“We witness to Mercy when we reverence the dignity of each person, create a spirit of hospitality and pursue integrity of word and deed in our lives.”

Spirit and Mission of the Sisters of Mercy

Catherine McAuley
Founder, Sisters of Mercy, 1831
Communities may invite women and men who are committed to another state of life to share in various aspects of our Mercy life and ministry. Such associations are organized according to guidelines and policies developed by the Communities.


Catherine McAuley’s Vision – Our Heritage

Catherine McAuley created a new vision of community and mission in the Church in 1827 as she faced the pain of the poor and alienated in Ireland. As a laywoman, she was convinced that people in their own walks of life could respond with mercy and compassion to the economic, social and physical ills present in her home city of Dublin.

She gathered other laywomen who shared her value of responding with mercy to anyone in need and shared her spirituality of “putting her whole confidence in God.” They promised to be with one another in union and charity, and eventually a new religious community was born.

Catherine cultivated a social consciousness and spirituality which saw merciful service as an act of gratitude to God for mercy received. The Sisters of Mercy continue that vision as expressed in their Institute Direction Statement and Action Plan.

From the beginning of the congregation, the Sisters of Mercy have experienced the support, collaboration and dedication of many who share the Mercy charism. Today, women and men who are growing in awareness of a call from God to live more vibrantly the Gospel message in the light of the charism of Catherine McAuley are encouraged, supported and strengthened in this call by entering into a more formal relationship, as associates, with the Sisters of Mercy. Together, Sisters of Mercy and associates celebrate our partnership in extending the ministry of Mercy within the Church and the world.
What is Mercy Association?

Identity Statement
Mercy Associates are women and men who hear and respond to a call from God, an invitation to Gospel holiness lived through sharing in the mission of Mercy. They desire to walk with and care for those who are poor, sick, and uneducated. Associates, while maintaining individual lifestyles, seek to embody the spirit of Mercy in partnership with the Community of the Sisters of Mercy through a mutual covenant. As identified by the Foundress, Catherine McAuley, the mission of Mercy is central for Associates who share in prayer, community, ministry, and friendship.

(Revision, Mercy Association Leadership Network, October, 2010)

Mercy Association is open to those who:
- desire to participate in the Mercy community through non-vowed, formalized association while remaining financially independent;
- are women and men aged 21 and older, from any race or culture, and are married, single, lay or cleric;
- identify with gospel values and desire to deepen their own spiritual life;
- possess emotional stability and skill for relating effectively with others in community and service;
- accept the Mercy mission, want to foster it in the spirit of Catherine McAuley and extend the works of Mercy into the future;
- wish to draw support from and lend support to the Sisters of Mercy.

Responsibilities of Associates:
- make a commitment to promote Mercy values of justice and compassion in their daily lives by living out the mission and works of Mercy;
- attend an annual retreat day, either with the Mercy Community or through their parish or place of employment;
- participate in Small Group Meetings and larger gatherings;
- complete the biennial devotional renewal process to Mercy Association; a reflective process is received through which the associate discerns how s/he will live out the commitment to prayer, community and ministry for the next two-year covenant;
- attend occasional Community-wide celebrations, liturgies, retreats, workshops and days of formation for prayer together when appropriate.

Responsibilities of Sisters:
- provide moral, spiritual and social support to associates;
- share the spirit of Mercy by inviting associates to participate in prayer experiences, apostolic service, etc. as appropriate;
- extend hospitality and accompany associates on their faith journey;
- welcome associates to serve on Community committees and be involved in activities as appropriate.

Responsibilities of “Mentors/Contact Persons:"
- provide a forum for the person to discuss and process what she/he is experiencing during the Orientations, using the Orientation Guidebook;
- encourage any questions and concerns regarding Association or the Sisters of Mercy to be expressed openly and honestly;
Responsibilities of “Mentors/Contact Persons:” (continued)
- assist the person in discerning her/his call to Association;
- companion and initiate other contacts, such as invitations to pray with a local community of sisters or a group of associates, by an occasional invitation to dinner or a phone call or note of encouragement;
- as invited, she/he may attend the Orientation Sessions;
- recommend the person for acceptance as an associate;
- testify that s/he has the desire and the capacity to partner with the Sisters of Mercy in making Mercy the focus of her/his life;
- state that the interested person is committed to and has given evidence of deepening her/his spiritual journey and life of service.

Application and Orientation Process
The Orientation Process consists of meetings in a group setting with the Orientation Committee members or meetings with a sister or associate whom the person chooses as a mentor during the process. The chosen mentor may also attend the group meetings. Time is usually given for sharing. The purpose of the process of Orientation is to discern whether or not God is calling the person to become an Associate of the Sisters of Mercy.

While the Orientation Committee may determine the specific timeline, the Mercy Association Orientation Process is as follows:
1. A sister or an associate extends the invitation to become an associate to women and men who are already associated with the Mercy Community.
2. The person responds to this invitation by contacting either the Coordinator of the Coordinating Circle, the mentor/contact person or the Orientation Committee facilitator and by obtaining information about the process to become an associate, understanding that it will be a period of discernment.
3. The person asks for an initial application form from the person as listed above and submits that, plus two recommendations from sisters or associates s/he is in relationship with. (Please refer to the addendum to this Handbook where they are located.)
4. If the applicant is accepted, the person is invited to attend the Orientation Process.
5. The topics covered in the Orientation sessions include:
   - Charism, heritage and the mission of the Sisters of Mercy
   - Ministries of the Sisters of Mercy
   - Gospel values
   - The “Call to Mercy”
   - Catherine McAuley: History and Legacy
   - Mercy history
   - Prayer
   - Called & Gifted: the Laity in the Church
   - Institute and Community Justice Efforts
   - The Mercy Associate Covenant.
6. After completion of the orientation sessions, the Orientation Committee facilitator or contact person speaks with each person and her/his mentor to discern together if the person is called to become a Mercy Associate.
7. The new associate participates in a Covenant Ceremony during which s/he makes a formal commitment, receives a Mercy Associate pin and a certificate of recognition.
8. The associate covenants are renewed bi-annually. The process for renewal is initiated by the Associate Coordinator of the Coordinating Circle.

Transfer
An associate from another Mercy Community who wishes to transfer to the Mid-Atlantic Community’s Association makes a request in writing to the Director and includes a recommendation from her/his current Director of Association. If approved, an appropriate introduction to the local area by the Associate Coordinator of the Coordinating Circle is planned. These vary per local site. At an appropriate time, the associate makes her/his commitment with the Mid-Atlantic Community.

Financial Independence
Members of Mercy Association are not members of the Sisters of Mercy. They are not obligated to fulfill any obligations of members of the Sisters of Mercy, nor are they entitled to any benefits reserved for the members. Associates have no financial responsibility for the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of Mercy have no financial responsibility for members of Mercy Association.

Public Statement Policy
An associate does not make public statements in the name of the Sisters of Mercy or the Mercy Associates.

Resignation/Disassociation
Participation in association is voluntary and may be terminated either by the associate or by the Sisters of Mercy at any time. Mutual dialogue occurs from the time of exploration to the covenant day and afterwards to the renewal, allowing both the Associate Coordinator of the Coordinating Circle and the associate an opportunity to discuss any areas of concern about the relationship.

An associate who wishes to discontinue her/his relationship with the Mid-Atlantic Community contacts the Associate Coordinator, who then notifies the Director.

In any situation where the attitude or behavior of an associate causes serious concern to the Community and is perceived to be out of harmony with the spirit of Mercy Association, the following process will occur.

1. The associate, the Associate Coordinator of the Coordinating Circle and the Director of Association will engage in conversation about the attitude and/or behavior that is the cause of serious concern.

2. The associate is given the opportunity to express her/his position and the circumstances surrounding the attitude and/or behavior; during this meeting every effort is made to resolve any conflict that the attitude and/or behavior have caused.

3. If agreement is not reached, either party may request a meeting with a review committee composed of one sister, one associate, and the Leadership Team Liaison to Association; the first two committee members should be, as far as possible, acceptable to both parties; in the event of irresolvable differences, the Director of Association and the President of the Community make the final decision regarding termination of the associate’s participation.
Direction Statement of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Founded July 20, 1991

Animated by the Gospel and Catherine McAuley’s passion for the poor, we, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, are impelled to commit our lives and resources to act in solidarity with:

- the economically poor of the world, especially women and children;
- women seeking fullness of life and equality in church and society;
- one another as we embrace our multicultural and international reality.

This commitment will impel us to:

- develop and act from a multicultural and international perspective;
- speak with a corporate voice;
- work for systemic change;
- practice non-violence;
- act in harmony and interdependence with all creation; and
- call ourselves to continual conversion in our lifestyle and ministries.

Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

The Fourth Institute Chapter of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (2005) recognizes the need to intensify our responses to critical needs of our times which continue to call us to conversion:

- to deepen and assimilate more consciously the practice of non-violence as an integral aspect of the charism of mercy;
- to deepen our response to the unrecognized and unreconciled racism past and present within our community;
- to reverence Earth and work more effectively toward the sustainability of life and toward universal recognition of the fundamental right to water;
- to continue to embrace our particular concern for women;
- to stand in solidarity with immigrants.
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Declaration of the Fifth Institute Chapter

June 30, 2011

Passionate for the Gospel, witnessing to the legacy of Catherine McAuley, and impelled by our Direction Statement, we, Sisters of Mercy, are growing in consciousness of the interdependence among us and with all creation. The dramatically evolving context of our Church and world shape our efforts to be faithful.

We are scandalized by the increase in the impoverishment of peoples, the pervasive denial of basic human rights, the degradation of Earth and increased violence and racism in all their forms. We mourn the continued oppression of women in Church and society, unjust immigration laws and the lack of solidarity among peoples and nations. Even as we acknowledge our complicity, we contemplate the gift of God’s Mercy and we ask:

God of Mercy, of Wisdom and Mystery, where do we need to be led now to come to both a deeper response to our Critical Concerns and a radical embrace of our identity?

Having listened deeply to the God who speaks in each of us and in this Chapter, we are led:

- To deepen and make evident our Gospel-based spirituality through passion for service and vibrant community life;
- To unmask and address the underlying causes of our Critical Concerns and the interconnections among them;
- To liberate and redistribute our human and financial resources across the Institute and develop creative solutions to unmet needs acting in solidarity with impoverished people;
- To act in ways which contribute to a sustainable future for our Institute, the Church and Earth.

Yearning for integrity of word and deed, we commit, with urgency, to these acts.
Glossary of Commonly Used Terms

Assembly
An Assembly with decision-making authority and responsibility is convened at least once every five years. All Sisters choose their level of participation for that period as collaborative or supportive members. Associates may be supportive members of the assembly and are non-voting members of the assembly. The Leadership team is chosen during the assembly.

Chapter (Institute)
A Chapter is the highest decision making body of the Sisters of Mercy. Chapter decisions carry legislative power for the Community. Only Sisters are voting members. The Institute Chapter is held every six years and includes the Institute Leadership Team, Presidents of the Area Communities, and elected delegates from each Area.

Commonly Used Acronyms
ILT Institute Leadership Team - five Sisters elected for a six-year term
ILC Institute Leadership Council - ILT and Leadership Team of each Community
CLT Community Leadership Team – elected to govern the Mid-Atlantic Community
RSM the initials after a sister’s name that are an abbreviation for “Religious Sisters of Mercy”

Consultative Meetings
These are periodic gatherings of Sisters of Mercy of the Mid-Atlantic Community to discuss Community issues. Mercy Associates are invited to some of these gatherings.

Constitutions
The Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas is the rule that guides their lives. The Constitutions offer the sisters a way to organize and to challenge themselves in a faithful way to live the mercy of God. The mercy of God is the constitution of the sisters’ lives.  

- Maureen Crossan

Directory – Mid-Atlantic Community
Two separate books are published. One includes an alphabetical listing of the sisters and the other of the associates in the Mid-Atlantic Community.

Foundation Day
On December 12, 1831, at George’s Hill, Catherine McAuley and her two associates (Mary Ann Doyle and Mary Elizabeth Harley) vow perpetual poverty, chastity and obedience and found the Sisters of Mercy, established for the Visitation of the Sick Poor and the charitable instruction of poor females. (The protection of distressed women was added two years later.)

Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
The Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas was established in Buffalo in 1991. Presently it is made up of 6 Area Communities: Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, South Central, NYPPaW (New York, the Philippines and PA West), West Mid-West, and CCASA (Caribbean Central America and South America).
“MAST Journal”
The journal of the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology is published three times per year.

Mentor/Contact Person
A mentor/contact person (sister or associate) is someone who supports the growth of Association and is willing to companion a person through the Orientation process. The relationship between the mentor/contact person and the interested person provides an opportunity for sharing on a personal and spiritual level.

Mercy Action, Inc.
The Institute sponsors Mercy Action, Inc., which gives grants to programs and projects of Sisters of Mercy and associates. Applications are available in the Fall from the Institute. The deadline is December 31 of each year. Contributions and bequests to support the activities are welcome.

Mercy Day
September 24 is the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy, patroness of the Mercy Community.

Mercy Source
Mercy Source is the database of all sisters, associates and companions, giving access to ministries, residences and reports on statistics, census information and mailing labels.

Mercy Volunteer Corps
MVC is a volunteer program sponsored by the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. MVC invites women and men to consider a year of service with people who are economically poor or marginalized. Volunteers serve people within the continental U.S. and in Guyana, South America. Volunteers commit to compassionate service, a simple lifestyle in community, and spiritual growth. U.S. volunteers serve for one year and may renew for one year; International volunteers make a two-year commitment.

Mid-Atlantic Community
The Mid-Atlantic Community consists of the former Regional Communities of Brooklyn, Dallas (PA), Merion, New Jersey and New York. They became the Mid-Atlantic Community on January 1, 2007.

Newsletters
- “¡Viva! Mercy” is a bi-monthly publication of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. It includes feature-type articles, raising awareness around the Critical Concerns and how they are responded to in meaningful and practical ways.
- “Mercy Now” is the online newsletter of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. It includes news, events, announcements and communications from leadership and other information.
- “Mercy World E-News” is the online newsletter of Mercy International.
- “Mid-Atlantic Messages” is the Community’s weekly communication.
- “Mid-Atlantic News” is the Community’s quarterly e-newsletter.
Suscipe
A suscipe is a prayer in which a person responds to the experience of God's love by making a total offering of mind and heart in return. The word is derived from the Latin for "receive" or "accept." In the Latin Mass, the priest used the word suscipe when he raised the paten during the Offertory.

Warde, Frances, RSM
Often called the “American Founder,” Frances Warde brought the Sisters of Mercy to the United States and established the first United States foundation in Pittsburgh, PA in 1843.

Symbols of Mercy

The Mercy Shield was an important symbol from the time of Catherine McAuley until the 1960’s. The dark red bars symbolize courage and bravery; the gold background symbolizes dignity; the white cross symbolizes purity and sacrifice.

The Institute Logo is a modified version of the Mercy Cross designed for use, along with the words Sisters of Mercy, Hermanas de la Misericordia, on all printed material from the Institute and the six Communities.

The Mercy Associate Pin, worn by all Associates, is a symbol of Mercy Association for the Mid-Atlantic Community and each Community of the Institute. This pin was designed in 1980 by Carol Mc Govern, RSM, from Rhode Island. It is also available in Spanish.

The Sisters of Mercy pin, given to the sister upon entrance into the Novitiate, consists of the Mercy Cross, a small, black ebony cross representing Christ with an inlaid ivory cross representing the sister, was a symbol chosen by Catherine McAuley. Catherine taught that the cross was the very heart of Mercy. In total self-giving, sisters find the core of their consecration as they show God's mercy to those in need. The cross was redesigned in the 1960’s in a contemporary style and made into a pin which is worn by the Sisters of Mercy.
“Suscie” of Catherine McAuley

My God, I am yours for time and eternity.
    Teach me to cast myself entirely
    into the arms of your loving providence,
    with the most lively, unlimited confidence
    in your compassionate, tender pity.
Grant me, O most merciful Redeemer,
    that whatever you ordain or permit
    may be acceptable to me.

Take from my heart all painful anxiety;
    suffer nothing to sadden me but sin,
    nothing to delight me but the hope
    of coming to the possession of you,
    my God and my all,
    in your everlasting kingdom. Amen.

Spirit, Nature and Purpose of Mercy Associates

Mercy is a creative energy that incarnates the love of God revealed to us in the life and teaching of Christ. The task of Mercy Associates, in collaboration with the Sisters of Mercy, is to be and show Mercy wherever they live and whatever they do. They find their supreme rule of life in the following of Christ as in the Gospel and in programs of prayer and study adapted to the age and needs of local groups.

Their personal way of life is sustained by an honest search for the Will of God in tune with the Gospel and the needs of the contemporary world. The associates, imbued with a Mercy energy, try to live out their lives amidst the daily anxieties of the family, but bring to the family an extra dimension of love, compassion and understanding. The nature and purpose of the Mercy Associate Movement is therefore to help members to live more in tune with the Will of God in the midst of daily struggles at home and at work.

Associates are called to unite themselves with Christ under the banner of Mercy as dedicated lay people whose role in the Mission of the Church is spelled out in the Vatican II Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.

Their commitment is to make the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy their own and to try to emulate Catherine’s words:

“I would rather be cold and hungry than that God’s poor should be deprived of any consolation in my power to give them.”

Catherine McAuley,
Founder of the Sisters of Mercy
Mid-Atlantic Community
Mercy Associate Leadership

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Leadership Liaison - Catherine Darcy, RSM

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