

YOU COULD USE THIS REFLECTION WITH STAFF OR LEADERSHIP TEAMS  
TO REVIEW OR REFRESH ASPECTS OF A MINISTRY'S SPIRITUAL LIFE AND DIRECTION.

# A Reflection on Ten Gifts of Mercy Spirituality

## A GOD-CENTRED SPIRITUALITY

'We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centred in God for whom alone we go forward or stay back' (Catherine McAuley, 1840. *Letter to Mary de Sales White*).

## A GOSPEL-HEARTED SPIRITUALITY

'Let us often consider our model and master, Jesus, and ponder how he walked, served, spoke and ate... What a consolation to serve Jesus Christ... in the person of the poor, and to walk in the very same path he trod' (Catherine McAuley, *Familiar Instructions*: 36 & 16). 'The life and teachings of Jesus Christ should be as a book always open before us ... a seal whose image we are to impress on our hearts ... what Jesus said and did was said and done to give us an example, which our lives should be spent in copying' (*Retreat Instructions*: 87 & 15).

## A PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

'When Catherine gave us the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy as our focus, when she defined an approach to ministry that was as broad and wide as human need, she left us a lot of room in which to move about' (Sheila Carney rsm, 2016. *Catherine McAuley - an Integrated Life*).

'If we wish to sow the seeds of real hope in our world, I think Catherine McAuley would say: this is the way we must do it - one person at a time: one answering of the figurative doorbell, one opening of the figurative door, one embrace of the stranger, one welcoming of the other, one sharing of our bread and milk - one person at a time' (Patricia Smith rsm, 1996. *Mercy Values Today: Ever Ancient, Ever New. The MAST Journal*. Vol 3. No 1. 6-13).

## A PATIENT SPIRITUALITY

'I shall submit what seems generally requisite for a Sister of Mercy. Besides an ardent desire to be united to God and serve the poor, she must feel a particular interest for the sick and dying; otherwise the duty of visiting them would become exceedingly toilsome. She should be healthy, have a feeling, distinct, impressive manner of speaking and reading; a mild countenance expressive of sympathy and patience' (Angela Bolster rsm, 1998. *The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1827-1841*, 22).

'Chapter three of Catherine's Rule opens with a proclamation of Mercy as the principal path pointed out by Jesus to those who are desirous of following him. The language is direct and strong. For Catherine, Mercy is everything' (Mary Sullivan rsm. *Welcoming the stranger: the Kenosis of Catherine McAuley*).

## A WELCOMING SPIRITUALITY

'Hospitality is the principal characteristic of Mercy identity, spirituality, and mission. In light of the example of Catherine McAuley, Sisters and Associates broadly understand hospitality as an individual and collaborative way of being, believing, and behaving in relation to God and others in the world, in practical response to today's human needs' (Di Lisio, 2004. *A Comfortable Cup of Tea. The MAST Journal*. Vol 4. No.3).

## A REFLECTIVE SPIRITUALITY

'Catherine McAuley had an extraordinary ability to withdraw completely from everything that could be a distraction to her. In other words, she was able to create spiritual space for herself and to maintain a contemplative vision of reality' (Angela Bolster rsm, 1981. *My Song is of Mercy and Justice: The Spirituality of Catherine McAuley*, 62).

'Two practices which Catherine encouraged as a support to apostolic spirituality were the 'sacrament of the present moment' - the notion of 'what is now' is where God is for me, and the practice of silence. Today we might call it reflective living' (Mary Reynolds rsm, 2010. *Like the Compass*. [www.mercyworld.org](http://www.mercyworld.org)).

## For Reflection:

- **How does your ministry embrace these aspects of Catherine McAuley's spirituality?**
- **In what ways does balancing practical spirituality and reflective spirituality present challenges in your Mercy ministry?**

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### A RELATIONAL SPIRITUALITY

'If the love of God reigns in your heart, it will quickly show itself in the exterior. You will become sweet and attractive in manner. You will have tender esteem for everyone, beholding in them the image of God' (Teresa Purcell rsm. *Retreat Instructions of Mother Mary Catherine McAuley*. 145).

'Catherine offered the same gracious empathy to stagecoach drivers, poor boys who carried her luggage, bishops who visited Baggot Street, and to the youngest, most inexperienced postulants. If one were to ask her to choose her name for the virtue ... her one word would probably be courtesy... a genuine respect for and generous consideration of others: the kind of thorough courtesy that creates a large space for the differences between ourselves and others, and that honours their otherness and welcomes it into a deeper unity' (Mary Sullivan rsm. 305. Rule 9.1).

'Genuine hospitality ... is an outreach of love, and integral to a spirituality of mercy. It arises from a sense of deeper belonging. In welcoming the 'other' we extend belonging to him or her and draw that person into its warm circle. The mercy heart out of which hospitality flows is a heart that knows that all of life is gift and all belonging originates in the heart of God' (Madeline Duckett rsm. 2015. *Boots, Cracked Pots and a Place at the Table*. McAuley Ministries Ltd: Ballarat. 74.).

### AN EMPOWERING SPIRITUALITY

'Mother McAuley's insistence on a good education for girls - middle class as well as poor children - was a direct challenge to the injustices of her time. Her practical programmes were unheard of social services which broke the barriers of indifference, making them give way to social caring and compassion ... her congregation was the canonical expression of her vision of promoting social justice, of providing the poor with the services she believed they needed and had a right to, and of doing this on as comprehensive and as flexible scale as possible' (Angela Bolster rsm. 1981. *My Song is of Mercy and Justice: The Spirituality of Catherine McAuley*. 248).

### A CELTIC SPIRITUALITY

'Catherine McAuley was a woman of Celtic heritage - part of a worldview that encompassed land, community, ritual, prayer and concepts of divinity. The mystical tradition of her Celtic roots helped Catherine to uncover the Divine in everyday reality' (Teresa Purcell rsm. *Retreat Instructions of Mother Mary Catherine McAuley*. 42).

A Celtic spirituality honours wisdom circles celebrates relationship and connectedness and encourages the leadership of women.

### A FEMININE SPIRITUALITY

'Particularly important in the shaping of Catherine McAuley was the Quaker respect and appreciation for the talents of women. Their pioneering acknowledgement of the spiritual equality of men and women liberated Quaker women to share both religious and secular responsibilities. It seems probable that awareness that the Quaker "Women's Meetings" were charged with particular concerns for the poor of their own sex planted seeds deep in Catherine's soul, seeds which would blossom in her oft-quoted maxim: "Nothing is more productive of good to society than the careful instruction of women." Catherine's services for the Callaghans allowed her to feel her own sense of dignity and worth and led her to make a valiant effort to develop that same sense in others' (Carmel Bourke rsm. 1987. *A Woman Sings of Mercy*).

'The natural talent for leadership with which God had gifted Catherine was enhanced by her feminine qualities of mind and heart which drew young people to her ... her patience, her compassion, her lighthearted playfulness all helped to give life and character to the first community' (Mary Ignatia Nuemann rsm. *The Letters of Catherine McAuley*).

'It is for God we serve the poor not for thanks.' Catherine McAuley