Meeting in Merion are the Mid-Atlantic Community Life and Ministry Facilitators (front row, left to right) Mildred Rossiter, RSM, Carol Gallagher, RSM, Jane Hardy, RSM, and Virginia Baeder, RSM, (back row) Mercedes McCann, RSM, Sharon Donohue, RSM, Marie Melanie Weyand, RSM, and Francis Marie Sheridan, RSM.

Life and Ministry Facilitators Meet in Merion

On Monday, March 26, the eight Life and Ministry Facilitators met with the Mid-Atlantic Leadership Team to discuss their new positions, roles, and responsibilities.

The agenda for the day included a chance to get to know each other, an opportunity for dialogue, and a review of the draft policies for the Mid-Atlantic Community.

After Easter, each sister will receive a printed mailing with the appropriate forms to choose their Life and Ministry Facilitator. The leadership team encourages sisters to choose a Life and Ministry Facilitator from the geographic area where they reside. However, a sister may select any person appointed to this role. The Life and Ministry Facilitator selection forms are due on Friday, April 27. The next meeting of the Life and Ministry Facilitators is Thursday, May 31st.
Over 500 Sisters Participate in Spring Consultations

Through the month of March, 537 sisters participated in the Mid-Atlantic Community’s first Consultative Gatherings which were held at five different locations.

The objective of these meetings was to share in contemplative dialogue around the issue of Identity, by using the Sacred Circles process, and to learn about the integration of the proposed Mid-Atlantic Community justice model, especially related to the Critical Concerns.

“The experience of the Sacred Circles process helped us realize what a treasure we have in our Constitutions,” says Rosemarie O’Neill, RSM, “It is a life-long endeavor to live into the richness.”

“Now that we are the Mid-Atlantic Community, our gathering together invigorates and empowers us to live and be the mission of Mercy,” says Maureen McDade, RSM.

Have a blessed Easter!
Sister Moves from Massachusetts to Merion

Maire Armour, RSM, recently moved from the Our Lady of Mercy Health Care Center in Worcester, Massachusetts, to McAuley Convent, a retirement center in Merion, PA.

“I’m known as the New Yorker on the floor,” says 83-year-old Sister Maire who made the transition from Massachusetts to Merion in November of last year.

“The place I lived was closing and I needed another place to live,” says Sister Maire who has suffered several strokes. “I moved to McAuley and like the life here. The sisters welcomed and reached out to me,” she says.

Maire spends her days praying, reading and remembering her days as an elementary school teacher on Staten Island and as an assistant at Mercy College and Our Lady of Victory Academy in Dobbs Ferry, NY.

“I love the fact that we are the Mid-Atlantic Community now,” says Sister Maire. “Otherwise, I would not be living here.”

Sisters Welcome Candidate into Their Home

by Kathleen Schneider, RSM, Mid-Atlantic Community

Last month the members of Shalom Convent in Philadelphia welcomed candidate Barbara McGahan to participate in their community life while she worked at nearby Mercy Hospital.

For a month, Barbara volunteered in the pastoral care department of the hospital. She came eager to meet new people, to learn the depth of the spirituality of sick people, and to share their prayer life. Barbara shared daily her enthusiasm for the spirit and legacy of Mercy Hospital. The four members of Shalom Convent shared bits and pieces of their experiences.

“I arrived in Philadelphia as a New Jersey candidate for the Sisters of Mercy,” says Barbara. “Five weeks later after wonderfully welcoming and nurturing experiences in community and ministry, I felt transformed into a Mid-Atlantic Community candidate.”

“Welcoming Barbara as a community member was our practical pledge to the future of the Sisters of Mercy,” says Kathleen Schneider, RSM, of Shalom. “Being a Sister of Mercy is a wondrous thing and we want to spread that good news. In the future, when we say pray for vocations or formation, we will be thinking of Barbara and hoping for more “Barbara’s” to come and see life as a Sister of Mercy.”
Digging dirt for the groundbreaking of Mercy Neighborhood Ministries in Philadelphia on Saturday, March 24, are (left to right) executive director Ann Provost, RSM, (Mid-Atlantic) Associate Marie McGuigan, staff members Alice McCall and Barbara Coleman, and special projects coordinator Margery Lowry, RSM (Mid-Atlantic).

Sisters Simultaneously Help Earth and an Impoverished Neighborhood

On Saturday, March 24, 2007, 200 people gathered in North Philadelphia for the groundbreaking of the Mercy Family Center, the first “green” building in this neighborhood and the permanent home of Mercy Neighborhood Ministries of Philadelphia, Inc.

This building is silver certified by The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™, the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance environmentally-friendly buildings.

“This center will enable us to significantly extend our reach to more families in need,” says Ann Provost, RSM, (Mid-Atlantic), the executive director of Mercy Neighborhood Ministries, an independent, non-profit lay organization which opened approximately 35 years ago. This ministry provides child care, adult day care and human development services, for and with the people of the neighborhood.

Instead of constructing a new building, the ministry staff saved natural resources and recycled building and construction waste by re-fitting an existing warehouse with energy efficient heating, air conditioning and lighting. “The melding of service and environmental responsibility is the perfect marriage of goals, a complementary, holistic approach,” says Sister Ann. For more information, visit www.mercyneighbors.org
Forty persons from two Mercy Colleges in the Mid-Atlantic spent their semester break in the border town of Laredo, TX, deepening their understanding about immigration issues.

Students and staff from College Misericordia and Gwynedd Mercy College (including Gwynedd’s President, Dr. Kathleen Owens) learned about the Mercy commitment to immigration during their five day stay at the Mercy novitiate. Long-time Laredo residents, Sisters Maria Luisa Vera and Rosemary Welsh, told the group about the history and Mercy presence in the city. The group toured colonias, walked across the U.S. Mexican border, and met some of the novices and other professed at a Mexican restaurant.

True to Mercy’s charism, the students wanted to make Laredo just a little better during their stay. They participated in a Habitat for Humanity building project by painting at two Catholic elementary schools and helping students from these schools clean up the banks of the Rio Grande River.

During this activity, the students found pants, shirts, back-packs, underwear - even some bottled water and a few packs of snacks, items left behind by immigrants trying to come into the country though the water, the only route available to them. “We were all moved by the silent scraps of stories we witnessed,” reported one of the students in her evaluation of this service project.
Have you ever spoken with an immigrant, and heard his/her story? If you have, the person becomes more than a statistic – the story takes on a life of its own.

Juan (not his real name) came to the United States a few years ago out of sheer economic necessity. From a poor family, Juan had no hope of finding any kind of work in Mexico. He saved his money and paid a “coyote” (a person who smuggles immigrants out of the country) to lead him to California. Juan knew and trusted his “coyote” personally because some coyotes smuggle only for the money, not for a real concern for immigrants.

Under cover of darkness, the group left their home at night and walked through the desert to the border. They could not carry too much with them. They were able to reach the border but were turned back by a border patrol. They repeated the process the next night. They managed to evade a low-flying helicopter and cross the border.

Juan was immediately driven from California to the East Coast. After several years, he found employment and took his first step to becoming an American citizen. Today he is employed, happily married, and the father of a baby girl. Multiply this story by the thousands and you can understand the many questions focusing on this volatile issue.

The 2005 Institute Chapter voted, “to stand in solidarity with immigrants.” Recently the Institute Justice Conference invited members, associates and companions to accompany immigrants, people affected by immigration, and people left behind. By connecting with an immigrant, this abstract political/humanitarian issue becomes a reality.
On February 24, 2007, two Sisters and twelve Associates from the Mid-Atlantic Community journeyed to Dublin, Ireland, to walk in the footsteps of Catherine McAuley.

These fourteen women stayed four nights at the Mercy International Center on Baggot Street with associate, Ann Reid, and Mary McEnearney, RSM (Australia) as walking tour guides.

At Coolock House, the group explored the very place where Catherine lived for twenty-five years with the Callaghans. As they prayed in Catherine’s bedroom, they could easily picture her efficiently managing the house and caring for the sick Mrs. Callaghan.

At George’s Hill, Catherine McAuley spent time in the novitiate of the Presentation Sisters. No longer a convent or a “Motherhouse,” the building now serves as housing for lower income people. The “pilgrims” gathered in the original chapel now used as a meeting room. In this holy space, Marie Noel Keller, RSM, (Mid-Atlantic) Marilyn Elizabeth Karas, RSM, (Mid-Atlantic) and Mary McEnearney, RSM (Mid-Atlantic) renewed their vows. The Associates gladly renewed their Covenant promises in that same holy space.

When the group returned to Baggot Street from George’s Hill, the sisters who live at Mercy International Center welcomed everyone warmly, and in the spirit of hospitality, toasted the group’s return with wine and grape juice.

On Thursday, the travelers prayed, packed, and explored the rooms and grounds. The entire group meditated at Catherine’s grave where they felt her presence strongly. “We will savor the memory of this spiritual journey and the very personal experience of Catherine’s sacred space for years to come,” says Madeline Murphy, one of the Associates.
In February of this year, Mary Harvey, RSM, (Mid-Atlantic) spent two weeks in Panama providing Montessori supplies and training for native women that work with the CCASA Sisters of Mercy in that country.

Arriving in the city of Colon with two suitcases full of supplies purchased in dollar stores or made on the computer, her first stop was the small mountain community of Volcan. At this site, Mary conducted a three-day workshop for 15 women on the Montessori methods of teaching. Mary shared her 50 plus years of Montessori teaching including her current ministry of teaching English as a Second Language to immigrant Latino children in Southampton, New York.

The students who attended the Volcan workshop are known as “Madres Muestras” (Mother Teachers). They will use the training and materials to develop a model Montessori classroom which will be used as a resource center.

Mary’s next stop was the city of Colon, a seaport on the Caribbean coast and the second largest city in the country. She conducted a similar workshop at the pre-school of Centro de formacion Y Capacitacion Mujeres, a women’s center started by two CCASA Sisters of Mercy formerly from Brooklyn, Barbara Anne Ozelski, RSM, and Dina Altamiranda, RSM. Twenty-four teachers from the center and neighboring schools attended that training.

“With this new information, we have acquired better tools for our interaction with young children,” says Maritza Martinez from Volcan. “This opportunity to learn and observe has left us truly impressed with everything the children are able to learn if they are guided correctly,” says Ana A. de Dixon, a participant from Colon. “Using the Montessori methods to educate and stimulate the poor children in the community of Colon will have a great impact,” says Zelibeth Peggot, the psychologist at the women’s center in Colon.

Montessori Teacher Shares Her Expertise with Women in Panama

Ana A. De Dixon (right) hugs Mary Harvey, RSM, (left) in gratitude for providing Montessori training to women in Panama.

Mary Harvey, RSM, (Mid-Atlantic) poses with some street children in Panama.
Sister Mary Paul Celebrates Her 100th Birthday!

Sister Mary Paul Steiner, RSM, (Mid-Atlantic) celebrated her centennial birthday on Saturday, March 31, 2007.

Born in Chattanooga, Tennessee, on Easter Sunday in 1907, Sister Mary Paul attributes her long life to “going to chapel and Mass every day, a positive attitude, and daily crossword puzzles.” “I do not know what I would do without my strong Catholic faith,” says Sister Mary Paul. “I do not know how people exist without religion.”

Sister Mary Paul’s faith was strong even as a young adult. She wanted to enter the convent right after her high school, but her father insisted that she wait until she was twenty.

Her family moved to the Philadelphia area in 1920 when she entered John W. Hallahan High School. Three years after graduation, she entered the Sisters of Mercy in Merion, PA.

Sister Mary Paul taught elementary school for three years before attending pharmacology school at Philadelphia School of Pharmacy. She received her Bachelor’s degree in Pharmacology in 1936 and her Masters’ degree in Chemistry from Villanova University in 1942. She worked as a pharmacist and taught science to the nursing students at Fitzgerald Mercy Hospital for seven years. “Students knew if they took my class they would learn whether they wanted to or not,” says Sister Mary Paul.

For thirty years, she taught at Gwynedd-Mercy College. In her later years, she served as the archivist at Fitzgerald Mercy Hospital until she retired last year at the age of ninety-nine. In her retirement, Sister Mary Paul still wakes up at 7 a.m. each day, goes to Mass at 8:30 a.m., strolls the corridor of her convent several times a day, and prays.

She celebrated her birthday with a liturgy, an Open House with 175 people, and a visit by Cardinal Justin Rigali of Philadelphia.