

Acknowledgements:

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Mercy Global Concern

Leaven for Good
in a Hurting World

Mercy Presence at the United Nations



A family settled down for dinner at a restaurant. The waitress first took the order of the adults and then turned to the seven year old.

“What will you have?” she said.

The boy looked around the table timidly and said, “I would like to have a hot dog.”

Before the waitress could write the order, the mother interrupted. “No hot dogs,” she said. “Get him a steak with mashed potatoes and carrots.”

The waitress ignored her. “Do you want ketchup or mustard on your hot dog?” she asked the small boy.

“Ketchup.”

“Coming up in a minute,” said the waitress as she started for the kitchen.

There was a stunned silence when she left. Finally the boy looked at everyone present and said, “Know what? She thinks I am real.”

Anthony de Mello. *Heart of the Enlightened* (Fount Publications, 1997).

Dear Sisters, Associates and Friends of the Sisters of Mercy,

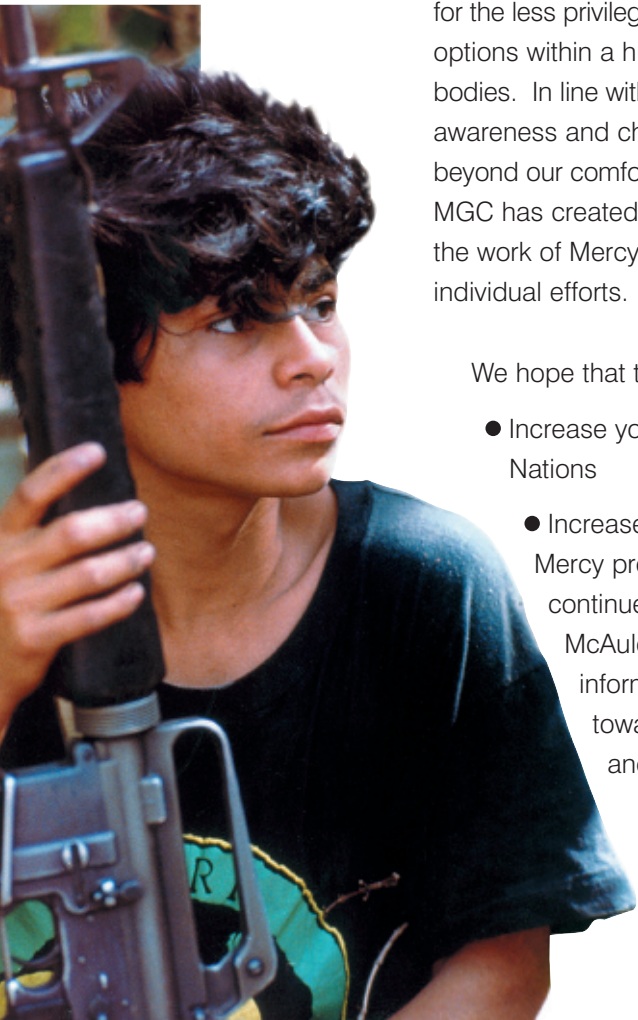
Just as the little boy in Anthony de Mello's story tells us, we all have a need to be treated as “real.” As human beings we have a God-given dignity that makes us unique, individuals who are the aim of God's love. Yet with this dignity comes the responsibility to recognize the worth of others. So, not only is dignity the manifestation of God's love, but it also lets us recognize when the intrinsic value of another human is being abused. The ability to perceive injustice demands action. Yet, when those who are abused are hidden from our sight, it is, unfortunately, often socially acceptable to forget about them.

Catherine McAuley, the foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, did not accept this ignorance and indifference. Instead she became a “leaven for good in a hurting world.” When she decided to take the poor children of Dublin and educate them in the House of Mercy, located in an upscale neighborhood of Dublin, she brought the plight of the poor to those with power and ability to change the situation. Her vision, her awareness, and her passion to respond to need wherever it is define the religious order that is now the Sisters of Mercy.

“The poor need help today, not next week.”

(Catherine McAuley)





In continuing to promote the vision of Catherine, the Sisters of Mercy established Mercy Global Concern (MGC) in 1998, in order to bring the Mercy spirit to the United Nations (UN), the one forum in the world where all nations have the potential to meet as equals. MGC is the mechanism by which all those associated with the Sisters of Mercy may interact with the UN system. At the UN, Sisters of Mercy can advocate for the less privileged and make explicit preferential options within a huge network of international bodies. In line with Catherine's vision of spreading awareness and challenging all of us to move beyond our comfort zones and make a difference, MGC has created this booklet to connect further the work of Mercy Global Concern with your individual efforts.

We hope that this educational tool will:

- Increase your awareness of the United Nations
- Increase your understanding of how the Mercy presence at the United Nations continues the vision of Catherine McAuley and helps to shape and inform global policy decisions towards a more merciful, peaceful, and equitable world.
- Inform you of the importance of advocacy on behalf of all living systems.

In the following guide, we will examine our global reality, the United Nations system, the work of the Sisters of Mercy at the UN, and propose a plan of action so that all of us can become advocates for change in the name of justice. We will examine the work of the Sisters of Mercy as examples of “good practice” in their work with trafficked human beings, HIV/AIDS, poverty eradication, and refugee assistance, as well as our efforts to live in harmony with all of creation. We have also included some questions for you to reflect on as you peruse through this guide.

We hope that you find this a useful tool, as you too become “Leaven for good in a hurting world.”

In peace,

Deirdre Mullan, RSM
Director,
Mercy Global Concern,
Representing the Sisters of Mercy worldwide
at the United Nations

Established at the initiative of and under Mercy International Association, Mercy Global Concern serves as a channel through which all those associated with the Mercy spirit, vision and mission in the tradition of Catherine McAuley can be effectively connected with the United Nations.

– Mission Statement, Mercy Global Concern

“We ought [to] have great confidence in God in the discharge of all these offices of Mercy, spiritual and corporal, which constitute the business of our lives..”

(Catherine McAuley)



Just Another Day in the World

Today is just another day for over 11,000 Sisters of Mercy worldwide. It will begin with prayer, breakfast, and maybe a commute to work. For many of those in the ministries of the Sisters of Mercy, the day will be devoted to education or health care, and being leaven for good in a hurting world. But it will be relatively comfortable, with good meals, worthwhile employment, and in an environment of respect. The day will be reasonably safe, and will end as it started with prayer. The next day will begin again, in a similar spirit.

Today is also just another day for 2 billion of the world's hurting inhabitants, who will make less than \$2 a day. It is just another day where they will wake up to extreme and chronic poverty. It is just another day where hunger is expected and clean water is unheard of. But for over 7,000 people around the world, it will not be just "another day." **For they will not have another day.**

Today will be their last, as they will die of HIV/AIDS. For another 24,000 people, it will not be just another day, as they will die of hunger. For another 6,000, today will be their last as they will die of easily preventable diseases.

Now let us move to "just another day" in the lives of 191 people, the leaders of the member states of the United Nations. These heads of state, will wake up in luxury, in safety, in prosperity, and with the power to change the world. They

will probably start the day with a national briefing, maybe a report on the situation in Iraq or an update on the AIDS epidemic in their country. They will have responsibilities and duties to their citizens; some respect this obligation more than others. Some will sign bills to empower their people with universal free education; some will work with corrupt businessmen to fatten their own pockets. The world leaders will have decisions to make, fancy business lunches to attend and an array of people to care for their needs. They will finish their day of work with perhaps another briefing before preparing for another day. But their day will end as it started: in luxury, in safety, in prosperity, and with the power to change the world.

These are the realities of life. Today there are approximately 11,000 Sisters of Mercy worldwide, who follow the vision and hope for the dissemination of the mercy, which was a mark of the life and work of Catherine McAuley. There are millions of people who live in acute poverty, who need and hope for that mercy. There are also powerful national leaders who have the ability to create laws to change the world. At the United Nations, Mercy Global Concern, working in collaboration with other non-governmental organizations (NGO's) challenge their leaders to live up to their responsibilities.

"My God, look down with pity and mercy on your afflicted poor, and grant us grace to do all that we can for their relief and comfort."

(Catherine McAuley)



**“Love of God ...
and love of
neighbor... are as
cause and
effect.”**

(Catherine McAuley)

Questions for Reflection:

- Where are the hurting people in your ministry?
- Do you think government officials are acting to change their situation? How or why not?
- How can you reach out to be leaven for good in a hurting world today? How can you challenge your government to live up to its responsibilities

An Example of a Mercy Sister in Action: Poverty Eradication Project, Guatemala

“The gospel text of John: 10; 10 ‘I came that they may have life and have it in abundance.’ has been a motivation for me. I came to the village of Chiquimula in 1973. There were 153 families with no water. The daily wage was less than a dollar a day or the equivalent in corn or beans. A horse trail was being widened to make a path to the town 22 kilometers away. The needs were many. Where to begin..... Water was the big priority. There was a river and there was a stream close by. The weekly washing was done there, and the weekly baths were taken here. During the rainy season, water was collected in buckets to save the women from going to the polluted holes to collect it. The first need was identified. The village needed water, wanted water. Liberation began. A village water committee was formed, and men, women and children worked very hard to trap the water from a natural spring 6 miles in the mountain. Six miles of pipeline were laid in 34 days. In the following month, 12 public taps were located in various sectors of the village. Little by little water was brought to the people of the village. Mercy motivated every movement of this project, with the heavy work being undertaken by the people of the village.

Other projects included:

1973-1974: Health Post, in 1975 a Basket Ball court was erected.1975-1976 an agricultural Co-op was established, and between 1975 and 1980 Community leaders were trained in catechisits. Between 1980-82 a primary school with 3 grades was replaced with a school for 6 grades. In 1990 the “Potters Wheel - programme offered courses in farming, alternative education and healthcare.”

The United Nations: the Voice of the World

The United Nations came into being to ensure that the world would never again experience a war like World War II. In San Francisco, on June 26, 1945, the United Nations was formed when representatives from 50 countries signed the UN charter, proclaiming,

“We the people of the United Nations determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small...do hereby establish...the United Nations.”

Since then, the United Nations has been a forum for international discussion aimed at creating a global consensus on a host of issues that must be dealt with beyond the national level. It also oversees a group of agencies set up to protect human rights and ensure that all citizens of the world are treated as equal.

Although the Security Council is in the news most frequently, the UN General Assembly is the main decision making body of the United Nations, creating resolutions that carry the weight of the





world's opinion. A parallel forum to the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), is the UN body that coordinates economic and social issues and sets the agenda for the UN's specialized agencies and bodies, such as the UN Development Programme and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Mercy Global Concern represents Mercy International Association as a non-governmental organization (NGO) in consultative status with ECOSOC. In this role, Mercy Global Concern can make suggestions to policy makers as the UN creates a new global consensus or reviews the implementation of a past agreement. It can also bring concerns to the international agenda and monitor these proceedings. To fulfill its mandate, the UN needs non-governmental organizations like MGC not only to create platforms for action but also to carry out its work. Governments can create resolutions, but it takes a change in the hearts and minds of people for these resolutions to make a difference. For this reason, Pope John Paul II stated,



“No organization, however, not even the United Nations, can alone solve the global problems which are constantly brought to its attention, if its concerns are not shared by all the people. It is then the privileged tasks of non-governmental organizations to help bring these concerns into the communities and the homes of the people, and to bring back...the priorities and aspirations of the people, so that all the solutions and projects which are envisaged be truly geared to the needs of the human person.”

– Statement to NGO's gathered at UN Headquarters in New York, 1979

By using the expertise and concerns of the Sisters of Mercy and our associates, MGC can make interventions at the UN. The responsibility given to NGO's associated with the United Nations is a lofty one, and changing the world opinion is no easy task. But with your help, MGC tries to meet this challenge.

Questions for Reflection:

- To what part of this mission can you contribute?
- How do you envisage making our world a place fit for all?
- How have you been an example of Mercy in Action?



An Example of Mercy in Action: Trafficking in Human Persons

The trafficking in human persons is the fastest growing trade in the world. It is estimated that over one million people are trafficked every year, and the majority of the victims are women and children. In situations where personnel are not available or do not have enough expertise, the Sisters of Mercy have worked with such groups as UNICEF which believes that the best way to protect children from trafficking is to create a protective environment for all children – one which safeguards them from exploitation and abuse before it happens. In order to do this, UNICEF works with many partners at all levels – from the grassroots to the highest political levels – to create a protective environment in which children can grow in safety and in dignity. For example, UNICEF works with governments to pass anti-trafficking legislation to punish traffickers and protect victims. UNICEF works at the community level to challenge attitudes and practices that discriminate against girls and allow them to be bought and sold as commodities. UNICEF works with NGO groups, such as the Sisters of Mercy, who give attention to the demand side of commercial sexual exploitation, which so often fuels the trade in children. Recently, UNICEF helped to launch a global Code of Conduct to prevent sexual exploitation by tourists. With the help of the Sisters of Mercy, UNICEF engages in a concerted advocacy effort to encourage wise adoption and monitoring of the tourism industry around the world.

– Pam Shifman and Deirdre Mullan RSM

Leaven for Good in a Hurting World

The Mercy International Justice Conference held in South Africa in 2001 helped to identify issues of concern for the Sisters of Mercy around the world. At the United Nations, Mercy Global Concern focuses on some of these issues, focusing on people who are on the margins of society and often excluded from the decision-making process about their lives.

Non-governmental organizations (NGO's), such as Mercy Global Concern are given access to the United Nations because they are a valuable connection between complex international agreements and ordinary people whom these agreements affect. In this regard, Mercy Global Concern tries to bring the voices of the dispossessed to the attention of the governments of the world.

The issues covered by Mercy Global Concern using the 'Lens' of WOMEN and CHILDREN are:

- The Girl-Child
- Ageing
- Poverty Eradication
- Trafficking in Women and Children
- Racism and Intolerance in all its forms.
- Living in Harmony with all of Creation
- Indigenous Peoples

At the United Nations, Mercy Global Concern tries to work in such a way that promotes and contributes to bringing about an ethical and compassionate policy-making forum in a variety of ways. In focusing its attention on Women and Children, MGC conducts research, strategizes with other NGO's, and meets with UN and government officials to discuss its concerns.

For example, in a meeting with the Kenyan ambassador, MGC was able to present concerns raised by the Sisters of Mercy in Kenya, which highlighted the plight of the "Girl-child as maid." The Kenyan ambassador, who had no prior information on this issue, quickly noted these injustices and promised to investigate the concerns raised. This situation continues to be monitored through our connection with the Commission to Eliminate Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

On another issue, MGC helped to prepare a brochure, "Empowering the Girl Child to Protect Themselves against HIV/AIDS." This brochure has been used to inform NGO's and governments of the human rights of girls, one of society's most vulnerable groups.

Questions for Reflection:

- How might your daily work fit into the mission of the United Nations or Mercy Global Concern?
- How in your ministry do you advocate for change?





An Example of Mercy in Action: Breaking the Silence about HIV/AIDS

Sister to Sister Project in Africa

HIV/AIDS is now the highest cause of death in Africa. The infection is spread primarily through heterosexual sex. Three million children are living with HIV in Africa. In 2002, 2.4 million Africans (more than the population of San Francisco and Philadelphia combined) died of AIDS. Religious traditions are both part of the remedy for the spread of AIDS and part of the problem. Attitudes and behaviors contribute to the stigmatization, powerlessness, fear, hostility, rejection and silence that spread HIV/AIDS. Central issues that cry out to be addressed are sexuality, the status of women, and the interconnection of gender, race and poverty.

The potential of women organized in religious communities has yet to be unleashed fully. African women must set their own agenda and must discern strategies and action. Communities of women religious who minister in Africa are working with Margaret Farley, RSM, and Eileen Hogan, RSM, to organize conferences that will bring these women together. The Sisters are offered a safe environment to discuss and examine their experiences of sexuality, the status of women and the intersection of faith, culture, gender and poverty as they relate to AIDS. The agenda items for the conference include: Basic facts about HIV/AIDS, social analysis of its rapid spread and its demographic and socio-economic consequences, cultural and cross-cultural issues: The Church and HIV/AIDS – responsibilities, problems, possibilities. The Ethical and moral issues regarding the prevention of HIV infection; the role of women in responding to the pandemic.

As our Sisters in Africa come together in order to listen, learn and develop strategies in response to the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, we are called not only to reflect upon their suffering but also to share our resources, and deepen our mutual bonds of faith and love in Christ.

– Eileen Hogan, RSM

Catherine's Embrace of Cultural Diversity

“If I were to summarize in the broadest terms Catherine Mc Auley’s embrace of cultural diversity and her legacy of hospitality to strangers, I think Catherine Mc Auley 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.”

Mary Sullivan, RSM “Welcoming the Stranger: The Kenosis of Catherine Mc Auley,” MAST 6, no. 3 (Summer 1996), p.17

“No work of charity can be more productive of good to society... than the careful instruction of women”

Catherine McAuley

Question for Reflection:

- How can you link with Mercy Refugee Networks wherever you live so that Catherine’s vision of welcoming the stranger continues?

An Example of Mercy in Action: Refugees in Ireland

International migration is a major and complex feature of the world scene. From the perspective of the UN, it has to be looked at from several perspectives, including the legal and human rights perspective, the demographic perspective, the economic perspective and the social perspective. In most regions of the world, the current movements of people across borders represent a problem. In the Northern Hemisphere as a whole, migrants or refugees have a negative image. Attention is focused on uncontrolled “flows” of people seeking asylum. This negative image is based on the assumption that migration has almost exclusively a South-North direction, whereas the latest estimates of the UN are that of the 175 million people currently residing in a country other than their country of origin, 40% are in developing countries. Public perceptions about refugees reflect ignorance, prejudice and fear, and that is why Mercy Refugee Network has developed to meet the growing needs of the refugees of Ireland. This group works with Local, National and EU politicians in raising issues such as Recognition of former accreditation for people with Refugee Status, Civil and Political rights, Voter Education issues on behalf of refugees. The Mercy Refugee Network is also part of the National Action Plan against Racism, which advocates freedom of religious expression, the application of Human Rights Criteria to the treatment of Refugees and Asylum Seekers and calling on the Governments of the European Union to honour their commitment to human beings who are seeking asylum.

– Anne Scully, RSM

Living in Harmony with All of Creation

All of what has been discussed takes place within the emergence of a world responding to and growing in awareness of the need to live in harmony with all living systems.

The term “globalization” is used to explain the interconnected character of political, economic and social life of the peoples of the planet.

Politically, the United Nations is evidence of the drawing together of the nations of the world into one world order. Now, as never before we have an awareness of our multi-cultural reality. Speaking at the United Nations during a seminar organized by the Religious Orders Partnership (ROP) theologian Elizabeth Johnston said: “This global awareness or global spirituality arises in response to this new interconnected planetary era. It challenges us to be in solidarity with the struggle for life with billions of economically poor people and calls us to take sides with the voiceless poor people of the world, and to work towards changes that will include them in a fairer distribution of this world's wealth. Typical of global spirituality is a commitment to the advancement of women, the majority of whom still lack goods that western women take for granted: access to education, nutrition and healthcare, the right to consent to marriage, the right to own property and the legal protection from domestic violence.

This new spirituality calls us to openness to learn from the wisdom of billions of people who are not Christian. While Christians have a unique encounter with the incarnate God in Jesus Christ, we do not have a monopoly on either truth or holiness.

At the start of this third millennium, a new awareness of the magnificence and uniqueness of planet Earth as one intertwined community of life is growing everywhere. At the same time, the present moment is marked by a strange paradox: while we grow in wonder at the earth and our belonging to it, we are at the same time engages in death-dealing actions that ravage and deplete, even wipe it out.

- Every year 20% of the earth's people in rich nations use 75% of the world's resources and produce 80% of the world's waste. An example: Chicago with 3 million people consumes as much raw material as Bangladesh with 97 million people. Such over consumption is driven by an economy, which does not factor in ecological cost.



- Simultaneously, human numbers multiply exponentially. In 1950 there were 2 billion people. In 1999, we were 6 billion people and current projections are that by 2030 there will be 10 billion people on planet earth – to translate these statistics into vivid image, another Brazil is added every year!
- The capacity of the planet to sustain life is being exhausted by human habits. Not only is our species gobbling up resources than the Earth's capacity to replenish itself, our practices are causing damage to the very systems that sustain life alone: hole in the Ozone layer, polluted air and rain, drained wetlands, denuded soil, fouled rivers.... By a conservative estimate, in the last 25 years, at least 10% of all living species have gone extinct. We are killing life itself.

Countering the sins of ecocide, biocide, genocide we take action on behalf of the natural world, with care, protection, restoration and healing, even if these go counter to powerful economic and political interests. Indeed one criterion measures our actions: Does it contribute to a sustainable earth community? The moral goal is to ensure vibrant life in community for all.”



An Example of Mercy in Action: The Oasis Project, NZ and the Four Winds Project, Australia

Mercy Sisters throughout the world are grappling with how to respond to this crisis. Examples of good practice are: The Oasis Project in New Zealand. (*Te Waipuna Puawai* Mercy Oasis Ltd) is a community development initiative grounded in a theology of right relationship – **whanaungatanga** – right relationship with god, self, others and creation. This right relationship is also reflected in a growing awareness of a new cosmology and a new story, which affirms our capacity for intimate communion with the natural world, and the universe as a 'communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects'. (Thomas Berry) The Sisters of Mercy have built a sustainable community house and the sisters offer a living model that bears witness to a healthy and sustainable ecological relationship with the earth and universe to preserve the cycles of life.

For more information visit the project at www.sistersofmercy.org.nz/auckland/offer_earth.html

In Australia, an example of good practice is the Earth Link project at Four Winds which encourages connectedness between earth and humans. It does this through education, earth-sensitive spirituality, promotion of biodiversity and sustainable living, and action for justice for the earth. For more information on this project visit the website: www.mery.org.au/orgs/earthlink

Your Turn to be Leaven

In the previous pages, we have tried to take a look at how the Sisters of Mercy connect at the United Nations. You have learned how Mercy Global Concern interacts and advocates at the highest levels of government. Maybe you have found a way that you can be involved in Mercy advocacy at the United Nation or wherever you live. There are many opportunities to be a Leaven for Good in a Hurting World.

Many of the international agreements monitored by Mercy Global Concern require updates from you on how your governments have made progress towards such agreements. For example, as part of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, all countries have been asked by the Secretary General to provide annual reports, which describe current achievements and challenges to their work. National legislation regarding many of these issues needs the support and monitoring progress.

- Are you willing to chart how your government is doing?

Governments have also been asked to provide updates to the UN on progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals, a set of goals agreed to in 2000 to improve the living

situation of the world's poor. By 2015 all United Nations Member States have pledged to:

- ✓ **Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**
- ✓ **Achieve universal primary education**
- ✓ **Promote gender equality and empower women**
- ✓ **Reduce Child mortality**
- ✓ **Improve maternal health**
- ✓ **Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**
- ✓ **Ensure environmental sustainability**
- ✓ **Develop a global partnership for development.**

Many studies have shown that these goals can be achieved if there is the political will. With your help, your government can be called to account for its progress to date.

- Are you up to the challenge?

By creating a platform similar to that of Mercy Global Concern, Mercy Sisters their Associates and Friends must continue to bring the voice of





vulnerable people to government leaders who have the power to create change. This process of advocacy is one that “Catherine” embraced as she fought ignorance and indifference in her day when she brought impoverished women and girls to an affluent neighborhood in Dublin to begin schooling.

Most international agreements to eradicate poverty, eliminate racism, ensure gender equality, etc, have local plans of action that can be implemented in your own community. These are well-designed platforms that can give you a solid basis for advocacy at the local and national levels. Contact Mercy Global Concern for more information on these plans.

Question for Reflection:

- What platform of advocacy can you become involved with to make this world a better place for all?
- How can you reach out to be a leaven for good in a hurting world today?
- How does advocacy relate to Catherine’s vision?

“Do not fear offending anyone. Speak as your mind directs and always act with ... courage.”

(Catherine McAuley)

More than 11,000 Sisters of Mercy are currently located in 44 countries including:

Argentina Australia Bahamas Belize Bolivia
 Brazil Cambodia Canada Chile Columbia
 France Germany Ghana Guatemala Guyana
 Haiti Honduras Ireland Italy Jamaica Kenya
 Lebanon Mexico Federated states of
 Micronesia Namibia New Zealand Nigeria
 Pakistan Panama Pakistan Papua New
 Guinea Peru Philippines Portugal Romania
 Samoa South Africa Timor- Leste Tonga
 Uganda United Kingdom United States
 Zambia Zimbabwe



“[The Congregation of Mercy] commenced with 2, Sister Doyle and I”.

(Catherine McAuley)

