



MERCY
Associates

Institute of Sisters of Mercy
of Australia & Papua New Guinea

One Charism, Many Paths

Chapter 8

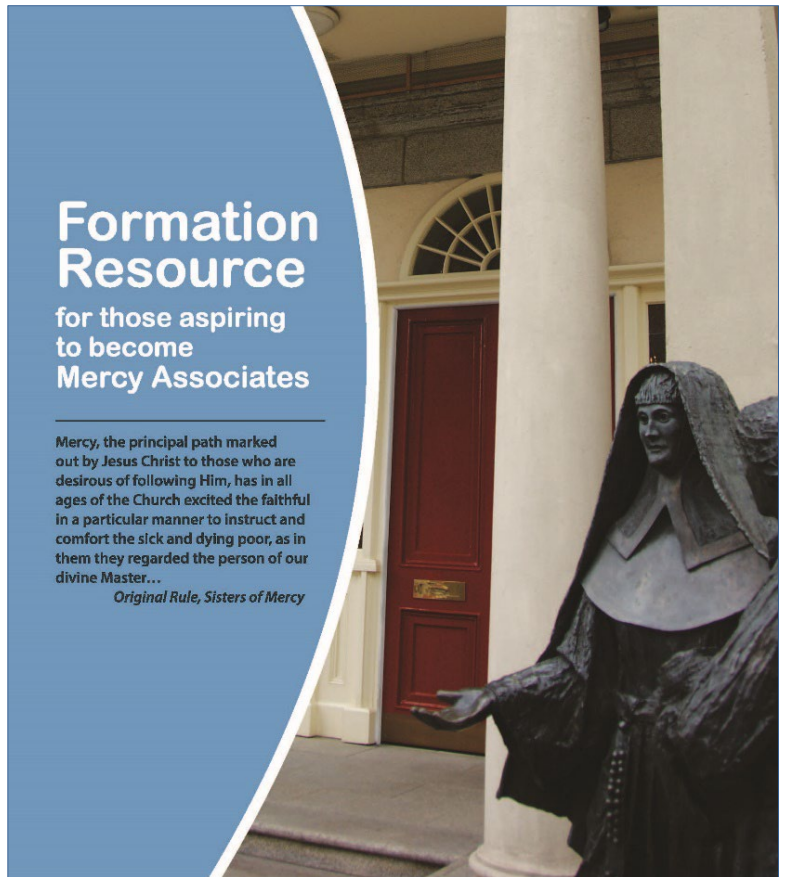
Ministry – Sharing the Charism of Mercy

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



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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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8.0 Ministry - Sharing the Charism of Mercy

As noted previously, the first House of Mercy, established on Baggot Street in the heart of Dublin's fashionable and wealthy district, had at its very heart a mission to serve the poor, address the causes of misery and support all people who struggle for full dignity. Sisters of Mercy today continue to read the signs of the times and to dedicate themselves to serving people who suffer from injustices. They animate others, including Mercy Associates, to journey with them – to partner them in this ministry.

8.1 Everyday Mercy

Sometimes we can think that sharing mercy means we must be looking for 'big' opportunities to do so, but the reality of life for Catherine McAuley and those who worked with her was that their day to day lives were flavoured through and through with small acts of mercy towards those they met. The following is an extract from an article by Vinita Hampton Wright, entitled

'What does everyday mercy look like? (*National Catholic Reporter*, 26 August 2014). It provides a perspective on mercy that enables us to learn to see moments each and every day, where our choice about how to react to a challenging situation can be one of Mercy.

I would rather be cold and hungry than the poor in Kingston or elsewhere be deprived of any consolation in our power to afford.

Letter to Teresa White November 1, 1838

What does mercy look like? How might I become a person of mercy? In the Christian vocabulary, mercy is a forgiving response to wrongdoing; it is God's countermove to our sin. ...

As I move through this day, how will I live mercifully? What words and actions will express to others around me the mercy Pope Francis is talking about? In a given day, I do ordinary things, and I traverse a fairly unexciting landscape. My mercy will not show up in grand gestures, and most of the time mercy reveals itself in fleeting moments.

For example, mercy gives you his seat on the bus, acting as if he was about to get up anyway rather than making you feel that he is doing you a favour. Mercy does not let out that sigh -- you know the one -- the wordless disapproval toward the person in the check-out line ahead of you whose card didn't swipe, or who can't find her coupons, or whose toddler is having a meltdown. Mercy offers quiet sympathy and does not convey with her body language that this holdup is ruining her day. Sometimes mercy chooses not to send back the food that isn't just right, simply because the waitress looks overwhelmed.

When mercy has been wronged, the offended one does not make it difficult for the offender to apologize or ask forgiveness. In fact, mercy does not wait for the other's action but forgives so quickly that the person needing forgiveness is freer to ask for it. Likewise, at work, at home or in the classroom, mercy creates an atmosphere in which a person feels safe enough to admit his mistake or ask a question. And if mercy must correct someone, it pains her to do it, and she does so gently, without vindictive relish.

Michael Leunig, Kindness in Another's Trouble



Mercy makes a habit of giving others the benefit of the doubt. Mercy is not in the habit of sending deadly glares at people who are annoying. Mercy gives charitably, knowing that eventually someone will take advantage of his generosity. Mercy welcomes you, fully aware that this act may disrupt her own plans.

Mercy relinquishes control when doing so allows another person to grow and learn. Mercy makes it his business to help others succeed. Mercy clears the way for others, so that they can walk on an even path, no matter how halting their steps or injured their souls.

In all these situations, mercy treats power as a sacred trust. I can be merciful because I have some sort of power, the means to affect another's life, if only for a moment. I act mercifully when I use my power to do kindness in this world. ...

In my own work, I have achieved a certain level of expertise and others' respect. When I sit in a room with colleagues, they feel the weight of my opinions. With a sentence or a glance, I can crush or I can encourage. I can open up the conversation or shut it down.

Most of my sins involve failure at mercy. Whether through my unhelpful opinion of someone, my silent sentences that criticize him, my words grinding away in the privacy of a moving car, my neglect to help, or my refusal to notice when help is needed -- each failure of mercy denies the community a bit of healing that might have happened.

Thus, mercy has become my new sin detector, a personal barometer. 'Am I showing mercy?' makes for self-assessment that is simple, direct, and difficult to misinterpret.

As I move through this day, how will I live mercifully?

Our challenge throughout each day is to be mindful of moments when we can choose to share mercy with another. Think about some moments so far today where the chance to be merciful arose. What did you do? How can you work to bring mercy to the lives of others in your everyday life?

8.2 Snapshots of Mercy Associates groups

Below are some examples of initiatives by Mercy Associates groups, past and present. They vary in their focus, and often a group will be involved in a few different initiatives – this is a great way to draw on the skills and interests of Mercy Associates and provide a chance for all to contribute their own gifts to the life of their group. Following these are some additional options for Mercy Associates groups to serve the needs of those in their communities and advance the spread of justice and mercy in our world.

SNAPSHOT: Supporting the Mater Hospital

In 2000 when the Sisters of Mercy opened the Mater Hospital in Gladstone, Mercy Associates responded with a new ministry of Hospitality at Day Surgery and other ministries within the hospital. From the beginning we have offered a 'comfortable cup of tea, a kind word and a compassionate look' to the patients.

Mercy Associates are rostered to assist in Day Surgery; administration packs for the charts are done in medical records; and a separate group visits patients in the wards. There is also an Associate, a very loyal pastoral care person who voluntarily visits the hospital twice weekly and Sundays as well as visiting the Oncology Ward, who is on call and visits the patients in the Base Hospital as well. She is also the Sacristan who sets up for the Monthly celebration of Eucharist and ensures all linen is spotlessly clean.

The hospital has evolved over the years and has become much busier and there are many areas within the hospital where Mercy Associates could do much more, Oncology being just one.

Over the years the Mercy Associates and volunteers have found great satisfaction in these ministries and the hospital has benefitted greatly from their commitment and dedication to their tasks.

In this ministry we are reminded of the words of Catherine: There are things the poor prize more highly than gold, though they cost the donor nothing: among these are the kind word, the gentle compassionate look and the patient hearing of their sorrows.

Adrienne Dyer, **Gladstone**

SNAPSHOT: Prayer Ministry

During 2015 an article titled, *Prayer doesn't change God, it changes us*, appeared in the *Just Mercy* newsletter. The article seemed to speak to me and I read it several times. Among other things, it mentioned that Mercy Associate gatherings always include a period of prayer, and our gatherings certainly do this.

It also wrote about Prayer Ministries that all Associates could take part in from their own homes. Then the penny dropped and I thought, 'That's something we could do very easily.' So I took the idea to the Mercy Associate Core Group where it was very well received. Some fellow Associates and I arranged a meeting to see how we might go about setting up such a Prayer Ministry. We decided that all our Associates should be invited to join this Ministry.

As a result of this detailed information explaining the initiative was posted to all Associates. The response has been very positive with 32 Associates agreeing to become part of the Prayer Ministry. There has been encouraging feedback from a number of Associates who are appreciative of being able to join their personal prayers with group prayer and offering these to God. A Prayer Sheet is sent out each month (by email or post) with some background details relating to the issues to be prayed for that month.

Kathy Pollard, **Ballarat**

SNAPSHOT: Supporting MercyWorks

One of the best kept secrets in the world of ISMAPNG is the relationship between Mercy Associates groups and Mercy Works.

Our group has held a fund-raising luncheon for over 15 years. Over this time we have been aware of Sisters who are working 'in the fields' in Africa, Timor Leste, Burma and PNG as well as Aboriginal communities and refugees, have benefited from these funds. This is a joy for us.

In 2016 we decided on a change and held a concert in the local Church hall in Tuart Hill. To our delight about 130 people attended, including many Sisters. The latter, in their generous way, supported our efforts in many ways.

Many local artists performed free of charge and our (Associate) MC had the audience laughing with jokes and skits between other performances. A tasty afternoon tea then had people chatting and enjoying the day for quite a long time after the concert ended.

The whole day was a great group effort and many who could see the importance of the cause, supported it with both food and cash donations. Prizes for raffles were also donated.

We have been overwhelmed by the generosity of all, both donors and those who attended the day.

While our group places a strong emphasis on prayer and spiritual formation and sees this as a priority, fund raising for Mercy Works has always been seen as a special part of our commitment to sharing in the work of the Sisters through the 'works of Mercy'. We share the values and objectives of Mercy Works and look forward to continuing to make a contribution.

Jan O'Connor, **Tuart Hill, Perth**

SNAPSHOT: MERCY DAY – Celebrating our shared Mercy journey

Since the establishment of the Institute (ISMAPNG) in December 2011, a committed group of Mercy Associates of the former Cairns Congregation, local Sisters of Mercy and a collection of other Friends in Mercy, have continued to gather for times of prayer and formation and have been active in a variety of service ministries in Far North Queensland. Mercy Day is a significant occasion that gives us a chance to celebrate our shared journey of mercy.

Our Mercy Day gatherings typically include some input and formation, a Mercy Day Liturgy and lunch together. In the Year of Mercy, for example, we spent the morning on the Mercy International Reflection Process, allowing us to reflect upon how the Wisdom Tradition calls us to respond to *The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor*.

Our Mercy Day morning teas and lunches are usually 'bring a dish to share' affairs, although occasionally the Associates are treated to the hospitality of a catered meal, courtesy of the local Sisters. We are fortunate to be welcomed to the Seville Centre and receive the extravagant hospitality the Sisters bestow on us. The relationships between the Associates and the Sisters of Mercy continue to be very strong and supportive.

Terry Power, **Cairns**

SNAPSHOT: MERCYING within and beyond the group

Bathurst Mercy Associates group is one with a difference. We began approximately seventeen years ago and many of the initial members are still with us. Over the years we have developed very deep friendships and we still delight in each other's company. Everyone brings a plate of food, halfway through our meeting we enjoy fellowship of a meal together. This is an essential part of our gathering as it gives us time to administer Mercy to one another, socially and prayerfully.

Most of our Mercy ministry, because of our advanced age group is performed individually but encouraged by group dynamics. Many of our members are seriously involved in offering love and care to the residents of St Catherine's Aged Care. Others help in the organisation of daily and weekend Masses in the parish and at St Catherine's.

Another member enjoys Hospital visitation to our local hospital on a roster basis; others visit the sick and house bound in our local community. Transport to weekend Mass is given to parishioners who are unable to drive. Another member offers her home to a mixed group weekly who pray the rosary for peace in our world and the spreading of mercy. We spread our offering of mercy through various church groups, namely weekday readers, commentators, Eucharist ministers, Legion of Mary and Cathedral decor ministries. These are all moulded happily into our individual daily routines and so are beneficial to the giver and the receiver of Mercy.

As a group we collect donations in the "Red Box" and support Mercy Works with a donation twice a year. Our chosen work is in Papua New Guinea. Our two projects for 2016 were to offer assistance to the Mercy Sisters for the development of McAuley Library and to create a Memorial seat in the grounds of Rahamim Ecology Centre in memory of five of our deceased Mercy Associate members, since our inauguration. This is a lasting example of Mercy to ourselves.

Sandra Lynch, **Bathurst**

SNAPSHOT: Spiritual Nourishment

The Mercy Associates of Caringbah were a group of Mercy women who met every second month to discuss Mercy concerns and listen to a guest speaker invited by their group.

Numbers varied from 20 to 25+ in attendance at meetings. In preparation for the meeting, all gathered for a welcome cup of tea and again following the meeting, enjoyed each other's company with a light lunch.

Invited guests and the discussions they inspired have been broad and interesting. Speakers are chosen so that personal spirituality continues to become a growing, changing, soul searching and challenging one. For up to one and half hours of meeting time a process of reflection, dialogue, exploration, sharing, and questions was followed.

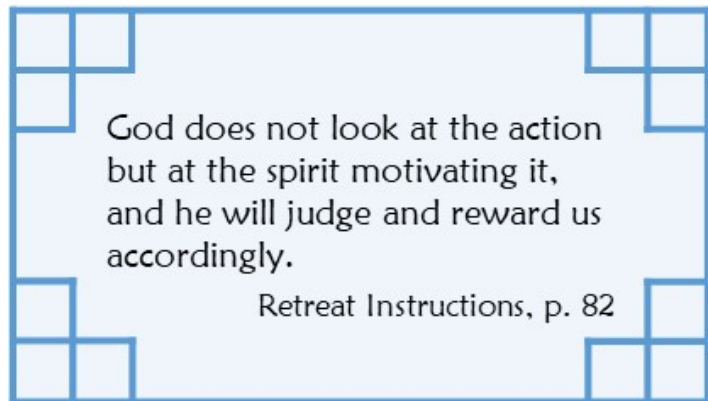
Topics ranged from hearing about foundress Catherine McAuley to understanding Mercy initiatives in Papua New Guinea. The meetings were important for sustaining individual spirituality, as well as awareness of local and wider faith communities.

Belonging to Caringbah Mercy Associates provided comfort and encouragement to its members, providing a spiritual enrichment and reminding all of something greater than ourselves, and acknowledging the presence of God's Merciful Love.

Carolyn Marr, **Caringbah**

8.3 Mission

'Mission' comes from the Latin word meaning 'to send' and it implies that a person sent goes in service of others. Through our baptism we are invited each and every day to be missionary in the way we live. Jesus did not just proclaim God's mission, his actions put him at the very centre of that mission. That centre was among the poor, the weak and the oppressed. Catherine's mission was also counter-cultural and she, too, was often treated with contempt. Through her great love of God she believed she was called to continue Jesus' work amongst the marginalised and most destitute people of her time.



The ISMAPNG Constitutions (Const. 1.03) describe Mercy Mission as follows: *Our gift as Sisters of Mercy is to know God's loving kindness and share it with others.* This calls the Sisters then to an 'urgent response to extravagant mercy' and an attentive listening to the stories of the most needy. For that service to be relevant in the contemporary world the needy must be constantly sought out. Mercy Associates are also invited to serve those most in need in our world.

8.4 Ministry

Mission is expressed through ministry – what we do to bring about truth and justice in the world and to break through the boundaries of comfort, privilege and security. Christian ministry gives witness to the reign of God and must be a public activity carried out on behalf of the whole Christian community. There has to be a fit between what is said and what is done. In early nineteenth century Ireland, Catherine recognised the many needs of people and determined that she and women like her could make a difference. She had a particular ability to address immediate need in a practical and loving way. Today, we see the Sisters of Mercy and their ministry partners continuing to change people's hearts and establish networks of support. Mercy Associates are invited to walk alongside them.

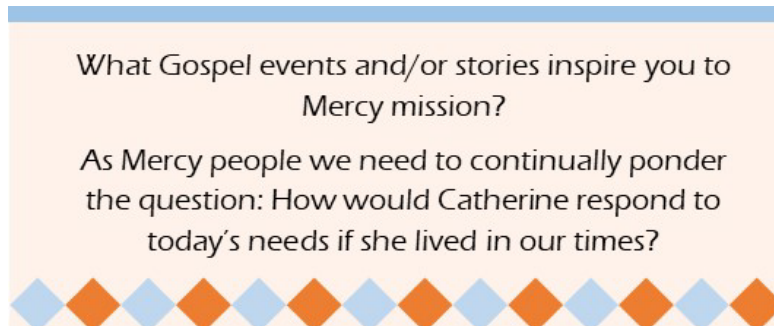
In Australia and Papua New Guinea, Mercy mission is exercised through a variety of ministries which include:

- the traditional works of ISMAPNG, teaching, visitation, care of the sick, assistance to disadvantaged and vulnerable people with particular concern for women and children in need
- care for the vulnerable earth community
- work for justice through challenging oppressive relationships and structures.

Within Australia and Papua New Guinea, there are many Mercy ministries run by individuals or groups of Sisters, and/or by women and men who share the vision of Mercy. These Ministries include the running of retreat and spirituality centres, multi-media services, health and education services, mediation and legal services, retreat and workshop facilitation and spiritual direction.

Mercy Associates have many different lifestyles, life experiences and responsibilities and, as such, live the Mercy charism in whatever way they can. Compassionate service can be given to family and friends, to work colleagues or within the broader community wherever they meet people in need. Many Mercy Associates are engaged in projects within their parish or in their own area. Such projects

include supporting refugee families, helping out in food vans that serve the homeless and hungry, volunteering in schools or assisting migrants with English lessons. Some Mercy Associates are engaged in directly working with the Sisters in their many different ministries. These may be assisting families, children, those with disabilities, women and victims of domestic violence, accommodation and outreach to those who are homeless or elderly, visits to people in gaols and detention centres, community development programmes, counselling and advocacy support. Great joy can be brought to Mercy Associates who support Mercy mission and ministries through prayer.



ISMAPNG encourages Mercy Associates to undertake ministry that aligns with their own ministries, always mindful that the conduct and level of responsibility of Mercy Associates provides an opportunity and an obligation to uphold the values of the Sisters and strengthen community understanding of the importance of mercy in everyday life. Among the ministries groups might take up are those related to ISMAPNG's focus on the cry of the earth, which aligns well with the eighth work of mercy declared by Pope Francis, care of our common home. The ISMAPNG website (institute.mercy.org.au) contains information on initiatives currently underway that could be adopted by Mercy Associates groups.

Whatever the service given, the dignity of the human person is paramount and the empowering of those who are powerless is vital. Through works of mercy Catherine always aimed to set people free – that is her legacy to all Mercy people today.

8.5 Mercy Works

Mercy Works is an organisation conducted by the Sisters of Mercy (ISMAPNG and the three additional Australian Mercy congregations) that supports mercy ministries in regional Australia, Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste. The programs engage in partnerships with communities to promote justice and self-reliance and to support displaced people and communities who are denied access to basic resources such as education, health care and social welfare. In Australia, MercyWorks offers community education in world development concerns, provides assistance for refugees, and works in partnership with Indigenous peoples. Overseas, the primary focus is in the South-East Asia Pacific region including Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste, where in collaboration with local partners, MercyWorks directs its efforts towards the education, health care, and social and spiritual well-being of those who are poor or displaced.



MercyWorks
SISTERS OF MERCY IN AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

8.6 Social action

ISMAPNG has Sisters and agencies working in many areas where injustice and lack of opportunity are prevalent. Some of the Institute's priorities include Women and Poverty, Trafficking in Humans, Indigenous Concerns, Eco-Justice, Asylum Seekers and Refugees. More information on these areas of injustice and need, as well as initiatives being undertaken to address them can be found on the ISMAPNG website, <https://institute.mercy.org.au/mercy-in-action/>. Mercy Associates are often able to add their voice to these initiatives by liaising with the local Sisters and seeking opportunities to contact local politicians, write letters to politicians and those in organisations where unjust treatment of staff and/or local residents has been proven, and where environmental damage is taking place.



Mercy listens – really listens, with interest and concern – then smiles, and reaches out her hand.

J. M. Dematteis, Mercy