The Sisters of Mercy

Currently, 112 Sisters of Mercy provide services for people in need in the local area in the Scranton Diocese.

The Sisters of Mercy — an international community of Roman Catholic women — dedicate their lives to God through vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and service. For more than 180 years, motivated by the Gospel of Jesus and inspired by the spirit of their founder Catherine McAuley, the Sisters of Mercy have responded to the continually changing needs of the times.

In this region, the Sisters of Mercy serve the communities where they live through a variety of roles such as nurses, chaplains, teachers, professors, counselors, therapists, social workers, administrators, volunteers, and spiritual directors.

“The Year of Consecrated Life is a sacred time to celebrate the legacy of women and men religious. For the Sisters of Mercy, we celebrate our history of helping people in need with mercy and compassion as we embrace a future full of hope, purpose, passion, and promise,” says Sister Patricia Vetrano, RSM, the president of the Sisters of Mercy Mid-Atlantic Community.

**Founder, Catherine McAuley**

Catherine McAuley founded the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin, Ireland in 1831 as a religious congregation committed to serving those in need.

After the death of both of her parents, Catherine went to live with relatives who embodied the strong anti-Catholic sentiments of the time. Through this challenge, Catherine developed a spirituality based on God’s mercy.

Two years later, she became the household manager and companion of an elderly, childless, and wealthy Protestant couple. Her Catholic faith and loving care for them and the needy people in the neighborhood was a powerful example of God’s love and action. Not only did they leave their estate and fortune to Catherine, but they also converted to Catholicism before they died.

For them to profess vows, they were allowed to include a vow of service to the poor, sick and uneducated (in addition to chastity, poverty and obedience). After the ceremony, Catherine returned to the House of Mercy, and on December 12, 1831, founded the Sisters of Mercy.

Since Catherine and her companions were often seen walking the streets of Dublin to serve people who were poor and/or sick, the Sisters of Mercy were known as the walking sisters. Catherine lived only 10 years as a Sister of Mercy, but in that time she established 12 foundations in Ireland and two in England. At the time of her death there were 150 Sisters of Mercy. (Today, there are over 9,000 Sisters of Mercy world-wide.)

Catherine McAuley founded the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin, Ireland in 1831.

In the early 1900s, a Sister of Mercy (dressed in white) ministers to patients at Mercy Hospital in Scranton. (Photo from Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, N.C.)

With her inheritance, Catherine built a large house in Dublin known as the House of Mercy where she and other compassionate women could take in homeless women and children to care and educate them. The house opened on the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, September 24, 1827.

Catherine, along with two friends, reluctantly joined the Sisters of the Presentation for a year where she received intensive training. When it came time for her to profess vows, she was allowed to include a vow of service to the poor, sick and uneducated. The first Bishop of Scranton, Bishop William G. O’Hara, blessed the Sisters of the Presentation.

In 1843, the Sisters of Mercy arrived in the United States from Ireland under the invitation of the Bishop of Pittsburgh, Pa. Their energy in ministering to the sick and economically poor attracted so many new members that by 1854, sisters had come from Ireland to settle in New York City; Chicago; Little Rock, Ark.; and San Francisco, spreading across the country and establishing schools and hospitals. Since then, the works of Mercy have expanded to embrace education, health care and pastoral and social services in hundreds of sites today.

**Canonization Cause**

Pope Paul VI opened Catherine McAuley’s cause for sainthood in 1978. St. Pope John Paul II in 1990 declared her “Venerable,” signifying the completion of the first step to sainthood. Miracles attributed to a prospective saint are part of the canonization process. Another miracle is required for Catherine McAuley’s next step toward canonization.

She entrusted her life and the life of the Sisters of Mercy to the loving and compassionate mercy of God. We believe the witness of her life of holiness and service to those most in need speaks today in a world marked by human pain and misery.

**Into the World**

Small groups of Sisters left Ireland to establish new foundations in Newfoundland, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, and the east and west coasts of the United States.

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**Local History**

The Sisters of Mercy first became involved in the local area in 1875, at the invitation of Bishop William G. O’Hara, the first Bishop of Scranton. On September 8 that same year they founded St. Mary’s Convent in Wilkes-Barre. They immediately opened a parish school at St. Mary’s for 400 children in the basement of the church, established an academy for girls, and conducted a night school for men working in the coal mines.

They also taught in numerous parish schools and ministered to the poor, sick, and needy. In 1898 they opened the doors of Mercy Hospital in Wilkes-Barre and began a century of ministry in health care that would extend to the Mercy Hospitals in Scranton, Johnstown, and Guyana.

At the dawn of the 20th century, the Sisters recognized yet another need of the community: young women in Luzerne County had no opportunity for higher education. Against the backdrop of World War I, the sisters planned and persisted in their vision and on August 15, 1924, the Sisters of Mercy established Luzerne County’s first four-year institution of higher learning, College Misericordia (whose name means “heart of mercy”) in Dallas, on nearly 100 acres of land. That September, 37 students began their studies sharing the Sisters’ motto: Muli-ev Fortis, valiant women trained in scholarship and spirituality.

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Sisters of Mercy around the world make a difference in the lives of others

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Misericordia College, now a University, continues to be a broad-based liberal arts and pre-professional studies institution offering superior education to those of all faiths. The university has been co-educational since the 1970s and offers graduate programs as well.

Varied Ministries

Through the years, Sisters of Mercy working in this region taught in numerous parish schools and ministered at the Mercy Hospitals in Scranton, as well as in Wilkes-Barre.

In 1979, they founded the Catherine McAuley Center in Scranton to provide housing to women and children in need. The first step began with the Sisters moving into the former St. Joseph Lithuanian Convent in North Scranton where they shared their extra bedrooms with women in need of shelter. From that small beginning on September 1, 1984, the Sisters accepted their first guest, a whole new ministry developed in Luzerne and Lackawanna counties. Facility locations now include Wilkes-Barre, North Scranton, South Scranton, Green Ridge, West Scranton, and the Belle Vue Section of Lackawanna County. The Catherine McAuley House, a transitional living facility, is located in Plymouth.

At Mercy Consultation Center in Dallas, Sisters provide counseling, pastoral services, and emotional and spiritual support to others.

Sisters also founded and work at the McGlynn Learning Center, an after-school and summer program that provides academic assistance to children who live in the Boulevard Townhomes and Mineral Springs Village — the two low-income family housing developments that are part of the Wilkes-Barre City Housing Authority.

Sisters also serve at The Pines in Dallas, a housing complex for independent, active seniors, Mercy Center, a retirement center for aged and infirmed sisters and community members, and Project REMAIN, which stands for Re-Establishment of Mercy Action in Neighborhoods formed in 1978 in response to the needs of elderly residents in the Wilkes-Barre area living in high-rise housing projects built after the Agnes Flood disaster. All Sisters of Mercy have one thing in common: In the words of their founder Catherine McAuley, they have an “ardent desire to be united to God and serve those who are poor.”

Vocations

More than 9,000 Sisters of Mercy around the world make a difference in the lives of others by bringing mercy and compassion to those in need. The Sisters of Mercy have 3,800 vowed members in the United States and 30 new members in various stages of formation.

The Sisters of Mercy offer the “Mercy Challenge,” in which women, college age and older, spend time with sisters in prayer, ministry and theological reflection. In addition, the community provides “Busy Persons’ Retreats” and “Come and See” weekends for women who want to learn more about the community.

To learn more about becoming a Sister of Mercy, call or e-mail Sister Anne Kappler, RSM at akappler@mercymidatlantic.org or 610-664-6650, ext. 562.

CONSECRATED LIFE MASS IS JUNE 14

The Diocese of Scranton observance of the Year of Consecrated Life will include the annual Pontifical Mass for Consecrated Life. This liturgy, which traditionally has been held in February, will this year be celebrated on June 14, 2015 at 12:15 p.m. at the Cathedral of Saint Peter in Scranton.

Bishop Joseph C. Bambera will be the principal celebrant. Religious priests, brothers and sisters who are celebrating jubilee anniversaries of ordination or profession of vows will be honored. A reception will be held following the Mass.

All women and men who are members of various forms of Consecrated Life are invited to this special event. Invitations and more information will be sent from the Office of Consecrated Life prior to the celebration.

Religious communities that are hosting special events for the Year of Consecrated Life are welcome to send information to The Catholic Light to: william-genello@dioceseofscranton.org