



INSTITUTE OF
SISTERS of MERCY
OF AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Orientation to Mercy: Module 3 – the Corporal & Spiritual Works of Mercy



The Scriptural quotations used in this booklet are from the New Revised Standard Edition.

This formation resource has been developed for the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea for use by staff new to the Institute and its ministries.

ABOUT ORIENTATION TO MERCY

The *Orientation to Mercy* program was originally designed for staff new to the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (ISMAPNG) and its incorporated ministries. The program is, however, also suitable for those for whom the mercy charism is a core component in their roles, including those from non-ISMAPNG ministries and schools with a Mercy heritage.

The *Orientation to Mercy* (self-paced) is a 7-module program, with each module designed to take about 30-40 minutes. The program was adapted from the one-day *Orientation to Mercy* seminars that were held face-to-face in early 2020. Whilst in-person seminars always bring an added dimension to education and formation, i.e., the ability to interact, network and share stories with the presenter and other participants, bringing people together physically is not always possible or feasible.

The seven topics covered in the Modules are;

- the story of Catherine McAuley, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, and the sources of inspiration for the work she did
- the early expansion of the Sisters of Mercy
- the *Works of Mercy*, their scriptural basis, and the traditional and contemporary manifestations of these.
- *Care for Our Common Home* (the 8th Work of Mercy) and the interconnectedness of the *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*
- The brief history of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea and the formation of ISMAPNG
- ISMAPNG's ministries
- The wider Mercy family & Mercy Values

Education and formation are not just about receiving input or even mentally processing what has been heard or read. It also involves some critical reflection on the resource material, engaging with it from the head, heart and spirit, being open to new insights. Ideally, formation also moves us into action. As such, each of the modules includes input, short activities and reflective questions.

At the start of each 30-40 minute module, there is a short video clip which provides information about the module. Within the body of the module, there are links to video clips and websites which relate to the focus of the module. There are also suggested short activities and reflective questions for consideration.

At the end of each module is a prayerful reflection. Central to being Catholic are the questions about the ways God is revealed through what we are seeing and hearing, how what we see and hear can strengthen our relationship with God, and the ways we are

invited to respond. If you are not Catholic or are unfamiliar with the Christian tradition of prayer and reflection, you are invited to take this time to think about the points in the module which have made an impact on you.

You will need online access whilst participating in this program as there are several links to video clips and websites to which you will be directed as key resource material.

It may also be useful to print out a copy of this document so that you are able to write down your responses to the reflective questions whilst engaging with the content. It is also hoped that the links contained will be useful as resources for further exploration.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country in Melbourne, the *Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation* and in the inner west of Sydney, the *Gadigal and Wangai peoples of the Eora Nation*, (where the presenters taped the introductory video clips at the start of each module) and throughout Australia.

We acknowledge First Nations people throughout the world. We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture.

We acknowledge the stories, traditions and living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this land and commit to building a brighter future together. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Watch

MODULE 3

The Corporal & Spiritual Works of Mercy

Watch the Introduction to Module 3 video clip [here](#).

Introduction to Module 3

In this module, we explore the traditional corporal and spiritual Works of Mercy, their scriptural foundations and their conventional and contemporary manifestations. We reflect on how the Works of Mercy were central to Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy, and how we are called to engage in them as women and men of mercy today.

Opening Reflection – Catherine’s words

Sweet Mercy! – soothing, patient and kind –
softens the highs and rears the fallen mind;
Knows with just reign and even hand to guide
between the false fear and arbitrary pride.
Not easily provoked, she soon forgives:
feels love for all, and by a look, relieves.
Soft peace she brings, whenever she arrives,
removes our anguish and reforms our lives;
makes the rough paths of peevish nature even,
and opens in each heart a little heaven.

Helen Marie Burns and Sheila Carney, (citing Angela Bolster, 1985, p. 817) *Praying with Catherine McAuley*, p. 36.

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The Corporal & Spiritual Works of Mercy

Works of Mercy are actions we can take in response to need, giving and receiving the mercy of God. They have been traditionally divided into two categories, the Corporal and the Spiritual. The Corporal Works of Mercy address material and physical needs, whilst the Spiritual Works of Mercy address emotional and spiritual needs. Traditionally, there are 7 Corporal and 7 Spiritual Works of Mercy, all of which have their basis in Scripture.

Pope Francis, in 2016, included 'Care for Our Common Home' as an 8th Spiritual and Corporal Work of Mercy. Given the importance of these works in our world today and the integral way that they are connected to the other Works of Mercy, Module 4 is dedicated to the 8th Work.

Scriptural Foundations for the Works of Mercy

Reference to 6 of the 7 traditional corporal works of Mercy can be found in the Gospel of Matthew Ch. 25, v 35. There are however, several other passages in Scripture which refer to these actions.

Corporal Works

Feed the Hungry	Matthew 14:15-21; 25:35 Tobit 1:17 Proverbs 22:9 Isaiah 58:10 2 Kings 4:42-44; 25:35 Luke 3:11; 9:12-17 John 6:35
Give Drink to the Thirsty	Matthew 25:35 Tobit 1:17 Isaiah 55:1 John 6:35; 7:37-39 Revelation 21:6; 22:17
Clothe the Naked	Matthew 25:36
Shelter the Homeless	Matthew 25:35
Visit the Sick	Matthew 25:36
Visit the Imprisoned	Matthew 25:36
Bury the Dead	Tobit 1:18; 12:12

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Spiritual Works

Counsel the Doubtful	Matthew 13:18-23 Mark 4:13-20; 9:14-29 Luke 8:11-15 John 14:27
Instruct the Ignorant	Daniel 12:3 Matthew 16:15; 28:19-20 Mark 16:14-18 Luke 24:47-49 John 20:21 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 4:1-5
Admonish the Sinner	Timothy 4:2 Proverbs 27:17 Luke 15:7; 17:3 2
Comfort the Afflicted	James 1:27 Psalms 9:8-11; 22:23-27; 27:4-5; 30:2-4; 46:2; 55:22; 56; 71:20-22; 116; 119:49-50 Jeremiah 29:11-14 Lamentations 3:21-24, 31-33 Nahum 1:7-8 Matthew 11:28-30 John 14:15-18, 27; 16:22-23 2 Corinthians 5:17 1 Peter 5:5-11 Revelation 21:4
Bear Wrongs Patiently	Matthew 5:10; 5:38-48 Luke 6:27-36 1 Peter 2:18-19
Forgive Offenses Willingly	Mark 11:25 Matthew 6:12,14-15; 18:15-35 Luke 11:1-4; 17:1-4
Pray for the Living	2 Maccabees 12:45; 38-46
Pray for the Dead	James 5:16

 Select a Corporal and Spiritual Work of Mercy and reflect on the related scripture passages.

NOTE: If you do not have access to a bible you can find the passages online if you type them into a search engine.

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The Corporal & Spiritual Works of Mercy

Activity:

Following are some quotes from Catherine McAuley's writings. Can you link each quote to a work of Mercy?

QUOTES FROM CATHERINE

"A good beginning is of great importance, you must waste some time with visitors."

"It is better to relieve 100 imposters – if there be any such – than to suffer one really distressed person to be sent away empty."

"God knows that I would rather be cold and hungry than the poor in Kingstown or elsewhere should be deprived of any consolation in our power to afford"

"Every place has its own particular ideas and feelings which must be yielded to where possible."

"Now and again bestow some praise."

"We should be shining lamps giving light to all around us."

"Try to meet all with peace and ease."

"There are things the poor prize more highly than gold, tho' they cost the donor nothing; among these are the kind word, the gentle compassionate look, and the patient hearing of their sorrows."

"There is nothing of greater importance than the perfect discharge of our ordinary duties."

The poor need help today, not next week!"

"It is for God that we serve the poor, and not for thanks"

"We can never say "it is enough."

"You must be cheerful and happy, animating all around you"

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Works of Mercy: Literal and Symbolic or Figurative

As you reflect on the Works of Mercy, keep in mind that we can engage in them literally (e.g. giving water to someone who is thirsty) as well as symbolically or figuratively (e.g. responding to someone who is thirsting for knowledge or acceptance).

Clare Agnew, a contemporary of Catherine McAuley, was a Sister of Mercy from 1838-1842. She is known for her illustrations of the early Sisters of Mercy as they engaged in the Corporal and Spiritual works of Mercy in Ireland in the 1830s.

See Clare Agnew's illustrations on the Mercy International Association website at <https://www.mercyworld.org/about/works-of-mercy/>

Activity:

Select an illustration that either resonates with you or is a core work in your Mercy ministry.

In what ways is this particular work of mercy evident in your ministry?

Recall an instance when you were the recipient of a work of mercy undertaken by another person. How does it feel to receive mercy from another?

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The Corporal & Spiritual Works of Mercy

Contemporary engagement in the Works of Mercy

Pope Francis, speaking in St Peter's Square in Rome to a Jubilee audience on 30 June, 2016, reminded those gathered there that *"the works of mercy are not theoretical ideas, but concrete testimonies. They oblige us to roll up our sleeves to alleviate suffering."*

Annette Schneider rsm, reflecting on the legacy of Clare Agnew and the lens she gave us into the works of the early Sisters of Mercy through her illustrations, writes that

"the works of mercy are the building blocks on which a compassionate and merciful world continues to be shaped by followers of Jesus who have 'rolled up their sleeves', alongside people of all faith traditions and all people of good will, to advocate for mercy, justice, compassion and inclusiveness." [Schneider, A. (2019) *A Lens on the Works of Mercy: Clare Agnew and her Legacy*, p. 62]

What are some of the contemporary issues in response to which we are called to 'roll up our sleeves' and engage in Works of Mercy?

Think about the scope of influence you have in your current ministry role. How might you nurture a culture of 'cheerful response to need' amongst those with whom you work?

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Prayerful Reflection¹


The parable of the Good Samaritan reveals Jesus' response to the question "Who is my neighbour?" posed to him by one of the scribes. Take some time to read the parable of the Good Samaritan from the Gospel of Luke 10:25-37.

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Notice that Jesus does not answer the scribe's question by defining "my neighbour", but turns the question around and instead, asks "who is the neighbour to the person in need?"

Stopping to help the man in need was not a simple action. Showing mercy entailed the "willingness to enter into the chaos of another" to make things right. Viewed through this lens, it is easy to see how mercy is at the heart of Catholic theological tradition. Jesus is God's way of entering into the chaos of human existence to rescue us from our slavery to false gods.

-  What are some of the 'false gods' from which God is calling us away in contemporary society?

¹ Adapted from James Keenan, *The Works of Mercy: The Heart of Catholicism*, 3rd Edition (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), pp. 4-7

Notes