Good Morning. The members of the Critical Concerns Committee are very happy to have this opportunity to be with all of you this morning.
We are inviting you today into a prayer service in which we will be reflectively looking at the local ground upon which we are gathered here in Parsippany; the Doctrine of Discovery, which illumines the history of Christian domination throughout the world; and some important aspects of our Critical Concerns, in particular Earth, Racism and Immigration. These three concerns were chosen primarily because of the timing of our weekend together:

- **Earth** – since we have just finished the season of Creation which we participated in during September and early October;
- **Racism** – since this year marks the 400th anniversary of slavery in America and, as you know, we are also reflecting on Consumerism and Racism during this quarter of our examen;
- **Immigration** – because of the horrific treatment of immigrants that is currently transpiring within our own nation.

In addition, as you may know, November is designated National Black Catholic History Month as well as National Native American month.

At the end of these “groundings,” we will have a quiet time for reflection followed by a prayer petition and response. After the five “groundings,” you will have some time for table talk and to participate in an action on behalf of immigrants.

So, let us take a few moments to wonder once again at the reality that we are always and everywhere in the presence of our God. (after a short time, *Let us pray together.*)
All:

God of justice and mercy, you are our saving God. Come with your power to save and free those held captive by oppression. Use us as your instruments of mercy and peace. Give us the courage to challenge all that enslaves the human spirit. This we ask in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Prayer:
(taken from Mercy Spirituality: Reflections on Living the Charism of Mercy)
“We Are Called”
by David Haas

Verse 1
Come! Live in the light!
Shine with the joy and the
love of the Lord!
We are called to be light for
the kingdom,
to live in the freedom of the
city of God!

Refrain
We are called to act with
justice.
We are called to love
tenderly.
We are called to serve one
another, to walk humbly
with God.
5 Groundings:

#1. Here We Stand in Parsippany
Let us remember that as we meet here in Parsippany, NJ, we walk on the hallowed ground of the Leni Lenape Native American Nation. The name Parsippany comes from the word *parsipanong*, which means "the place where the river winds through the valley."

Native Americans settled in the area several thousand years ago, dwelling in the highlands and along the Rockaway River and the Whippany River. They were attracted by the diversity of plants and animal life. They delighted in the fresh and sparkling water so accessible to them. They hunted and fished for the various game that lived in the area and which migrated through the area in autumn.

In 1611 the Dutch started to establish the area as a colony of New Netherland in this place; the Dutch settlers traded with the Native Americans until 1643 when a series of wars broke out generating hostilities between the two groups. In 1660 the English colonized this area.

Throughout the area now considered the Mid-Atlantic region lived the Susquehannock, Shawnee, and Iroquois nations of Pennsylvania, the Lenape, Manahatin, Shinnecok and Munsee of the Long Island region, with the Delaware, Erie, Iroquois, Mohawk, Oneida and Seneca Nations in other areas of New York.
According to the 2010 census, New Jersey is the 11th most populous state. New Jersey ranks last in terms of the percentage of indigenous persons. How did this happen?

(Pause for quiet, approx. 1 1/2 minutes)
Leader: Let us pray

Leader: It is not just about lands being taken from people in the past; it is also about our reluctance or our willingness to be blessed with “discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships.”

All: Merciful God, we are willing to live with this discomfort.
#2. Creation

In their text *Union & Charity*, Denise Colgan and Doris Gottemoeller tell us that at the second Institute Chapter the words “Act in harmony and interdependence with all creation” was added to the Direction Statement. This is instructive as the impetus for this addition came from the dialogue with those sisters who “had a different reality than their stateside sisters in terms of dealing with ecological abuses, and a greater sense of urgency about making the environment a priority in the eyes of the sisters and the Institute.

Today we hold fast to this concept through our Critical Concern: *to work zealously toward the sustainability of all life* … Through the Critical Concerns Committee, we have grown in our commitment to our own behaviors of consumerism individually, as communities, our nation and our world. The committee has developed reflections, questions for consideration, prayers, the examen, and other resources. These are opportunities to share and celebrate our living witness to this aspect of care for creation in our own life.

In 2015 we were inspired by the encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Sí*, in which we are reminded of our moral and spiritual challenge regarding our ecological crisis. Pope Francis lays out a summons to profound interior conversion, to renew our relationships with God, one another, and the created world. We are called to act as one human family—who have a shared responsibility for others and for creation, to serve and enhance human dignity.
The recent Season of Creation continued this theme and through our prayer intentions, our advocacy efforts, our willingness to eat less meat for the sake of the land, and our participation with others in our Mercy for Earth actions, we stood in solidarity with others—especially the young members of our human family who reminded us that the future generations will hold us responsible for the earth in the years ahead.

We stand in solidarity with communities harmed by extractive industries such as mineral and coal mining, oil and gas drilling, and so many other precious resources. The recent situation in Newark and other areas of New Jersey reminds us that water is a critically valuable resource, which calls for our attention and yet is often unrecognized. The United Nations reports that the poorest 20% of the population in Africa and Asia spend between 3 to 11% of their household income on water. This calculation does not include the cost of the time women spend on collecting water and managing water and sanitation facilities. Over 2 billion people live in countries experiencing high water stress and looking forward, 700 million people worldwide could be displaced by intense water scarcity by 2030.

Pope Francis underlines that “access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.” And yet lately water is being considered more of a commodity than a resource.

We respond as people of faith, as advocates and as citizens who are determined to make moral choices. The Sisters of Mercy are actively working to care for earth.

And we have found that our work for creation is a source of hope and joy!

(Pause for quiet, approx. 1 1/2 minutes)
Leader: Let us pray

It is not just about our care of creation, it is also about our reluctance or our willingness to allow ourselves to be transformed.

All: Merciful God, we are willing to live always toward conversion.

Leader: Let us pray
#3. Doctrine of Discovery
We study the Doctrine of Discovery to listen to the voices that have been silenced and disregarded for centuries. In the fifteenth century, Spanish and Portuguese explorers argued competing claims to discoveries of potential wealth in the New World. In 1493, they appealed to Pope Alexander VI. The Pope issued a Papal Bull that stated that the first Christian country to “discover” a non-Christian land was “to bring under its sway … the mainlands and islands with their residents and inhabitants and to bring them to the Catholic faith.” This teaching promoted Christian domination and superiority for many European countries. It became known as the Doctrine of Discovery.

The indigenous inhabitants who had welcomed Christopher Columbus and later the Pilgrims would not assimilate European culture and the Christian faith. Greedy for wealth, the Europeans inflicted inhumane cruelty on the native people. Some were enslaved to work in the mines and fields and others died of diseases carried by the Europeans. Many became depressed and committed suicide as their religion and cultural values of reverence for the Great Spirit, love for life, themselves and others, and the Earth were destroyed. Even baptized natives were not believed to be human beings on the same level as the Europeans. Genocide, cruel butchering of indigenous people, caused the native Mexican population to drop from 25.2 million in 1518 to 1.37 million in 1595.

In the 1800’s, the Doctrine of Discovery inspired the Monroe Doctrine and the declaration of Manifest Destiny. The Monroe Doctrine declared U.S. hegemony over the Western Hemisphere. Manifest Destiny propagated the belief that the U.S. was destined
to control all land from the Atlantic to the Pacific and beyond. In an 1823 Supreme Court case, *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, the Doctrine of Discovery became part of U.S. federal law and was used to dispossess native peoples of their land. Chief Justice John Marshall wrote that the principle of discovery gave first the European nations and then the United States, an absolute right to New World lands. Native peoples had only certain rights of occupancy on reservations with seemingly few resources. The Supreme Court has continued to uphold the Doctrine of Discovery of dominance and superiority in the 20th and 21st centuries. However, we know that the Sioux Indians and their supporters (including Sisters of Mercy) continue to resist efforts to put the Dakota Access Pipeline through their sacred ground at Standing Rock. The government of North Dakota, fearing that an oil spill would pollute its capital Bismuth’s water supply, had objected to the original plan. The Sioux Indians fear the proposed plan would pollute their water supply as well as disturb their sacred land. Since 1868, Article II of the Fort Laramie Treaty should guarantee the undisturbed use and occupation of reservation land. The Doctrine of Discovery does not. The controversy continues.

(Pause for quiet, approx. 1 1/2 minutes)
Leader: 
*It is not just about treatment of indigenous people, it is also about our reluctance or our willingness to be blessed with “anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom and peace.”* 

All: 
Merciful God, we are willing to live with this anger.

Leader: Let us pray
#4. 1619 – 400th Anniversary of Slavery in America

In August of 1619, a ship arrived near Point Comfort, a coastal port in the British colony of Virginia. It carried more than 20 enslaved Africans, who were sold to the colonists. Many consider this date to be this country’s true birth date, long before 1776—a defining moment that inaugurated a barbaric system of chattel slavery that would last for the next 250 years.

This year marks the 400th anniversary of that moment. Among the many public commemorations of this date and this legacy, the *New York Times* introduced The 1619 Project, from which the previous words of introduction were adapted.

As individuals, as a community, and through our work in the Institute anti-racism analysis workshops, we are waking up to the knowledge that the Jim Crow laws of the late 1800s into the 1950s, the war on drugs which began with Nixon in 1972, and a mass incarceration rate higher than that of any other nation on Earth are a legacy of slavery.

“In order to understand the brutality of American capitalism,” says writer Matthew Desmond, “you have to start on the plantation.”

The following excerpt from his essay, part of The 1619 Project, tells the story of the cotton industry and the type of capitalism it gave birth to.
Writes Desmond, “…What made the cotton economy boom in the United States, and not in all the other far-flung parts of the world with climates and soil suitable to the crop, was our nation’s unflinching willingness to use violence on nonwhite people and to exert its will on seemingly endless supplies of land and labor….Cotton was to the 19th century what oil was to the 20th….. But cotton needed land. …. The United States solved its land shortage by expropriating millions of acres from Native Americans, often with military force, acquiring Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and Florida. It then sold that land on the cheap….

Enslaved workers felled trees by ax, burned the underbrush and leveled the earth for planting…. An origin of American money exerting its will on the earth, spoiling the environment for profit, is found in the cotton plantation. Floods became bigger and more common. The lack of biodiversity exhausted the soil….As slave labor camps spread throughout the South, production surged….Southern white elites grew rich, as did their counterparts in the North, who erected textile mills….The large-scale cultivation of cotton hastened the invention of the factory, an institution that propelled the Industrial Revolution and changed the course of history.”

How do we change the course of history again?

Professor and poet Ross Gay suggests, “What if we acknowledged the drug war, and the resulting mass incarceration of African Americans, and the myriad intermediate crimes against citizens and communities as a product of our fears? And what if we thereby had to reevaluate our sense of justice and the laws and procedures and beliefs that constitute it? What if we honestly assessed what we have come to believe about ourselves and each other, and how those beliefs shape our lives? And what if we did it with generosity and forgiveness? What if we did it with mercy?…When we have mercy ….Inequalities might become visible. Violence might become visible. Terror might become visible. And the things we’ve been doing to each other, despite the fact that we don’t want to do such things to each other, might become visible.”

(Pause for quiet, approx. 1 1/2 minutes)
Leader:
*It is not just about those who enslaved others for 400 years, it is also about our reluctance or our willingness to be blessed with “tears to shed for those who suffer pain, and rejection, so that we may reach out our hand to comfort them.”*

All:
Merciful God, we are willing to live with these tears.

Leader: Let us pray
#5. **The Current Border Crisis**

In the news, we see migrant families separated at the border, and we see children and adults in separate cages in detention centers. We are aware of this administration’s insistence on a bigger, better border wall, the constant attempts to break up DACA and temporary immigration status protections, the use of fear tactics to track down undocumented immigrants, the use of demeaning language to dehumanize refugees, and the undermining of sanctuary cities and others who would offer protection.

Most recently, the administration announced a 40 percent reduction in the already historically low refugee quota of 30,000. In another anti-immigrant action on the same day, the administration issued an executive order that permits state and local officials to block refugee resettlement in their communities. This move is unprecedented.

Since the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act, the United States has set an average admissions goal of 95,000 refugees annually. According to UNHCR, the U.N. Refugee Agency, there are 25.9 million refugees in the world today. As the wealthiest country in the history of the world, the United States is capable of welcoming significantly more than 18,000 refugees.

As a community, our members have traveled to the border on immersion trips, we have traveled to offer direct assistance at hospitality and respite centers along our southern border when asylum seekers are released from detention centers in numbers too great for the regular staffs, we serve further south in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala, we lobby, we protest, we march, we donate money and supplies. We know from
experience that actions that address an issue by separation, exclusion, and
demonization don't resolve it, they simply push it somewhere else. Until root causes are
addressed the need remains, and the response adapts to the need.

This is shown in these three short observations from Sister Anne Connolly who
ministers daily at the Humanitarian Respite Center in McAllen, Texas, and is a regular
witness to the fluctuations in need and response.

The first:
“We are living in such very sad repercussions of our country’s present stance toward
immigrants. We have had days of 0 families, 4 people, 9, yesterday a total of 22. This in
comparison to norms of 250- 400, then to recent months when we could not move fast
enough to serve 800 to 1000 people. The people are being sent back to wait
somewhere in Mexico.

The second:
“My sense has been that we would just have to extend ourselves to the other side of the
border, myself and a few other local and full-time volunteers. We have all the supplies,
the people who need them are on the other side of the bridge, being held there, some
for several months or longer, for a court hearing. Those who have shelter are living in
small pup tents. My friends went a couple of times in my absence. They are not
reinventing the wheel, they join forces with a group called “Team Brownsville,” a group
that has other volunteers like us joining them each evening but who know the ropes. A
group of beautiful people who feed the hungry….”

The third:
“Something that came to me was a video that I looked up months ago. It showed the
tiny country of Honduras, smaller than many of our states. And it showed a family
moving around the country to get away from gangs. After moving three or four times
around the country and nowhere else to move, that’s when migrating is the option left. Is
that what we send people back to?”

(Pause for quiet, approx. 1 1/2 minutes)
Leader:
*It is not just about migrants,* it is also about our reluctance or our willingness to be blessed with “enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in the world.

All:
Merciful God, we are willing to live the foolishness of Mercy!
“We Are Called”
by David Haas

Verse 2
Come! Open your heart!
Show your mercy to all
those in fear!
We are called to be hope for
the hopeless,
so all hatred and blindness
will be no more!

“We Are Called”
by David Haas

Refrain
We are called to act with
justice.
We are called to love
tenderly.
We are called to serve one
another, to walk humbly
with God.
Process:
Table sharing, letter signing
Process:

Personal commitments
Verse 3
Sing! Sing a new song!
Sing of that great day when all will be one!
God will reign and we'll walk with each other as sisters and brothers united in love!

Refrain
We are called to act with justice.
We are called to love tenderly.
We are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God.
May I live gratefully and simply today.