



MERCY
Associates

Institute of Sisters of Mercy
of Australia & Papua New Guinea

One Charism, Many Paths

Chapter 3

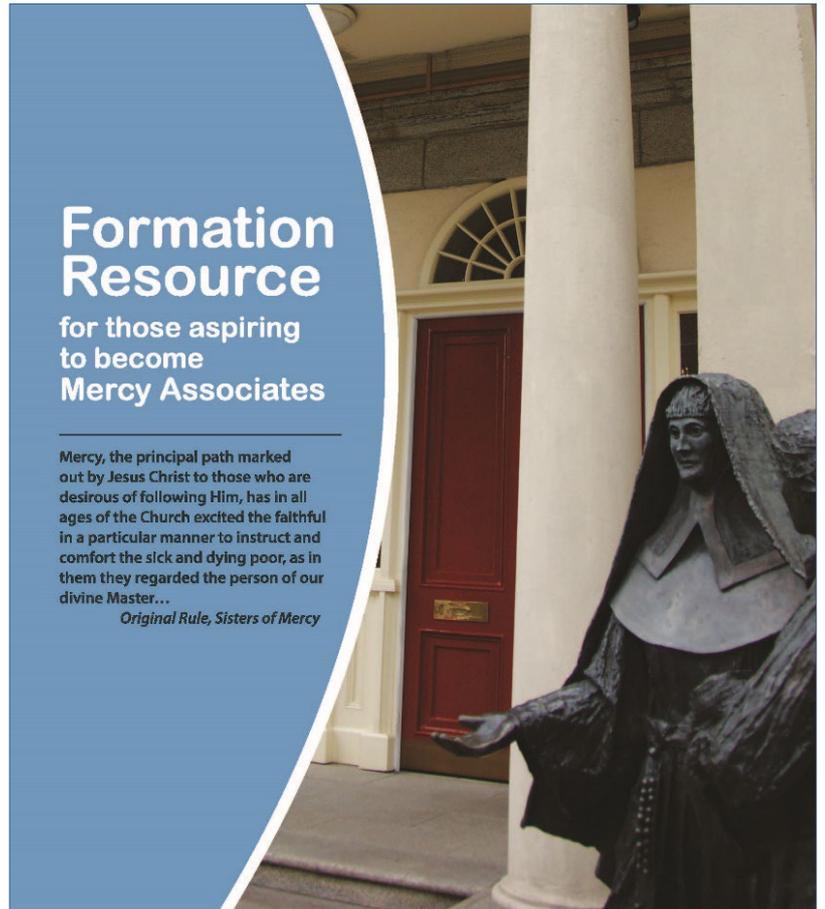
Mercy: Diverse yet Personal

Formation Resource

for those aspiring
to become
Mercy Associates

Mercy, the principal path marked out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following Him, has in all ages of the Church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor, as in them they regarded the person of our divine Master...

Original Rule, Sisters of Mercy



3.1 Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

3.2 Catholic Social Teaching

3.3 Charism and Calling

Notes for users:

The Formation Resource is designed for use by candidates aspiring to become Mercy Associates. This entails proceeding steadily through the resource, guided by a sponsor or other Mercy Associates, with time for reflection, discussion and prayer to discern if Mercy Associates is a suitable pathway for candidates.

The resource has a number of chapters, each available separately on the Mercy Associates screen of the ISMAPNG website: <https://institute.mercy.org.au/become-involved/become-a-mercy-associate/>

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3.0 Mercy: Diverse yet Personal

3.1 Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

Over the centuries, contemplation of the gospels has led to the identification of what have come to be known as the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. These are drawn mostly from the words and actions of Jesus as he showed mercy and compassion in so many ways to so many people. The seven corporal works are practical and involve how we serve those around us in need of mercy – they are about our external expression of God’s mercy to others. The seven spiritual works concern our inner disposition – the values and attitudes in our hearts that allow us to see all of humankind, including ourselves, as being in need of mercy and to respond in humility and sincerity to others. All the works of mercy underpinned the work of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy and continue to do so to this day.



In 2016, Pope Francis introduced an additional Work of Mercy – ‘caring for our common home’. In explaining its significance, Pope Francis commented that this newly identified work of mercy had both a corporal and spiritual component. As a spiritual work of mercy, caring for our common home requires ‘grateful contemplation of God’s world’ and as a corporal work of mercy it requires ‘simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness’ (*Laudato Si, 214 and 230*).

3.2 Catholic Social Teaching

Though many people are well-versed in gospel teachings, not all are familiar with the rich treasury of values and principles that are embodied in Catholic Social Teaching. These principles and teachings are founded on a very active and committed proclamation of human rights, drawn from the scriptures and the lived experience of Christianity over the centuries.

There are four foundational principles of Catholic Social Teaching:

- Human dignity**
We recognise the sacredness of life and that every person has inherent dignity and worth. Our human rights and responsibilities are founded in this essential, shared human dignity.
- The common good**
We have responsibility for one another in our life together and are called to work for the common good of all. We must advocate for a just society in which all people, particularly the vulnerable and marginalised, are able to flourish and meet their needs.
- Subsidiarity**
The capacity and capabilities of people and communities ought to be respected, with decisions made at the lowest local level possible. Everyone should have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to decision-making processes that closely affect them.
- Solidarity**
Humans are social by nature and depend on one another. We seek to stand in unity with each other, particularly those who are powerless or disadvantaged, and recognise each persons’ rights regardless of our differences.



Other principles include:

- Preferential option for the poor:** the needs of the socially disadvantaged and vulnerable are prioritised.
- Stewardship of creation:** care for the earth, recognising that all of creation is inter-connected and we are part of and dependent on the environment. Pope Francis has recently referred to this as integral ecology.

Source: <http://www.cssa.org.au/about-us/mission-and-vision/catholic-social-teaching>

Though not couched in the above terms, the values embodied in Catholic Social Teaching underpinned the work of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy through their commitment to bringing the teachings of Jesus in the gospels to life.

Pope Francis has stated, ‘An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it’ (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*). The principles of Catholic Social Teaching provide an invaluable guide to focusing our mission initiatives. We are called to continual reflection of what it means to live each moment as a sign of the goodness of God. During the Year of Mercy in 2016 the whole Church was reminded of our call to Mercy: ‘The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. ... This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other’ (Pope Francis, *Bull, Jubilee Year of Mercy*).

3.3 Charism and Calling

Charism can be a difficult word to define, but it is understood as a gift given to Christians by the Holy Spirit for the good of the Church. Founders of religious institutes are said to have received a particular charism that urges and inspires them to commit their lives to living the gospel with a special emphasis on the insights that are the gift of their charism. For the Sisters of Mercy, the charism of Catherine McAuley involved a deep understanding of and commitment to the Mercy of God. Her response to that charism was to actively serve the poor and, in time, to establish a religious congregation with vowed members who shared her deep understanding and commitment to God’s mercy.

Mercy Associates are lay women and men whose lives are inspired by the Mercy charism of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy. They experience a sense of being called to engage more deeply with the Mercy charism yet do so in a way that differs from the Sisters of Mercy, who make life-long vows to live as religious women. The purpose of Mercy Associates is to provide an intentional community through which this lay calling to the Mercy charism can be both nurtured and expressed.

Christian baptism is the foundation from which our response to our faith arises. Baptism instils a vocation in all who receive it to serve God, to live in a way that contributes to the reign of God in our world. The second Vatican Council, held in the 1960’s, highlighted the identity of lay people as the People of God, and that all of the People of God are called to be involved in the mission of God. It is not surprising that it has been in the post-Vatican era that associate movements have been established by many religious congregations. As well as discerning a renewed appreciation of the charism of their founder, they also came to appreciate that all are called to serve God in their own unique way. Life-long religious vows is one way of receiving God’s call, yet lay women and men may also share a deep commitment to serve God that draws on the charism of a particular religious congregation. Over the years that associate movements have increasingly flourished in many countries, the result has been a strong and mutually beneficial partnership between each religious congregation and its associate movement.

So it is from our experience of baptism that our individual calling emerges. That call is to serve God according to our gifts and the needs of our time, and our task is to identify what God is asking of us – how can we serve God most faithfully?



As the second Vatican Council emphasised, all women and men are called to a life of holiness via their baptism, and are called to have a commitment to the mission of God. Charism is dynamic, inspiring people differently over time to identify and respond to the needs of their time. “Charism is where the deep story and needs of the times meet. It calls us. Associates and religious live the same charism, but in unique ways. ... Associates express what they have caught from their community in their prayer, presence, service and commitment statements.” (NACAR, *Lead with the Spirit, A Manual for Associate Leadership*, 2015, Tab 2, p. 13).

Mercy Associates experience a call to the Mercy charism in their own individual way, and have come to the view that it is of such importance to them that they wish to join with others sharing that experience of charism. Their groups provide an opportunity to share and nurture their faith, and to work in common with each other to serve God with a special focus on expressing God’s mercy in their lives. They share this commitment to the charism of Mercy with the Sisters of Mercy through ISMAPNG and elsewhere in Australia and around the world.

Have there been times in your life where you felt “called” to something? This might be a career, a marriage, parenthood, etc.

If you recognize your own personal call to mercy, then you are invited to reflect and pray about the invitation to become a Mercy Associate.