

Lead with the Heart

On September 24th we celebrate Mercy Day – the anniversary of the opening of the House of Mercy on Baggot Street in Dublin in 1827 and the Feast Day of Our Lady of Mercy. Catherine has much to teach us, almost two hundred years later, about leadership with hope and faith in challenging times. Like today, Catherine's world was divided, violent, judgmental and unjust. Poverty, vulnerability and abject hopelessness existed alongside wealth and excess.

Catherine's response to the needs of her time was a two-fold commitment to trust and urgency: she wrote *... while we place all our confidence in God – we must act as if it all depended on our exertion* (Mary Sullivan. rsm. 2008). Indeed, Catherine McAuley's leadership was unusual for her time when transactional and hierarchical leadership models were the norm. Catherine led with the heart. Her leadership passion came from an unwavering faith in God and a commitment to the Gospel imperative to serve the poor. Her leadership style was personal, warm and responsive to the needs of those with whom she lived and worked. It is these personal qualities which not only assured the success of her ministry on Baggot Street, but also drew other women to help with her work.

These relational and affirming leadership qualities are even more critical for those working in Catholic ministries today. As Mary Reynolds rsm notes: *... we are faced today ... with a cultural drift toward bureaucracy, corporate modes of operation, and a confused substitution of management for leadership.* The challenge on this Mercy Day is to ask how we can be more effective people of mercy in our own world.

From a global perspective, Catherine might challenge us in 2024 to consider how we can address global interrelationships of rich and poor, *... knowing that as long as in any country the poor, the sick, the uneducated are oppressed or marginated, the light of the Gospel is dimmed, and peace and justice in the world remain elusive ideals* (Marie Gaudry. rsm. 1999).

In addition, Pope Francis continues to direct our focus toward the plight of the Earth and the natural world on which we rely for our health and well-being. The world too cries out for action and care.

Within our own ministries Catherine would no doubt ask whether the Gospel still drives our work and our mission.

- Are we nurturing not just our students, patients and clients but those who work beside us every day?
- Do we notice the need around us and those who are falling by the wayside?
- Do we put corporate agendas before people justifying our actions through notions of protecting the business?
- Do we acknowledge and affirm others in our workplaces, our boardrooms and leadership teams?
- Are we kind in our interactions with others and people who listen first?

This Mercy Day, Catherine McAuley invites us to look around our ministries and consider ways we can privilege relationship and compassion, care and love. As Julia Upton rsm notes, *Catherine ... encouraged acceptance of each sister's weakness, whether physical or spiritual, and the development of her unique talents, priding union and charity as values to be upheld above all others.*

This Mercy Day let's celebrate those who work with us and like Catherine McAuley rejoice in the gifts each person brings to our ministry.

Happy Mercy Day to all!

**“We should be as
shining lamps,
giving light to all.”**

Catherine McAuley



REFLECTION:

How does the Gospel drive the work and mission of your ministry?

We acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the lands on which our ministries exist and the Elders both past and present on whose land we walk, work and live. We support the Uluru Statement from the Heart.