



Many Paths

Newsletter of Mercy Associates of ISMAPNG

Issue 19, October 2021

FORMATION ... an ongoing journey

This is a special, additional edition of *Many Paths*. The majority of content relates to our *Formation Resource*.

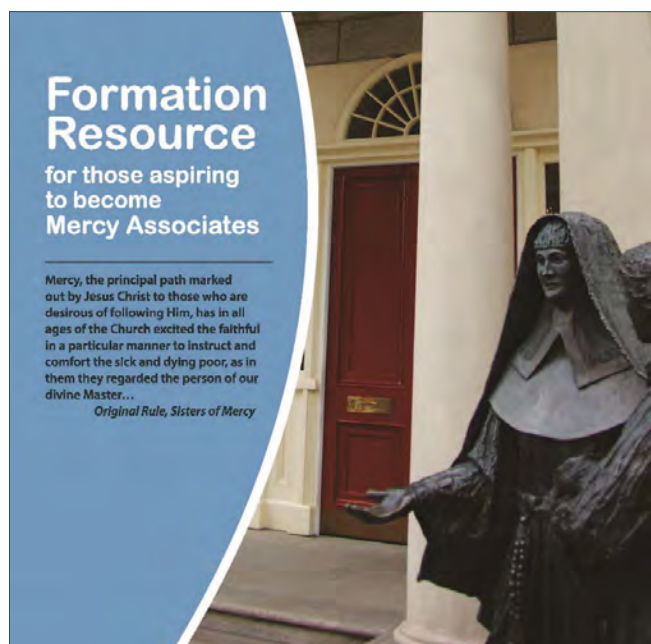
Our reason for focussing the Formation Resource in this edition is because it's so important. Its primary use is to assist those who are guiding new candidates through their initial formation process. Its secondary use is for groups to draw from in their regular meetings for their ongoing formation. We have received positive feedback about the Formation Resource over the years and want to remind everyone that it is readily available.

The Formation Resource has been developed to ensure you have a resource available to take new candidates through their formation process. This ensures you cover all the important material that will help a candidate decide whether

becoming a Mercy Associate is right for them, and it avoids you needing to spend vast amounts of time looking for suitable resources to use.

Two articles about the Formation Resource have been included in the newsletter, from Ballarat. Anne O'Connell has provided an overview; while **Jo Rix** and **Kathy Pollard** have provided a detailed account of their formation process and how they use the Formation Resource.

The Formation Resource is now on the Mercy Associates page of the ISMAPNG website. The web address is in the box below, and if you copy and paste this into your web browser, you will find the Formation Resource and other Mercy Associates items including the Administrative Handbook and our newsletters. The Formation Resource is there in individual chapters, so you can just download each chapter as you need it.



Formation Resource—Chapter Headings

1. Welcome and Introduction
2. The Call to Mercy
3. Mercy: Diverse yet Personal
4. Catherine McAuley
5. The Spirituality of Mercy
6. The Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea
7. Mercy Associates and ISMAPNG
8. Ministry—Sharing the Charism of Mercy
9. Being a Mercy Associate

Formation Resource web address:

<https://institute.mercy.org.au/become-involved/become-a-mercy-associate/mercy-associates-formation-resource/>



Dance every evening.

Catherine McAuley, letter to
Cecelia Marmion, 15 Jan. 1841

FORMATION RESOURCE and PROCCSS REFLECTION – Anne O’Connell, Ballarat

In 2017, we, in Ballarat, had the privilege of working through the newly produced Formation Resource for those lay persons wishing to respond to a call to live a more merciful way of life as Mercy Associates. I had previously assisted and then led the formation ministry for a number of years and this new Resource was an absolute gift to anyone working in Formation.

The Introductory Documents present the Vision and Vision in Practice Statements which really set up and give an insight into the following sessions.

The first time we used this Resource each candidate had two sponsors. The candidate and sponsors read through a Chapter prior to meeting to discuss and reflect. Sometimes this meeting would be just with the three of us or with the larger group which generated and stimulated wider discussion. I believe it’s important not to rush through these chapters as so much is included in each, that sometimes the conversation needs to continue to the next meeting.

We also found it beneficial to invite other Associates to a session, where appropriate, to discuss how they live their Mercy Commitment and how this Commitment has enriched their lives.

When studying the Chapter on the Sisters coming to Australia and Papua New Guinea, it was very helpful to be able to invite a Sister to give an insight into the early history of the Sisters arrival in this local area.

In the first use of this Resource we were also fortunate to have been provided with hard copies so each candidate and sponsor had their own copy in hand. Over time, of course, the practicalities of this practice were not sustainable - with changes and additions needing to be added to the document.

***NOTE:** On the next few pages is a detailed review of the formation process used by the Ballarat group, including how they use the Formation Resource. It is well worth reading as you think about how to use this resource with your own new candidates.*

Mercy Day celebration in Rockhampton

Denise Carroll

On Monday 13th September the Mercy Sisters and Mercy Associates were invited to celebrate Mercy Day with the St Mary’s School Community. One week is specially set aside each year to promote the spirit and charism of Catherine McAuley and to remember the enormous contribution the Mercy Sisters have made to Catholic Education at their school. Mercy Sisters have been involved for over 100 years and the last remaining presence was Sr Mary Dolores until 2020. In recent years lay people have taken charge. Since then, the Mercy Sisters and the Mercy Associates have been invited to a special lunch and Prayer Liturgy for Mercy Day. This year we were welcomed by the Principal, Deputy, Class teachers and students. Year Five, under the watchful eye of their teacher, Cindy O’Neill displayed the true spirit of Catherine by waiting on us at table and asking questions on religious life and showing us their art work on the life of Mary the Mother of Jesus. After lunch the school assembled for a special Liturgy prepared and led by Year Four on the life of Catherine McAuley. This was followed by prizes for school achievements and special announcements. The afternoon finished with a Prayer, a Blessing and the Singing of the National Anthem. An enjoyable day was had by all. The Sisters and Associates have written letters of appreciation.

**“In silence and quiet the
devout soul becomes familiar
with God.”**

Catherine McAuley
Retreat Instructions, p187



REVIEW of the FORMATION RESOURCE and PROCESS

Jo Rix and Kathy Pollard

BACKGROUND

In December 2019, the Ballarat Formation Team began using the Formation Resource with 5 prospective Associates. All five women are very committed to their Catholic faith and four of the women have been very aware of, and living, the Mercy charism (e.g. school, tertiary education, current employment). They fully appreciate that for God's mercy to be present and active in the world, it is our calling to be people who show merciful and compassionate love for others in all our interactions.

GETTING STARTED

A group of three or four Mercy Associates had previously gathered with seven women at Sr Anne McMillan's home on two occasions in October 2019, each time sharing a light meal whilst meeting and learning more about them in an informal setting. These gatherings came about because of enquiries and we called them 'pop up meetings.' We viewed the Catherine McAuley Story DVD. Of those enquiring two did not go on with formation. The other aspirants expressed the desire to know more and to undertake formation. It was discerned that five women were truly Mercy in so many ways and were more than ready to move into a formation time.

Subsequently, phone contact was made with each aspirant and as three of the aspirants worked full time, after work hours was the best time to gather. A meeting time (5.30 – 6.30pm) at a neutral place was arranged for the beginning of December 2019.

Prior to each formation session Kathy and Jo met to prepare the meeting, each taking responsibility for sections of the chapters to be discussed, deciding what questions would be considered at the meeting and which ones would be referred as 'homework' reflection, and what (if any) appendices needed to be considered.

The formation team and the five aspirants met on five occasions for usually about 1 - 1.5 hours, once in early December 2019 and from late January 2020 until mid-March 2020. Each meeting always began with prayer and reflection, and we always shared food and a beverage (Catherine's hospitality), often concluding with the Suscipe. All aspirants were given a copy of the Formation Resource. At each meeting, two chapters were read/studied (or set for 'homework'). At each session, there was a review of the previous two chapters, with any questions being clarified, prior to moving into the next chapters. (*see detailed comments below*)

Eventually, a **Commitment Ceremony** (and Re-Commitment for all Mercy Associates) was planned for Saturday 22 March 2020. However just days prior to this occurring, Victoria was plunged into lockdown due to Covid19 and the ritual and post-gathering was **postponed** indefinitely.

CONNECTIONS

During the 2020 covid-19 year, a 'phone tree' connecting all Mercy Associates was established, also including the aspirants. Designated members were assigned 3-5 other members to contact on a fortnightly to monthly basis to 'check in' with them, pass on any news relating to Mercy Associates and to focus their chat on bringing mercy and compassion to those members who might be struggling during the lockdowns.

2021 RESUMPTION OF FORMATION PROCESS

With restrictions being eased in February and early March 2021, (10 persons were allowed to gather) plans were put into place to prepare another Commitment Ceremony for the aspiring Mercy Associates. One year had passed since the earlier Commitment Ceremony was postponed. (Unfortunately, Covid19 limits on numbers at gatherings prevented a Re-Commitment Ceremony to be held concurrently.)

Each aspirant was contacted by phone. Allowing for 12 months – a time of deep reflection for them all - three aspirants were committed to continue and become Mercy Associates. Two women chose not to continue. One had become heavily committed to child-minding her professional daughter's family throughout the pandemic, while the other discerned she was seeking a more formal connection with a regular (weekly) faith group for her spirituality and knowledge to grow and be nurtured.

The important sixth meeting took place in February 2021. This meeting allowed the formation team to re-convene with the three aspirants in person and to plan and prepare for the forthcoming commitment ceremony.

REVIEW OF FORMATION PROCESS

Meeting 1 - 3 December 2019: Gathering at local café/restaurant with drinks and nibbles. Welcome and self-introductions. Each participant was issued a copy of the Formation Resource. After making an overview of the contents page, *Chapter 1* was introduced, read in sections and discussed. Chapter 2 was directed as homework.

As first-time formation animators, we found the Formation Resource to be a thorough and extremely valuable document. The introductory chapter (*Chapter 1*) was clear and engaging, allowing the aspirants to know exactly what they were undertaking. It clearly outlined who Mercy Associates are and what they are called to be/do. Further clarity was evidenced in the Vision Statement and the Vision In Practice statement outlining formation, contemplation and action. The explanation of the formation process, together with being introduced to the faith and works of Catherine McAuley, were both clear and very affirming.

Chapter 2: The aspirants read this chapter for homework and at our second meeting we reviewed it again. This chapter is really important as it explains clearly what mercy is by bringing together the Mercy of God, the Church's call to Mercy, the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy and Catholic Social Teaching. In hindsight, it is suggested that this chapter is worthy of deep and significant study in a separate meeting time. Most importantly it allowed the aspirants to understand that these teachings underpinned Catherine McAuley's and the Sisters of Mercy's commitment to bringing the teachings of Jesus in the gospels to life.

(*Clarification*: For this particular group of aspirants, both the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy and Catholic Social Teaching are familiar documents and highly relevant in their working lives)

Meetings always began with aspirants being welcomed, offered hospitality and a short time of prayer. Meetings always concluded with a hymn, most often the Suscipe.

Meeting 2 – 29 January 2020. Chapter 2 was reviewed.

Chapter 3 was read in sections and discussed. This chapter is complemented by the Catherine McAuley DVD and is perfectly situated in the resource to follow from the introduction of Catherine McAuley in Chapter 1 and the important teachings of the Catholic Church in Chapter 2, which so closely underpin Catherine McAuley's mission and ministry and the charism of Mercy. This chapter introduces the aspirants to important aspects of Catherine's story, the growth of the Mercy sisters in Ireland and around the world. *Chapter 4* was directed as homework. This chapter fleshes out all the very important aspects of Catherine's faith, wisdom and ministry, and subsequently, the charism of the Sisters of Mercy – spirituality, hospitality, charity, responding to adversity, prayer, the Eucharist.

Meeting 3 – 4 February 2020: Chapter 4 was reviewed. The discussion question on p. 21 resulted in rich sharing.

Chapter 5 was introduced, read in sections and discussed. This chapter is interesting in that it informs about the history and growth of 18 congregations of Sisters of Mercy in Australia and the 2011 foundation of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea (ISMAPNG) and explains the leadership structure of the Institute. The aspirants enjoyed naming all the places in Victoria (and some interstate) where the Sisters of Mercy had staffed schools. The Chapter Statement on p26 is practical and empowering and is closely aligned with Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si* (2015) on Care For Our Common Home. Aspirants were encouraged to reflect over the coming weeks on ways they already use their gifts and talents to serve the Mercy Mission and how they may be able to use them to do so in the future. The question: 'What in Chapter 5 surprised or was new to you?' resulted in rich discussion.

Appendix C: Aspirants were invited to read Appendix C which tells of the importance of Sr Ursula Frayne's leadership and mission in establishing congregations and schools in both Perth, WA (1846) and Melbourne, Victoria (1857) as homework.

Chapter 6: Chapters 1-5 are all forerunners for *Chapter 6* which informs the aspirants about the background to, and the establishment of, Mercy Associates. It explains the similarities and differences between being a Sister of Mercy ('vowed' woman) and being a Mercy Associate (lay person) and the differences in roles, responsibilities and structure. It also explains the eventual launch of the Mercy Associates of ISMAPNG and the formation of the Mercy Associates Leadership Group, in 2016.

During the meeting, each person present, both aspirants and formation team members, read a section of this chapter, with formation team members encouraging and answering any questions as sections were read.

Meeting 4 – 11 February 2020: *Chapter 7* was introduced, read in sections and discussed. (It was suggested that pp. 33 – 35: Snapshots of Mercy Associates Groups be read as part of their homework) After reading the first section of the chapter, the questions on p. 32 were considered and discussed. The remaining sections on Mission, Ministry, Mercy Works and Social action were read. The questions on p. 37 were also discussed. Being mindful of the conduct and responsibilities in our everyday lives of being a Mercy Associate was understood and appreciated.

Chapter 8 was read in light of what is involved in being a Mercy Associate and being open to and aware of finding rewarding and fruitful ways 'to live and share the compassion of God, revealed in the life of Jesus Christ, in Scripture and through the vision and charism of Catherine McAuley' (Vision Statement). Although the aspirants had been on a formation journey, Ch 8 explains that formation is on-going for all Mercy Associates. Other important aspects of being a Mercy Associate include prayer and contemplation, ministry and service, and community. The aspirants became aware that Mercy Associates have their own logo and motto, and that on the day of commitment, Mercy Associates receive a Mercy Associates badge. The last section 'Becoming A Mercy Associate – Next Steps' gently invites the aspirants to reflect on this formation period, to speak further with their sponsors and to pray about whether becoming a Mercy Associate is for them.

Meeting 5 – 4 March 2020: Review of Chapters 7 and 8 – questions and clarification.

For this meeting, it was decided that the aspirants would benefit from meeting other Mercy Associates. Five 'long-term' Mercy Associates were invited to join the second half of the meeting. Prior to the planned activity, the Mercy Associate guests were introduced to the aspirants. Each guest was seated around the room and all aspirants 'speed dated' with each of them for about 4 minutes. The aspirants heard about how each guest intentionally, although informally, participates in prayer and works of Mercy in their daily lives, how they live the charism of Mercy and what it means for them to be Mercy Associates.

The feedback from this activity was overwhelmingly positive.

(21 March 2020: Proposed Commitment and Re-Commitment ceremonies postponed due to covid19 lockdown)

2021 – 12 months later

Meeting 6: 9 February 2021. Preparation for Commitment Ceremony 2021. A meeting was convened with the three women seeking to undertake Commitment. At this meeting, we re-read and further discussed the Vision (p. 5) and Vision in Practice (p. 6) as well as the Code of Conduct and Responsibilities (Appendix E, p. 49). Finally, the aspirants were given a selection of optional dates for the proposed Commitment Ceremony (that also suited the Sisters, who were to be involved, and the Formation Team). The date decided upon was Saturday 20 March 2021 at 11am in the Convent Chapel, followed by a light luncheon. Due to covid19 restrictions, aspirants were aware that only 10 persons in total were allowed to attend. The three aspiring Mercy Associates were asked to prepare a commitment statement in the coming weeks which they would read silently as part of their commitment statement during the commitment ceremony.

Helpful examples and suggestions were made available.

Aspirants were reminded of forthcoming/ongoing gathering dates for Mercy Associates:

e.g. Associates dinners – 2nd Tuesday evenings of the month

Catherine's Cuppa – 3rd Friday of the month at 2pm

The meeting concluded joyfully, as so often, with the singing of the *Suscipe*.

A huge thank you to Jo and Kathy. This is an extraordinarily rich, detailed account of how they have worked with the Formation Resource. One thing that struck me was their own reflection, meeting by meeting, about how to best use the resource to make it meaningful and enriching for the candidates. This led them to be creative with the resource to suit their local people. And, they invited other Mercy Associates in their group to contribute to the process too—a fabulous thing to do.

Notwithstanding the interruptions of Covid-19, Jo and Kathy persevered and successfully formed three new Mercy Associates, who have now made their initial commitment and are part of the Ballarat group.

Remember the Formation Resource is there to make formation 'doable' - serious and reflective but not onerous and burdensome. For your group, when you next have new candidates, think about how you can use this resource to make your role fruitful and effective.

It seems that Mercy spreads its wings far and wide and I'm delighted to pass on some news of the work of one of our Mercy Associates, Sandra Atkinson. Sandra works for Dementia Support Australia, a Commonwealth funded programme, whose services are free. Sandra travels considerably around WA's north to provide these services. However she takes a lot more than the service the Government provides to the people. She loves the work and the people she serves. She takes a Mercy heart to these people and they respond to the extra love and care she adds to her work.

Jan O'Connor, Tuart Hill, Perth

Working with people with dementia in Australia's vast north west

—Sandra Atkinson, Tuart Hill, Perth

For the past eight years I have had the great privilege to work with and support people living with dementia and their families, although mainly based in WA I was lucky enough to travel interstate.

While I enjoyed the entire role my greatest joy was working in remote first nation communities. I found the people who I met to be kind, courteous and above all wanting to learn to improve the lives of the family members who had dementia.

I met the most amazing people here in Perth and in my travels to communities in NT and the Kimberly.

I met a lady who had translated the bible into her native language; so that everyone in the community could access the bible and she believed this would help maintain the language.

I was invited to a hunting trip as the lady who I was visiting was amazed that I was unable to hunt or fish and cook turtle or bake damper!! She made me a promise that when I returned, she would take me out to catch a turtle and show me how to bake damper – she was 86 and still fished and hunted.

Wherever I was I always tried to take the opportunity to visit the local art gallery, the art is so much more than pictures. It speaks about the history, culture and faith of the people which to me seemed a mixture of Christianity and Dreamtime. Their connection with the land and stewardship of the land is something very relevant today.

I was also very privileged to be taken to several 'sacred places' - the feeling of peace and spirituality in these places was incredible.

Photographs:

My accommodation in Fitzroy Crossing which overlooked the River. I was advised not to wander too far as there were crocs about. No need for an alarm, the Roo's woke me up thumping near the tent.

Swimming in a water hole outside Kununurra – when I was told that there were 'freshies' (fresh water crocodiles) in the pool I made a speedy exit much to the amusement of the local girls.

Long straight road, had to be on the lookout for cows, kangaroos and once a donkey.



Choose Joy

I sometimes forget that
I was created for joy
My mind is too busy
My heart is too heavy
Heavy for me to remember
that I have been
called to dance
the sacred dance for life
I was created to smile
to love
to be lifted up
and lift others up
O sacred one
Untangle my feet
from all that ensnares
Free my soul
That we might
Dance
and that our dancing
might be contagious.

~ **Hafiz**,

cited on Jamberoo Abbey Facebook page, 17 Aug 21

Dance every evening.

Catherine McAuley, letter to Cecelia Marmion, 15 Jan. 1841



We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia and the indigenous peoples of Papua New Guinea. We pay our respect to past, present and emerging elders. We look forward to an era when all peoples of Australia and Papua New Guinea live



in harmony with one another.

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ISMAPNG Code of Conduct

Code of Conduct Commitments

1. I commit to behaving respectfully, justly, honestly and with integrity.
2. I commit to creating a supportive, safe and caring environment.
3. I commit to safeguarding all people, particularly children and vulnerable people.
4. I commit to acting within the law, carefully, diligently and as a good steward of resources.

