



INSTITUTE OF
SISTERS of MERCY
OF AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Orientation to Mercy (self-paced) Workbook



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

This formation resource was first developed for the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea in February 2021 for use by staff new to the Institute and its ministries. On December 3, 2021, *Mercy Ministry Companions*, a ministerial public juridic person, was established, so this updated resource will also be of benefit to those new to *Mercy Ministry Companions* and its ministries.

January 2025.

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, a number of whom transferred to *Mercy Ministry Companions* (MMC) on December 3, 2021. 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 or MMC ministries and schools with a Mercy heritage.

The *Orientation to Mercy* (self-paced) is an 8-module program, with each module designed to take 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 eight 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
- Mercy Ministry Companions and its 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.

MODULE 2

Early Expansion

Watch the Introduction to Module 2 video clip [here](#).

Introduction to Module 2

News of the work that Catherine McAuley and her Sisters of Mercy were doing spread rapidly. Consequently, Catherine received many calls for assistance. She responded to these calls in her typical generous nature. In this module, we briefly look at the foundations of Sisters of Mercy which occurred in Catherine's lifetime.

Catherine McAuley was a prolific writer, and we are blessed to have access to a wealth of her writings. In this module, we explore three letters she wrote to the early Sisters.

Opening Reflection

Meeting Mercy

May you meet mercy each day:
in the light of your own heart,
at the hands of your loved ones,
in the eyes of the stranger and the needy.
And if by chance you do not at first meet it,
then search your heart for it,
listen patiently for word of it,
and it will tap you on the shoulder,
a quiet surprise,
a small gesture,
the tender look,
given and received
in the encounters of your day.

Mary Wickham RSM,
Souvenirs of Spirit: Poems & Prayers, p. 37.

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Outwards from Dublin

In the remaining 10 years of her life following the founding of the Sisters of Mercy and the first convent at Baggot Street, Catherine founded a further nine autonomous convents, two of them in England (E), and two branch houses of the Dublin community.

AUTONOMOUS CONVENTS

Tullamore	1836
Charleville	1836
Carlow	1837
Cork	1837
Limerick	1838
Bermondsey	1839 (E)
Galway	1840
Birr	1840
Birmingham	1841 (E)

BRANCH HOUSES

Kingstown	1835
Boosterstown	1838

Learn more about Catherine and her early foundations at

<https://www.mercyworld.org/catherine/chronology/>

The outreach of the Sisters of Mercy was not restricted to Ireland and England. Between 1846 and 1907, 52 autonomous foundations of Sisters of Mercy were established in Australia. We will briefly explore these in Module 5.

Sisters of Mercy are currently in 46 countries, working with an increasing number of ministry partners, associates, and volunteers. You can view the map of where the Sisters of Mercy are ministering at <https://www.mercyworld.org/about/mercy-family/>

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“... each society of Religious receives a grace particularly adapted to the duties which they are called to perform. We ought then to have great confidence in God in the discharge of all these offices of mercy, spiritual and corporal – which constitute the business of our lives ...”

Mary Sullivan RSM

The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818 – 1841, p. 462

Catherine McAuley’s Letters

Catherine McAuley was a prolific writer and kept in touch with her ever-growing network of Sisters of Mercy through letters. We are very fortunate as a great number of these letters have survived, allowing us to learn much about Catherine and the early Sisters of Mercy. We are indebted to Mercy historian, Mary C. Sullivan RSM, for her research and scholarship in making these letters accessible to the Mercy family.

Catherine’s letter to Sr Elizabeth Moore, written on 13 January 1839, is significant because it contains Catherine’s reflections on the first eight years of the new Institute. Listen to the extract from this letter on Track 2 (5 min 20 sec) at the following link

<https://www.mercyworld.org/library/your-ever-affectionate-catherine-mcauley179/>

Jot down something from Catherine’s account of the founding years of the Sisters of Mercy which resonates with your experience of looking back on your life.

NOTE: The page numbers referred to on the web page above correspond to those in the book *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818-1841* by Mary C. Sullivan.

Find out if your ministry has a copy of Catherine’s letters for your future reference.

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Read the excerpts from two of Catherine's letters on the next two pages of this booklet. Both letters are short, written in 1840 to women whom Catherine knew very well.

Frances Warde, who was the leader of the Mercy Community in Carlow at the time and was a close friend to Catherine, held many leadership roles during her life. **Mary Ann Doyle**, leader of the Mercy Community in Tullamore at the time, was one of the first Sisters of Mercy, having done her novitiate training with Catherine at Georges Hill.

The footnotes to each letter contain important information about the backdrop to each situation.

As you read the letters and the footnotes, reflect on the following questions and jot down some points as you go.

**What insights do the letters give you about:
the things which were important to Catherine?**

Catherine's approach to leadership?

Catherine's belief that, for the new Institute, mercy constituted "the business of our lives"?

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163. To Sister M. Frances Warde
Carlow

Convent, Baggot Street
March 2, 1840

My Dear Sister M. Frances

I feel exceedingly anxious about you in your present state of trial and fear for the health of your community, but please God the contagion will not spread.⁴⁰ They have had three in fever in Tullamore-- Sister Purcell & two Lay Sisters, all recovering, thank God.⁴¹ I am sure no place or convent could be better situated for recovery than yours - it has everything desirable. Poor Sister M. Francis goes on in the same hopeless way.⁴² Most melancholy are those protracted maladies - six fevers would be preferable in my opinion. They have a similar case in Cork.⁴³

I did hope that God would have spared you all these severe trials for longer time - but His Holy will be done in all things. May He never leave the choice to us. We never can be unhappy while we love and serve Him faithfully. I trust you use every prudent precaution. I am sure you do for others, but remember, well regulated charity begins at home.

May God preserve and bless you. Let me hear often until you have a favorable change.

Your ever affectionate
Mary C. McAuley

Autograph: Silver Spring

40 Irish historians of medicine do not usually cite 1840 as a year in which typhus fever was particularly prevalent in Ireland, yet Catherine McAuley's letters in February and March 1840 report cases of "typhus" or "fever" in the Carlow, Tullamore, Charleville, and Limerick communities- with a total of six sisters affected. In Carlow, the postulant Julia Redmond was still seriously ill, though recovering. Crawford notes that in Ireland in the nineteenth century "four major epidemics [involving "typhus symptoms"] occurred in 1816-19, 1826-7, 1836-7 and 1846-9." Like other medical historians she points out that in the first half of the century "typhus was generally referred to in Ireland simply as 'fever' ... 'Fever', in fact, was an omnibus term that embraced several febrile conditions, such as relapsing fever and typhoid fever, as well as typhus it was not until William Jenner published his work in 1849 that typhus, typhoid and relapsing fever were accepted as distinct diseases" (121-22). Frederick Cartwright's *Disease and History* provides a helpful historical account of these diseases and of the evolution in recognizing their bacteriological causes. **41** In Tullamore, Mary Teresa Purcell, Mary Martha Gilligan, a novice, and Elizabeth Molloy, a postulant, all had "fever" which "still continued to rage in the town and of course the poor were the victims, As the sisters were unceasing in their visits to the poor sufferers, they naturally caught the infection." Eventually, Dr. Cantwell "formally forbade the sisters to attend infectious cases, and although often called upon to revoke the prohibition, he could not be prevailed on to do so" (Tullamore Annals 32). **42** Mary Francis (Margaret) Marmion was dying at Baggot Street of consumption. The sister of Mary Cecilia Marmion, she had professed her vows only fourteen months before. She will die on March 2, 1840 (see Letters 164 and 165). **43** Mary Francis (Catherine) Mahony was dying in Cork, evidently of consumption. She was one of the first postulants to enter the Cork community and had just professed her vows on February 11, 1840 (Cork Register)

Mary Sullivan (ed.) *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818 – 1841*
(Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), pp. 255

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190. To Sister Mary Ann Doyle
Tullamore

Convent, Baggot Street
August 20, 1840

My Dear Sister M. Ann

I had a letter this day from Limerick. Sr. E²⁸ says you are about to send two Srs. to learn the education system - indeed she speaks as if you were to be one. Surely not. I suppose you will never be one of the appointed teachers, though you might oversee: Would it not be better to try to get a well qualified Monitress from the Model School until your Sisters would know the method. They sent us such a one from Limerick, quite a poor girl. I should think they could send you one. She should be paid a small salary [*sic*] out of what the board allows. I do not think they permit any one to attend the Model School in Dublin except those who are settled with them for the purpose and remain all day - paying a certain fee.²⁹

There could not be a more delightful school than they have in Limerick--if one of your Sisters went there Sister Harnett, who is exceedingly clever, would teach her in a very short time - if a Priest could be met to accompany her. I need not add that you have this house at your command if you think of Dublin.

Sr. M. Cecilia hurries me lest Sr. M. Teresa should not have her note in time to answer.³⁰

I am much better - the cough almost gone. Write to me soon - and tell me how all goes on. Sr. M. Cecilia was delighted to get a note from her old favorite. God bless you. Give my affectionate love to each and believe me always.

your attached
M. C. McAuley

Sister Angela has moved into her new Convent.³¹

Autograph: Bermondsey

28 Mary Elizabeth Moore, superior in Limerick. **29** As part of the construction of the new convent in Tullamore, new schoolrooms were provided. Evidently Mary Ann Doyle, the superior in Tullamore, now planned to have the school affiliated with the national school system, once the teachers were prepared to meet its standards. The mode of instruction Catherine McAuley recommends is the Lancastrian method wherein a team of monitresses is employed to hear the students' lessons after they have received instruction from a head teacher or have studied the material on their own. Catherine advocates drawing on the expertise of Mary Vincent Harnett in Limerick, urging Mary Ann Doyle not to burden herself with a teaching role in addition to her other duties as superior. Model Schools were established in some of the major cities of Ireland to prepare teachers and monitresses for the national system, the one in Dublin apparently requiring a prior commitment to the Dublin schools. In the next paragraph Catherine seems to suggest that a sister could also study in the school at Baggot Street for service in Tullamore. **30** Mary Cecilia Marmion, and Mary Teresa Purcell in Tullamore. **31** Mary Angela Dunne in Charleville.

Mary Sullivan (ed.) *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley 1818 – 1841*
(Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), p. 295

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Prayerful Reflection

Suscipe is the Latin word for 'receive'. It became almost synonymous with a prayer of self-sacrifice to God following St Ignatius of Loyola's prayer of the same title. The *Suscipe of Catherine McAuley* is, as the name suggests, the one that she wrote and prayed. Whilst it uses some language which we may not use today, it continues to be prayed and sung by Sisters of Mercy, their associates, staff, students and volunteers everywhere.

Suscipe of Catherine McAuley

My God, I am yours for all eternity.
Teach me to cast my whole self
into the arms of your Providence
with the most lively,
unlimited confidence
in your compassionate, tender pity.
Grant, O most merciful Redeemer,
that whatever you ordain or permit
may always be acceptable to me.
Take from my heart all painful anxiety;
suffer nothing to afflict me but sin,
nothing to delight me,
but the hope of
coming to the possession of
You my God,
in your own everlasting kingdom.
Amen.

Listen to and pray Catherine's *Suscipe* with the staff and students at the Santa Barbara Catholic School in Guam at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35tXvZ1BFo0>.

- ✚ Do you have a prayer, poem, piece of music or art or a special place to go which nourishes you in times of need or which helps you to be your best self?
- ✚ Think of ways you can be merciful to yourself.
- ✚ What small response to need could you make as you start or continue your mercy journey?

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