

The gift of time in Mercy International Association

In the dining area of our home in Pooler, GA, we have a large, framed image of the entrance to Mercy International Centre. For many years I have wanted to serve the staff and guests of this very special place. Our good, gracious, and merciful God answered my prayers. From the moment we walked through the vibrant gleaming red doors at 64A Baggot Street, Dublin, Ireland, we felt the warmth of our new “home.”



For 6 weeks Mike and I lived, ministered, and celebrated mercy life at the first House of Mercy. What an honor and privilege it was to polish the brass fixtures identifying the address, until they gleamed as bright and shining as the sun. To us, this act of love and service was not unlike preparing the sacred vessels used at Mass.

Our horticultural skills were put to great use as we filled and watered the window boxes with beautiful flowers much like we do in preparing our worship spaces at home and church. All who pass by will know that it truly is a special place that is loved and cared for in every way.

The second day of our arrival was a big surprise! A Heritage Tea for several guests took place in the carefully preserved Callaghan Room and we were transported back in time. How did my colleagues know to have the proper attire for me to serve our guests? It was a lot of work in my long black dress with the white pinafore and matching cap, but it also was so much fun and very exciting! I can still hear the voice of John McCormack playing in the background and the clink of antique teacups as we carefully poured the steaming Barry’s Irish Tea.



Shortly after this event we began preparing for the arrival of Mercy leaders from all over the world. The atmosphere of the center was much like it is at our own house when we anticipate visiting family and friends. We take extra measures to make sure everything is just right. Mike and I spent some time tending to the lovely garden.



There was mowing and weeding and caring for the beautiful and sacred space where Catherine McAuley and 49 Sisters of Mercy are laid to rest. In this setting I was prayerfully reminded of the Corporal Work of Mercy, Bury the Dead. This quiet preparation also reminded me of Memorial Day in the States. On this day each year, we visit the National Cemetery to pray for the fallen military that are buried there. We also spend time in prayer while we tend to our son's grave. David went to be with God when he was just an infant.

Catherine's room is yet another place of deep reflection. This room is so beautifully arranged and holds precious, personal items of Catherine McAuley. We repositioned the beautiful crucifix in front of the prie-dieu where Catherine spent hours in prayer, and I replaced bed linens to reflect a natural, simplistic beauty. I was also asked to arrange beautiful yellow roses for Catherine's room and the space just outside the door. Oh my, I felt so very close to her while I carefully placed the arrangement on her desk. The scent of the Catherine McAuley roses filled the air in this very room where she completed her service to God's people. While walking across the wood floor, I was reminded of my visits with my Mum as she can no longer care for herself. I tidy her room, change her linens, and lay out her clothes for the next day. Sometimes I bring her flowers to brighten her room. It was difficult to leave Catherine's room on my last day, and it is heartbreaking to say goodbye to my mum at the end of each visit.

The dining room in our home is where our family has spent countless hours together. It is a place for our family to reflect on the events of the day. The same holds true at Mercy International Center. Each day we set the tables very carefully in the room that is just off the garden. There are beautiful notes displayed from previous guests on the windowsill. The images of Catherine that decorate the walls of the dining room recall the art projects our children and grandchildren have created over the years that have special places in our home. In this space guests may enjoy a lovely breakfast, tea and scones, or a nice lunch. Hospitality is the focus of Catherine's ministry. I can't begin to count the number of cups of tea we served to our visitors.

Every evening we would lovingly stock the coffee/tea station with everything needed for a cup of freshly brewed coffee or a pot of tea in an array of flavors. There was even a tin of biscuits (cookies) close by to enjoy, much like my grandmother would have available when my siblings and I would stop by for a visit.

The conversation and the relaxed atmosphere enhanced the love and connectedness of the Mercy family. I believe Catherine felt the same way. Catherine's words to Teresa Carton were: "Now fearing I might forget it again, will you tell the Sisters to get a good cup of tea- I think the community room would be a good place- when I am gone, to comfort one another. But God will comfort them."

We have a large family. God blessed us with 6 children, 4 spouses, and 15 grandchildren. The Mercy International Centre Reception could be compared to the Williams household. The phone is always ringing, someone is always coming or going, there are celebrations, and there are requests for prayer. Volunteering in Reception was like a typical day in the life of our family. Every day is a new day filled with the unexpected. During my time at the House of Mercy, I shared a maxim of Catherine McAuley with several guests that I often pause to reflect. "This is your life, joys and sorrow mingled, one succeeding the other." Through prayer we begin each day anew.

Meeting and caring for so many people in our Mercy family from so many different places was extraordinary. Each person shared willingly their wisdom and love, which we humbly see as our Mercy inheritance. Meeting and caring for each guest who was simply "popping in" was extraordinary as well. Listening to their stories, helping them navigate their travel plans, directing a tour of the Mercy International Centre, or sharing a cup of tea, was absolutely grand! We took the time to hear their stories and to appreciate each person that came through the vibrant, gleaming, red doors of 64A Baggot Street. We were given a tremendous gift to be able to experience firsthand how widespread the Mercy Community really is and how many different ministries are happening all over the world at the same time.

Mercy International is a very special place. There is a deep spiritual awareness that is both comforting and exciting. Each day we spent time in the chapel. In the quiet and stillness, we prayed the beautiful Suscipe, and the daily readings, and quietly hoped to celebrate Holy Mass in this chapel before we returned home.



What an honor it was for us to be invited to be the gift bearers at the Mercy International Association Members and Directors celebration of Eucharist. We can only compare our feelings to that of the Magi at seeing the star in Matthew 2:10: “They were overjoyed!”

When we first arrived, the garden was dormant, and the trees were still bare. Six weeks have passed, and the trees are full and there are flowers everywhere. The garden is now absolutely breath taking and finally we saw the first of many beautiful yellow roses, Catherine’s favorite flower, now in full bloom!



While we took one last look at the beautiful building, we were drawn to the front, left side that is truly unique and open to the passerby. The Oratory reflects Catherine’s vision to provide hospitality to those in need of prayer. People walking by will stop and enter this lovely prayer room and lay their burdens down. It comforts us to know that Mercy is extended in yet another tangible way beyond the vibrant, gleaming, red doors of the First House of Mercy.