

Sisters in Buffalo celebrate 160 years of Mercy

Standing before her Sisters *in Mercy*, Sister Margaret Mary Quinlan addressed the assembly during a Mass for the community's 160th anniversary to celebrate the sisters, associates and others who have gone before them and to carry on their legacy.

"Every one of us is called to reach back through our mercy history to listen to the first one who answered the call of the Spirit in our tradition," she said in a reflection.

She noted that Catherine McAuley calls us to live deeply the charity that has held us together from the very beginning. Quoting Catherine, she said: "We must clothe ourselves ... with mercy, compassion, kindness, humility ... and patience, so that it may truly be said, there is in us but one heart and one soul in God."

The liturgy in the chapel – just across from the Heritage Room in which are kept momentos of 16 decades of ministry and service to others – started the festive weekend. Msgr. David Lee celebrated the Mass; Jesuit Father Frederick Betti was concelebrant. The bell and voice choir provided music at the liturgy that was attended by sisters, Mercy Associates and friends of Mercy. A reception followed.



Sister Margaret Mary Quinlan offers a reflection during a liturgy of thanksgiving.

Photo by Patrick McPartland, Western NY Catholic



Sisters sing "Amen, We Affirm" during the Mass at the Mercy Center chapel.

Sister Nancy Hoff of the Transitional Coordinating Committee said the focus of the Mass was thanksgiving.

"The spirit at the liturgy was predominately gratitude, not only for the legacy of 160 years in the diocese of Buffalo and for the sisters who contributed to that legacy, but also for our lay colleagues who continue the

Mercy mission today and who are creating a new legacy,” she said.

Added Sister Mary Ellen Twist who, with Sister Meg Quinlan, planned the weekend celebrations, “I was proud to be a Sister of Mercy and deeply joyful realizing the extent of the influence of the Sisters of Mercy in Western New York.”

In her reflection, Margaret Mary linked Mercy to the call of the Gospel in which Jesus said that he is in the hungry, the stranger and those who are ill.

“The healing we offer to others is the healing we ourselves have experienced through the mercy of God. We know what it is to be in need, and through God’s grace we know the joy of offering mercy to others,” she said.

She told sisters that their experiences show them that mercy often is not of their own choosing.

“It comes to us from beyond ourselves as a grace,” she said.



Vintage photographs provide a glimpse of the past.

Quoting Scripture, she said, “The spirit of God is upon me, because God has anointed me and sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted ...”

She reflected: “Mercy also impels us to address the *causes of poverty*. It draws our attention to the *sources of illness*, like pollution of air and water and the profusion of nuclear waste. We are anointed and sent to speak the hard truth in defense of the poor and the sick.”

Near the end of the liturgy, sisters led the singing of the “Suscipe” and then turned to

the assembly of Mercy Associates, benefactors and friends blessing them with the singing of “Amen, We Affirm.”

On Feb. 11, sisters gathered in their Heritage Room for a ritual that included prayer and a sharing of memories.

Sister Diane Swanson, local leader, prayed: “May we continue the Works of Mercy in our day and in our way, strengthened by your Spirit to be Mercy for your people.”

Sisters Nancy and Joan Sherry recounted the history of the Sisters of Mercy in Buffalo and ministries in health care, education and social services.

Sisters 90 years and older were given corsages to wear and invited to share their reflections on what life was like when they entered or on a sister who influenced them. Sisters M. Eugenia Vastola, Donna Marie Paolini and M. Priscilla Faltisko shared their experiences. Sister M. Josepha Timmons was not able to attend, but wrote her reflection for the morning presentations.

Following the reflections, sisters shared in small groups about a sister who was influential. Sisters perused photo albums positioned around the room and in the hallway. A brunch followed.

Said Nancy: “I think every Sister of Mercy is proud to be part of our ongoing Mercy legacy and proud of the impact that we have had on the people of Western New York for over 160 years. We have made a lasting impact, especially in the areas of health care and education and in many other ways as well.”

