

# ISMAPNG Staff Formation Bytes

## Module 1: The Face of Mercy in Times of Uncertainty

### Resource Sheet

#### Introduction to the Module

Our focus for this module is the face of mercy in uncertain times. We start with the story of Catherine McAuley and then focus on the response she and her companions made during the 1832 cholera epidemic in Ireland. Then, through two music video clips, we explore some ways we can support others during current uncertainties.

#### Byte 1: The story of Catherine McAuley and the early Sisters

Set aside some time to watch the docudrama *In God Alone* on the life of Catherine McAuley <https://www.mercyworld.org/film-in-god-alone/> (22 min)

As you watch the video, we invite you to think about the following:

- What were some of the times when Catherine faced uncertainty?
- How did she respond?

#### Byte 2: The cholera epidemic in Dublin in 1832

Historian, Mary Sullivan RSM, a Sister of Mercy from the Americas, writes about the work of Catherine and the early Sisters of Mercy during the cholera epidemic in Dublin in 1832. How similar was their situation to what we are living through in 2020!

Take some time to read the extracts on the last page of this resource and identify what is significant for you about the assistance given by the Sisters to those in need.

#### Byte 3: He ain't heavy, he's my brother (she's my sister... )

Most of us are on a journey along a road we have not travelled before. In these uncertain times, we can reach out to others traveling a similar road or bike path or driveway nearby. If we each do something in our own space or place, together we can do a great deal, as the You Tube clip of the *Melbourne Welsh Male Choir* shows us!

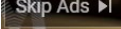
<https://youtu.be/IjGKQ0otAKU> (4 min 53 sec)

Has there been a time over the last few weeks when you've lent a hand (or an ear) to someone near to you?

## Byte 4: Always there

Take some time to view the clip 'Always there' by *Secret Garden*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3dn9MNSOFns> (4 min 53 sec)

Unfortunately, advertisements are unavoidable, so you may like to  when the icon appears in the bottom right of the window to go straight to the music.

Catherine McAuley and her companions were 'there' for the people of Dublin during the 1832 cholera epidemic. Similarly, we can 'be there' for people in our time. We can allow others to care for us, to 'be there' for us. We can 'be there' for each other within ISMAPNG.

*Where or what or who is your constant, your still point, your rock during these uncertain times?*

*Think of a way to express gratitude to someone who is 'there for you' in these days.*

## Byte 5: Zoom conversation

We invite you to join our Zoom conversation to explore the content of this module further, and to share your thoughts and/or insights with other participants.

Zoom link: Details are posted in the weekly Living Mercy newsletter

Date/time: 2 pm (AEST) Monday, 11 May 2020

Carole Gan and Annette Schneider RSM

27 April 2020

Extracts from Sullivan, M. C. (2012) *The Path of Mercy: the life of Catherine McAuley*  
Dublin: Four Courts Press.

### **Cholera, Port Wine and Mutton Chops**

"A few weeks later, exhausted, Catherine carried home in the dark a newborn baby, wrapped carefully in her shawl, and 'put it to sleep in her own cell' (bedroom). Another calamity had struck, not Baggot Street, but the whole city of Dublin. The long feared malignant Asiatic cholera had now arrived from England and Europe. The young mother had just died in the temporary cholera hospital set up in Townsend Street.

In news announcements and placards, issued from Dublin Castle on April 13, 1832, Francis Barker M. D., secretary of the Central Board of Health for Ireland, had warned the public to seek immediate medical treatment upon experiencing or witnessing 'the earliest and most striking Symptoms' of 'aggravated forms' of the disease. 'Delay or concealment for even one hour may be the cause of death.' (p. 114)

"... Catherine wrote to Archbishop Murray seeking permission to offer the services of the Sisters of Mercy wherever they were needed. He came to the House immediately.

Dr Murray had just published a pastoral letter on the cholera visitation, begging Catholics to follow four precautions: avoid intoxicating liquors, since these were thought to weaken physical resistance to the disease; abstain from conducting or participating in wakes for the dead, as these occasions were 'most dangerous to public health'; 'procure interment with the least possible delay' and take suspected cholera victims to the hospitals set up for them, rather than to treat them at home. Given the unbelievably sudden deaths they had already witnessed, and the high mortality rates, the poor were terrified.'" (p. 115)

"Daniel Murray endorsed the Baggot Street community's willingness to assist in the epidemic, though there were now only ten of them and they were already running a shelter for dozens of homeless women, teaching hundreds of poor girls in the school each day and caring for several young orphans ... Murray was concerned for their health suggesting the Sisters 'should take great nourishment, *port wine* and *mutton chops*...

On May 1, the Board of Health "immediately and unanimously resolved to send its 'cordial thanks ... to the Sisters of Mercy, and inform them that the depot in Townsend Street had been opened ... and that their attendance, cooperation and consolation will be gratefully accepted.'"

"Mutton chops and port wine or not, the sisters were on the job at Townsend Street by May 4, at the start of one of the most deadly months of the epidemic. They worked in shifts: 'We went early in the morning, 4 Sisters who were relieved in 2 or 3 hours and so on till 8 in the evening. Rev Mother was there very much... Clare Moore remembered that there were always four at the Depot "from nine in the morning till eight at night, and that although Catherine had a natural fear of contagion, she overcame that feeling, and scarcely left the Hospital.'" (p. 117)

"The mere presence of the Sisters apparently assured patients and their relatives that, contrary to the wild rumours swirling outside, the doctors were not poisoning patients, and that despite appearances and suddenness of death (within a few hours), no one was deliberately buried alive... Most of all, Catherine and her sisters consoled and prayed with dying patients and those that survived. When it was possible to give physical relief they did so. From long experience by sickbeds Catherine knew how such small gestures and kind words could help..." (p. 118)