

“Circles of Mercy in the Year of Mercy”

Written by Richard S. Zazycki



The Catholic Church’s jubilee Year of Mercy has special meaning for someone like me, who has been entrusted with the care and operation of a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Mercy. Many people around the world, including me, symbolically walked through the “doors of mercy” with Pope Francis after he declared 2016 a holy Year of Mercy.

For me, opening those doors symbolizes the many ways we are called to open our hearts to give and receive God’s mercy. At Circles of Mercy, the doors of mercy swing open many times each day.

In this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis invites us to journey “with a heart open to the fringes of society, bringing consolation, mercy and solidarity to people who live in precarious situations.” We are further reminded that, “What moved Jesus was nothing other than mercy, with which He read the hearts of those He encountered and responded to their deepest need.”

Trying to respond to the needs of the disenfranchised and marginalize has been our calling at Circles of Mercy for the past 18 years. This year, as we seek to deepen our own commitment to Mercy, I reflected on my work and thought that perhaps I am not so different: Our shared mission as Catholics is to spread God’s mercy. At Circles, we act in the spirit and tradition of the Sisters of Mercy as their foundress Venerable Catherine McAuley did in Dublin, Ireland.



“Clothe the naked” is the third Corporal Work of Mercy, and is one of many ways we serve the poor, sick and uneducated here at Circles of Mercy. It is my sincere belief that God and Catherine McAuley inspire me, which in turn inspires others, who volunteer daily at Circles. Together, we serve those most in need and vulnerable, namely women and women with children.



The Circles of Mercy logo reminds me of the never-ending circle of mercy and the support we offer as a group to those who enter our doors. Clients come in search of clothing, household items and other services like free income tax preparation (VITA), computer training, social service resources and referral coordination, and assistance with resume preparation and job searching. With our special focus on women and children, we provide layettes, baby clothing and supplies through our Cate’s Kids and Baby Blessings programs. We also offer supplies for back to school and have holiday programs at Christmas and Easter time.

Perhaps more importantly, we offer friendly faces, words of encouragement and sometimes a hug. As our motto states, we seek to provide “hope and hospitality” to all who enter our doors.

Unfortunately, there may be times when we fall short of our goal at being merciful in an attempt to meet someone’s expectation. As the organization’s servant leader, that’s when I stop and ask myself; “What would Catherine do?” Essentially we need to be good stewards of the resources we have, to ensure that there’s been some improvement in the individual’s situation and to do it one person at a time -- making changes as Mother McAuley taught us, “...taking small careful steps, not great strides.”

When making my way to Circles each day, in prayer to God and Catherine, my request is that the staff and volunteers are blessed to carry out our Mercy mission. As one of our volunteers said,



“That God’s words and deeds; be our words and deeds performed in His name, and together we will further His works of mercy.”

It is a true blessing to be the leader at Circles of Mercy. It is also a sincere pleasure to be a Mercy Associate. Recently, I heard a presentation by a fellow Mercy Associate Kerry Weber-Lynch, who spoke at Siena College about her book “Mercy in the City”. She ends the book speaking of *“looking forward to continuing our shared journey on the path of mercy, and to the works ahead, works for which none of us is ever quite prepared, but to which all of us are called.”*

At Circles of Mercy we are called each day to make the Works of Mercy available to the marginalized and most helpless in our community. It is a joy to be partnered with the volunteers and staff members as we carry out this mission. We are grateful for the donors and benefactors who support our efforts. My hope is that as a ministry we give more mercy to others than what we receive.

Our “Circle” of Mercy continues to grow, ever widens, is never ending and is always in need of friends.

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