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LEADERS TO EXAMINE THE CORE ELEMENTS OF MERCY LEADERSHIP.

## Mercy Leadership Reflection

# Catherine McAuley & Everyday Leadership

### WHAT MADE CATHERINE MCAULEY'S LEADERSHIP SO REMARKABLE?

### WHAT CAN CATHERINE MCAULEY OFFER LEADERS IN A VERY DIFFERENT AND COMPLEX WORLD?

Catherine McAuley did not lead an international company or a high-powered board, yet her impact transcended her own lifetime leaving a leadership path for us to follow. Indeed, it is certain that Catherine did not put great emphasis on herself as a leader, she shunned any trappings of leadership, preferring to focus on the works of mercy operating out of Baggot Street and the nurturing of the young women who worked alongside of her.

**Catherine McAuley's leadership can be situated in the post hierarchical, contemplative and transformative school where leadership is aligned closely to the inner qualities of exceptional leaders. Mary Sullivan rsm describes Catherine as a nurturing leader who approached her work with energising passion, personal care, boundless compassion and tender affection for those she led. She had a sacramental understanding of the sacredness of each moment spent with another. This reflection uses Mary Sullivan's work to examine key elements of Catherine's leadership practice.**

### PRESENCE

Attending to, affirming, listening to and being with each person we encounter in our leadership journey is a profound personal blessing which can transform lives. Catherine McAuley knew this, and it was the bedrock of her leadership practice. As Sullivan rsm notes, 'this presence began with her sisters: Catherine's love for her companions was revealed to them in dozens of ordinary human ways: her shoulder-to-shoulder presence among them, her attentive care in their sickness, her affectionate letters, her laborious journeys to comfort and assist them, her persistent self-effacement for their sakes, and her grief as they lay dying' (2003. *The Spiritual Leadership of Catherine McAuley*. Conference transcript). Catherine McAuley led by example, and this example was inclusive, other-centred, friendly, welcoming and authentic.

### CONSIDER PRESENCE AS AN ELEMENT OF YOUR LEADERSHIP

- Describe a time when your presence made a difference to another.
- Who is calling out for your presence and compassion at this time?
- What are the barriers to the practice of presence in your ministry?
- How can you strengthen presence and the power of relationship building in your leadership?

### MERCY AND COMPASSION

'Catherine McAuley understood mercy to be the beating heart of her work with the vulnerable and marginalised. She frequently reminded her sisters that mercy was the recognition of Jesus in the face of every person and the imperative to do all in one's power to assist those in need. Catherine was a role model of mercy: ... being mercy, living mercy, doing mercy, acting with mercy' (Mary Sullivan rsm. 2003. *Catherine McAuley's Priorities as Leader: Her Instructions and Care for the Future*).

Catherine was also a woman of tender heart, and she was moved to compassion for those she encountered in her work; the orphans, the young girls at risk of exploitation, the desperate women and men struggling to survive, the elderly who were frequently abandoned and without hope.

### CONSIDER MERCY AND COMPASSION AS AN ELEMENT OF YOUR LEADERSHIP

- How is mercy at the heart of your leadership practice?
- Who is calling out for your mercy today?
- Describe a time when you have shown mercy to another.
- How can you strengthen the practice of mercy and compassion in your Mercy ministry?

# Catherine McAuley & Everyday Leadership continued

## EMPOWERMENT

Catherine McAuley believed that leaders enable others to lead. She was generative, collaborative and collegial in her leadership, developing trust and nurturing the gifts of others. As Mary Sullivan rsm notes: 'the future of the Sisters of Mercy rested in a particular way on the novices and postulants whom God sent. They had, therefore, to be welcomed, loved, taught, and given a true sense of belonging and inclusion; and their care could not be left entirely to others' (2003. *Catherine McAuley's Priorities as a Leader*. Conference paper extract). Catherine practised consultative management and autonomous governance. She sent her strongest sisters to start new foundations, trusting them to lead in the way of mercy. Catherine McAuley empowered others to lead and supported them in every way she could.

## CONSIDER EMPOWERMENT AS AN ELEMENT OF YOUR LEADERSHIP

- How do you empower others in your leadership role?
- Describe a time when you demonstrated collaborative and collegial approaches to leadership.
- What leadership succession strategies do you have in place?
- What aspects of mercy leadership are most precious in your experience? How can you share these?

## WISDOM

Catherine McAuley led with gospel-centred common sense. She noted that: the way to virtue and piety is shorter by example than by preaching. Catherine was flexible and creative. She was not afraid to walk new paths for mercy. She gives practical advice to her Sisters: do not fear offending anyone. Speak as your mind directs and always act with more courage when the mammon of unrighteousness is in question. Catherine promoted the virtues of humility, as Mary Sullivan rsm notes: 'She had a great dislike for noise and display in the performance of duties' (2003. *Catherine McAuley's Priorities as Leader: Her Instructions and Care for the Future*. Conference extracts). In addition, Catherine knew the value of cheerfulness and fun in the building of community; she believed in animating others through practical jokes, dancing, poetry, and gentle encouragement. She could overlook the defects of others and knew the power of kindness and compassion. Catherine also sought wise mentors to assist her in the leadership journey.

## CONSIDER WISDOM AS AN ELEMENT OF YOUR LEADERSHIP

- Catherine McAuley chose companions and mentors to assist with her leadership journey. Who are the people you look to for advice?
- How do you build community through cheerfulness and fun?
- What wisdom have you gained from working collaboratively with others?
- Describe a time when you have given practical advice to your ministry?

