

SISTER MARY SCULLION, R.S.M.
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When Catherine McAuley surveyed the landscape of poverty in her native Dublin in 1824, she was distressed to see the horrid squalor in which the poor lived. Catherine decided that she would meet their needs through the Works of Mercy, providing food, shelter, clothing, health care, and education. She opened her first shelter on September 24, 1827, the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy. In 1831, she founded the Sisters of Mercy. By the time of her death in 1841, there were one hundred Sisters and ten foundations. Today, Sisters of Mercy serve the poor and advocate on their behalf in eight geographical regions spanning the globe.

In 1978, Mercy Sister Mary Scullion surveyed the landscape of poverty in her native Philadelphia and saw people in need of health care, education, employment, and recovery from alcoholism and addiction. But her chief concern was for the growing number of people experiencing homelessness.

Many of us have accepted homelessness as an unsolvable problem. Not Sister Mary. She knew from her Mercy roots that the solution could come through the Works of Mercy. In 1989, together with her associate Joan Dawson McConnon, Sister Mary founded Project HOME, an organization whose stated mission is to empower people to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty. The name Project HOME is an acronym for Housing, Opportunities for Employment, Medical Care, and Education, and the project addresses the problem of homelessness on a systemic level, providing coordinated care through street outreach, housing, health care, education, job training and employment services, and public advocacy. Since its foundation, Project HOME has helped more than eight thousand people move from homelessness to permanent housing, and its success rate is astonishing: ninety-five percent of those whom the project has served do not return to life on the streets.

Sister Mary has received numerous accolades and awards. Time magazine selected her as one of the Hundred Most Influential People in the World in 2009. Along with Joan Dawson McConnon she was awarded the Laetare Medal from the University of Notre Dame in 2011. She serves on the Board of the Jon Bon Jovi Soul Foundation, and has even mentored Bon Jovi himself in his work on behalf of the poor. He once referred to her as “the nun who spits and swears,” to which she responded, “I do not spit.” Prior to Pope Francis’s visit to Philadelphia in September, 2015, Sister Mary constructed a grotto to Mary, the Undoer of Knots at the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul. She invited people to submit their own knots – difficult problems that, like knots, cannot easily be untied. Pope Francis happens to have a devotion to Mary, the Undoer of Knots, and so he made an unscheduled visit to the grotto. Sister Mary asked Francis to bless the knots and their struggle, and Francis asked for her prayers in return. These accolades and awards, the attention of the Holy Father, they all confirm both the urgency of the problem of homelessness in our country and Sister Mary’s profound success in addressing it. Her prophetic voice is perhaps best summed up in Project HOME’s motto: “None of us are home until all of us are home.”

In recognition of her ministry to the poor and homeless of Philadelphia, her loving service in the tradition of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy, and her vision of a world in which loving community answers the problem of homelessness and poverty, Georgetown University is proud to bestow upon Sister Mary Scullion, R.S.M the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, *Honoris Causa*.