



Mercy Global Action: Creating Circles & Culture of Mercy

Tylia Barnes (Americas): 'Wonderful Circles of Mercy'

The symbolism of circles has far more value than its simple shape we learned as children. They are a wonderful reminder of the infinite love of God. My first remembrance of the power of a circle was during my childhood. Eight friends and I sat together on a porch, each from different faith traditions in a prayer circle. The circle summoned us to a quiet intentional place, where we could be fully present with and accountable to one another. Together we prayed for our neighborhood and its residents. Though we did not share the same religious beliefs, we were called to community by way of circle. We also found great peace in God's providence in our midst, reserving the center as a space for the divine. That simple time prepared me for the life I currently have in Mercy as an Associate, Emerging Leaders Fellow and employee.

Mercy Association has been a wonderful way of deepening my understanding of circular community. It began with a small sphere of sisters and associates 10 years ago. Today that circle has expanded to thousands of sisters, associates, and friends of Mercy who live around the globe. It has become an extraordinary blessing rich in number and culture.

In Lima, Peru, I joined sisters and associates from the United States, Central and South America, weaving ribbons of different fabric and colors as a form of prayer and unity. As we spun the pattern in a circle, it reminded me of the circle I sat in as a child. Instead of having different faith traditions, some of us spoke different languages. There were many things I did not understand, yet I was 100% confident that God's love was at the center. As we traveled round and round weaving in a circle, I was reminded of Christ's love which continually goes around the world.

A few years later, in Siem Reap, Cambodia, I sat in a circle with 14 women from around the globe with whom I had never met. Collectively, we shared customs, cultures and faith traditions all holding the Creator at the center. God was with us. This ritual established forever friendships and sisterhood that will last a lifetime.

As I reflect on some of the most valuable moments in my life, they took place in the posture of circular formation. The circle symbolizes unity, inclusivity, entirety, and perpetuity. The shape can be seen with the eyes, felt with the hands, while the all-encompassing enfolding of the Spirit is heartfelt. The first line of the *Suscipe* says, *"My God, I am yours for time and eternity"*. How blessed are we, that when we commit ourselves to God, we are ensured of everlasting life? Agape love encircles us in our earthly life and will in the next. It is whole, complete, and everlasting, just like a circle.

Like Catherine McAuley, let us gather in mission and prayer, inviting the fullness of the loving sphere of God awaiting an invitation to join our circles. Find your porch with friends, or circle of likeminded people knowing that the Spirit will engage in our global efforts to use our hands to do the works of mercy and our hearts to be compassion to and for our suffering world. The next time you see a circle or find yourself standing in one, think of the infinite love and grace always awaiting us.