

JULY | AUGUST 2020

Bimonthly publication for sisters, associates and companions of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

viva!mercy



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Barb Giehl, a Mercy candidate in Merion, Pennsylvania, and a registered nurse, has been ministering to her community during the COVID-19 pandemic. **Read more on page 4.**

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BIMONTHLY PUBLICATION FOR SISTERS, ASSOCIATES
AND COMPANIONS OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE SISTERS
OF MERCY OF THE AMERICAS

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THE INSTITUTE LEADERSHIP TEAM

(FROM LEFT) SISTERS ÁINE O'CONNOR, PATRICIA McDERMOTT, JUDITH FRIKKER, PATRICIA FLYNN AND ANNE MARIE MILLER.

Dear Sisters, Associates and Companions,

Many of us have become accustomed to experiencing the months of July and August as downtime—a time for vacation, retreat, visiting family or keeping a slower pace in ministry. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing “shelter-in-place” policies, we have, in many ways, already been in downtime for several months. In this issue of *¡Viva! Mercy*, you will read the reflections from our sisters and associates about their experiences of being mercy for others, receiving mercy from others and the new and surprising ways God is being revealed in the midst of the pandemic.

The stories powerfully reflect an immediate and compassionate Mercy response to this particular sign of the times. Across our Institute—whether in the Caribbean, Central or South America, Guam, the Philippines or the United States—the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy are front and center.

Care for our suffering sisters and brothers is embodied in our Mercy service, and we are grateful.

John O'Donohue, in his poem “This Is the Time to Be Slow,” invites us to appreciate the present moment, to continue with generosity of spirit and openness to another beginning for all of creation. Let us take advantage of the gift of slow time and, more importantly, give attention to the truth being revealed in the stories of Mercy and our Gospel response to the global health crisis that is COVID-19. In these July and August ordinary days, let us echo Catherine's words, “We must strive to do the ordinary things exceedingly well.”

*This is the time to be slow,
Lie low to the wall
Until the bitter weather passes.*

*Try, as best you can, not to let
The wire brush of doubt
Scrape from your heart
All sense of yourself
And your hesitant light.*

*If you remain generous,
Time will come good;
And you will find your feet
Again on fresh pastures of promise,
Where the air will be kind
And blushed with beginning.*

In Mercy,

Anne Marie Pat Judith Pat Aine

An undated photo of a large recovery ward at Baltimore City (later Baltimore Mercy) Hospital.

The Business of Our Lives:

A Historical Perspective

By Sister Mary Sullivan

Sisters of Mercy have always been moved to pray with and serve those who suffer in severe pandemics. Some say it is in our DNA, our founding grace and spirit. Catherine McAuley says simply: “These offices of mercy, spiritual and corporal ... constitute the business of our lives,” and “this proceeds ... from the grace belonging to the vocation or grace of the order.”

When Asiatic cholera struck Dublin in early 1832, Catherine and the sisters on Baggot Street volunteered to nurse in a makeshift cholera hospital set up by the board of health. Catherine stayed there most of the day, consoling the dying (for whom there was no adequate treatment) and verifying each death (to prevent any being buried alive, as the poor feared).

Clare Moore recalls: “We went early in the morning, 4 sisters who were relieved in 2 or 3 hours by 4 others and so on till 8 in the evening.” They did this for seven months, though there were only 10 of them, and they were simultaneously running a school for 200 poor girls and a night refuge for 20 homeless women.

Once, when a young woman died of cholera just after giving birth, Catherine “had such compassion on the infant that she brought it home under her shawl and put it to sleep in a little bed in her own cell.” The next day, she found a trusted wet nurse who could suckle the baby.

No sister died of cholera in Dublin in 1832. What protection from the bacillus did they have? As Clare reports, “We used ... at

first change our habits and use vinegar, we then got accustomed.” Archbishop Murray said, “we should take great nourishment, *port wine* and *mutton chops*. This was literally obeyed for a week or two when it was found to be too troublesome.”

Other epidemics occurred over the next decade—typhus in Dublin in 1837, and again in Tullamore, Carlow, Charleville, Limerick and London in 1840. Writing to Carlow, Catherine said:

I feel exceedingly anxious about you in your present state of trial and fear for the health of your community, but please God the contagion will not spread ... I did

Mary Veronica Corrigan
typhus, Dublin, 1837

Mary de Chantal McCann
typhus, Kingstown, 1837

Mary Aloysius Thorpe
typhus, Dublin, 1837

Mary Bourke (postulant)
typhus, Galway, 1840

Mary Teresa Vincent Potter
typhus, Limerick, 1840

Mary Scholastica Burroughs
typhus, Bermondsey, 1840

Mary Ursula O'Connor
typhus, Bermondsey, 1840

Mary Joseph Nugent
typhus, Newfoundland, 1847

Anne Rigney (novice)
typhus, Pittsburgh, 1848

Catherine Lawler (postulant)
typhus, Pittsburgh, 1848

Magdalen Reinbolt (novice)
typhus, Pittsburgh, 1848

Mary Xavier Tiernan
erysipelas, Pittsburgh, 1848



Sisters of Mercy assist the surgical team in this undated photo of Mercy Hospital in Hamilton, Ohio.

hope that God would have spared you ... but His Holy will be done in all things.

When Mary Teresa Vincent Potter, a young sister in Limerick with whom Catherine had exchanged poem-letters, died of typhus in March 1840, Catherine immediately wrote to Elizabeth Moore:

I did not think any event in this world could make me feel so much. I have cried heartily—and implored God to comfort you—I know He will. ... My heart is sore—not on my account ... but for you.

In November 1840, when two Bermondsey sisters died of typhus in one week, Catherine wrote:

Their trial has been great indeed. [Clare Moore says] “picture us ... going to the vault with one dear sister on Wednesday, and with another on Saturday following.” They caught this malignant fever attending a poor family—all of whom recovered. Such is the mysterious Providence of God.

In the chapter on the “Visitation of the Sick” in the Rule she composed, Catherine asks the Sisters of Mercy to reverently go forward, “as if they expected to meet their Divine Redeemer in each poor habitation” or hospital bed.

A list of Sisters of Mercy who reverently went forward and died while serving the sick during early epidemics may remind us that we are a congregation “founded on Calvary, there to serve a crucified Redeemer.”

And always, before the “mysterious Providence of God,” then and even now, kneels a woman who “heartily” grieves her sisters’ deaths, even as she thanks God for their merciful lives.

Mary Joseph Joyce
cholera, Galway, 1849

Mary Agnes Smyth
cholera, Galway, 1849

Mary Agatha O'Brien
cholera, Chicago, 1854

Mary Winifred Sprey
cholera, Liverpool, while nursing in the Crimea, 1855

Mary Elizabeth Butler
typhus, Liverpool, while nursing in the Crimea, 1856



In 1917, a medical team in the Pittsburgh Mercy Hospital emergency room tends to a badly injured man, possibly a veteran of World War I.

CONTRIBUTE to the Mercy COVID-19 Archive

Mercy Archives is collecting objects, archival materials (both digital and physical) and web content that reflect the experiences of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Community—including sisters, staff, caregivers and ministries—during the COVID-19 pandemic. Official records, including leadership activities, communications, meeting minutes and documentation of Community events and activities, will all be collected.

Personal accounts provide depth and context for what an event or era was like for the people experiencing it. To help tell the stories of the Mercy individual's experience during this unprecedented time in history, original, first-person materials such as diaries, journals, oral histories, images, recordings, personal protection equipment (masks, etc.), objects related to life under quarantine and similar materials will also be gathered.

This collection will also be a part of the Mercy International Association's digital global COVID-19 collection, which documents the ways that Mercy has been impacted and has responded across the world to COVID-19. If you wish to contribute directly to the collection, please contact the archives at archives@sistersofmercy.org or call 704.676.2721.



Sister Nieves Jiménez, who lives in Chiriquí, Panama, has been sharing resources—including food and homemade masks, which she makes at her sewing machine—with the poor in her community.



April is the cruelest month

When T.S. Eliot wrote those words, he was surely not envisioning a global pandemic that would see much of the world's population on lockdown for months in the first half of 2020, with more than 7 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 400,000 deaths as of this writing. Communities of color and the poor have been particularly decimated.

Crueler still the enforced separations, as the sick were isolated and the rest told to stay at home as the best way to protect themselves and others. "Staying at home" became the means by which most of us, the non-essential, contributed. Some, who could afford it, ordered carry-out from local restaurants, to help small businesses stay afloat; many went hungry. Others sewed masks for themselves and frontline workers left exposed by unprepared governments whose chaotic responses wasted valuable time and cost precious lives. Many, worldwide, sang and banged pots and pans on balconies and in doorways each night in support of healthcare workers. Some, in the United States, donated stimulus checks for the unemployed and undocumented, whose lives became ever more precarious. Still others hung hopeful signs in their windows and held them aloft outside retirement centers, to boost the spirits of those secluded within.

For Sisters of Mercy, who take a vow of service, the order to stay at home hit especially hard. Unused to being asked to sideline themselves as the cries of our suffering world grew louder, those who could continue their ministries did so—albeit sometimes in creative new ways—and those who could not personified the ministry of presence, also in creative new ways.

iViva! Mercy asked some of you from across the Institute how you were being and experiencing Mercy in the time of COVID-19, and where you were finding God in it all. Know that we wish we had pages enough to print the wisdom of the whole Mercy family! Instead, we share the following snapshot, and hope you find comfort, inspiration and even joy in knowing how the extraordinary women of Mercy are responding to these extraordinary times.



(Top) After watching an online tutorial, sisters at Mercy Center in Buffalo, New York, made masks for staff in the healthcare unit and others who needed them. Sister Rose Curry showed her football team spirit by using Buffalo Bills fabric to cover her face.

(Bottom) Sister Libby Fernandez and her Mercy Pedalers volunteers have temporarily had to give up their bicycles and carry supplies in vans, setting up card tables to facilitate social distancing while interacting with people experiencing homelessness.

EL DORADO, PANAMA



‘Sister, we are hungry!’

An immigrant-volunteer from Venezuela, left, and Sister Angelina Mitre fill food bags for distribution at the Centro de Orientación y Educación Familiar in Panama City, Panama, where Sister Angelina works.

I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. (Mark 8:2)
You give them something to eat. (Mark 6:37)

I first became acquainted with the immigrants when they started coming for psychological care at the center where I work.

One day, we heard that the coronavirus was knocking at our doors. The government instituted a quarantine, making the situation very difficult. For people working in the informal sector, that means there is nothing to eat; 44 percent of the population—many of them immigrants—make a living through informal work.

I awoke to the impact of COVID-19 when immigrants began sending me messages saying: “Sister, we have gone three days without eating, help us.” This struck at my core of maternal mercy. Like our founder Catalina McAuley, I felt challenged by the people’s hardship. I received a list of 234 families. I felt lost. So many people and I didn’t have enough money to offer relief. I said, Lord, what am I going to do? I cannot multiply loaves and fish like You.

We took money from the funds of the Family Education and Counseling Center, our place of ministry. It was insufficient. Where to turn? I sought help in the archdiocese, from well-known people and through our Facebook page. Fortunately, a donation came to the archdiocese. In cooperation with an organization of Nicaraguan immigrants, the bulk of the food and vouchers was distributed. The center is closed, so they came to our house: Nicaraguans, Venezuelans, Colombians and Dominicans, during the allotted time, since we are on quarantine and can only go out for two hours, three times a week. The word has spread, and I keep receiving messages asking for help.

I am still astounded by the people who have joined the effort to provide food to the hungry. I put myself in God’s hands and know that the miracle of multiplying loaves and fishes is possible, with the help of God and of people of good will.

—Sister Angelina Mitre



In Chulucanas, Perú, Sister María Elena Anto Pasache delivers food baskets to people who have few resources during the pandemic.



(Left) Rachel Schofield, class of 2020 at Mercy Academy in Louisville, Kentucky, was one of many art and design students who created uplifting Mercy artwork during the pandemic.



MERION, PENNSYLVANIA

‘I’m scared, mom. This is bad!’

When COVID-19 descended on New York City, its deadly impact became of great personal concern to me. My daughter AnneMarie, a nurse practitioner, works in an intensive care unit (ICU) at a Manhattan hospital.

Each morning when she returns to her four-room apartment, she worries that she might infect her husband and two young children, my precious grandchildren. I have been a registered nurse for 44 years and understood too well what she was telling me on the phone when she said, “I’m scared, mom. This is bad!”

I told my daughter that I wanted to help and was looking for someplace to volunteer as a nurse. She begged me not to and asked me to please just stay home! Every day I thought of Catherine McAuley and the many Sisters of Mercy who had come before me, and I knew I couldn’t just stay home.

Then came the hardest part: Telling my four adult children I would be volunteering. I became the “outside” person for my local community, making essential trips to the grocery store, pharmacy and post office. And when the call came asking me to help in the McAuley Convent Residence in Merion, I said “Yes!” The virus had made its way to Philadelphia by that time and had taken the lives of several of our sisters.

My time at McAuley has been one of gentle Mercy. No matter how hard or heartbreaking, it has been about presence—laughter, new friendships, surprises and too many tender graces to count. Sometimes my heart has felt heavy and my eyes have welled with tears for those we have lost. I am grateful for the support and prayers I have received from the Mercy Community, my friends and my family. It has been an honor and a privilege to help care for my sisters at McAuley. I know this is exactly where God means me to be. THIS is MERCY! I am blessed to be held in the merciful love of God.

—Barbara Giehl, RN, Candidate



(Top) Barb Giehl, a registered nurse who will be received as a Mercy novice in August, is a familiar sight around McAuley Convent Residence, where she provides nursing care for sisters.



(Bottom) Sister Seville Cabuhat, a certified nursing assistant at Guam Memorial Hospital, takes the temperature of an employee entering for work, a COVID-19 protocol.

Mercy Frontliners

“We must strive to do ordinary things extraordinarily well.”

These words of our Mother Foundress, Catherine McAuley, are chirping in my heart in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, as I am one of the frontliners in Mercy Community Hospital. Her words gave me strength while experiencing enhanced community quarantine and lockdown.

Sisters Aura Rudelsol Matalines, Elizabeth Ballero and I went to the hospital every day and spent most of our time there. At the start, there was a feeling of panic—fear that one or all of us would be afflicted with the virus and even fear of death. Our co-workers were scared to continue working. The doctors stopped their out-patient consultations. Everyone was afraid and giving up. In spite all of these uncertainties, we did our very best to be their inspiration, to put on happy faces and be a hope to them.

I experienced deeply how to be poor and fearful of the unknown and of the very potent virus, which stopped everyone’s movement and plans. Through all of this, I held on to God very closely, as we continued to pray unceasingly, holy hour and rosary to Blessed Mother of Mercy in the hospital with our co-workers. In the midst of this, God graced us with creativity and initiative as our way of survival. We made face masks and face shields. Kindhearted individuals, families and institutions gave their support and provided us with PPE (personal protective equipment) and food.

My deep realization with this pandemic was that no one is exempted, all are equal. It does not matter your ethnicity, race or color, poor or rich, young or old, leader or subordinate.

COVID-19 makes all people equal. This virus taught me to slow down, appreciate what we have and how quickly it can be gone. My faith was tested by fire. How strong I am in my conviction that the One I believe and trust is Jesus, who was crucified and died for me and for everyone. Our greatest hope is the resurrected Jesus the Christ.

—Sister Francisca Margate, RN



Sister Francisca Margate, left, walks with Sister Elizabeth Ballero on a happy occasion: the release of a recovered COVID patient from the hospital.



(Center) Holy Hour at Mercy Community Hospital Chapel (Philippines) is a time of respite from hospital work for Sister Elizabeth Ballero, left, and Sister Francisca Margate.

(Bottom) Sister Francisca Margate finds consolation in the sewing of face masks for use by her colleagues in the hospital where she works.

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

‘Into whatsoever houses I enter ...’

I took the Hippocratic Oath in 2001 and promised to “use treatment to help the sick according to my ability and judgment ...” and “into whatsoever houses I enter, I will enter to help the sick.”

These words have taken on a poignancy for me, a family medicine physician, in the time of COVID-19. In 2013, I began the ministry of Holy Redeemer HouseCalls, driving all over northern Philadelphia and its suburbs to provide health care to the many people who are no longer able to leave their homes to get to a medical provider’s office.

My patients range in age from 32 to 104, with the great majority of them over 85. I accompany people who have had devastating ailments such as multiple sclerosis, stroke, Parkinson’s disease and cancer, as well as those who live with advanced dementia and are in the remaining days of their long and beautiful lives.

I have the privilege of visiting in their homes and hearing stories from their lives. I have witnessed the incredible sacrifices families make to care for their loved ones at home. I become part of the family. Now, coronavirus. My biggest fear is not for myself, but that I may “do harm” by bringing the contagion to my vulnerable patients. It keeps me up at night.

But still, I go! I don my protective gear and, in the tradition of the walking nuns who went out into the community during cholera, during Spanish influenza, during HIV, I go! And bring Mercy presence to those who are already so isolated and frightened. Am I fearful? Yes! God’s grace and the solidarity with all healthcare workers, especially those working in hospitals, give me the inspiration and courage to not be paralyzed by fear.

I know that God will always provide people who answer the call to serve God’s most vulnerable ones. I am honored and humbled to stand on the shoulders of all the Sisters of Mercy who have blazed this path ahead of me. I trust in the words of Catherine: “We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about, our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God, for whom alone we go forward or stay back.”

—Sister Karen Scheer, MD



Sister Karen Scheer, a family medicine physician, treats homebound patients. She believes she is carrying on the Mercy tradition of the walking nuns.

Binding our Community Together



Throughout the pandemic and quarantine, members of the Mercy family have been reminded that although we may be socially distanced, we are spiritually connected.

As we adjusted to our new COVID-19 reality, we wrote one another texts and emails and letters; we Zoomed and FaceTimed and learned how to play games online; we cooked meals and baked cookies; we checked in on our friends and neighbors; we planted gardens, for food or for pleasure; we packed bags and boxes of food for the hungry; we looked for signs of spring and reminded ourselves that all this rain would green the Earth; we comforted the sick and the worried; we prayed for those we lost and mourned from a painful remove; we took walks and prayed some more, looking for solace and, often, finding God.

Throughout the Institute, we strengthened the bonds of community in more ways than we can count and in ways that are emerging still as the learnings continue. The faces of Mercy—and their stories—are many, and these are some of them.





Lily Ford, class of 2020 at Mercy Academy in Louisville, Kentucky, was one of many art and design students who created uplifting Mercy artwork during the pandemic.

ALAMO, TEXAS

Mercy and Our Good God in North America's Spring, 2020

Awed is how I approach this on Divine Mercy Sunday. You are 76, 82, 52, 65, 94. I turn 70 soon. With creativity, the energy of Mercy, imagination, determination and now coronavirus, there is no end to learnings of how, where, when and with whom we Mercy. No missed opportunity.

It was the last two weeks of March, the first two weeks of April, as New York became the new Italy and we listened to the government threaten to close our southern border.

Then coronavirus opened a new chapter for Oneness, shelter in place in the Rio Grande Valley.

At the Tex/Mex border, Oneness was for a time shoelaces, so many seniors in Mercy reaching into their widows' mites for immigrants.

Getting to know them virtually and thanks to MercySource.

Now virtual hospitality ... suppers, meetings, a glass of wine ... connecting with others at home in their hermitage or monastery. Staying in touch. As church is not a building, community has no walls.

Obituary calls, making sure each other gets them, gratitude to our sisters being with these mentors in their final time, and gratitude in the midst of sadness for these women and now their eternal rest.

The world again smaller, the Americas one with Australia, Ireland and England in prayer. Relationship among us growing by leaps. Mercy energy always for the most vulnerable. Amen!

—Sister Anne Connolly

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

The Haiti of Many Plagues

The first plague lasted 300 years until 1804—SLAVERY.

To be followed by the plague of GREED and POWER, a nation divided north and south, political corruption and coups for another 200 years.

Until 2004 with the OVERTHROW of Aristide.

In the 1950s to the 1980s, there was the plague of TERROR—Papa Doc and Baby Doc and the “tonton macoute” who terrorized the people.

HURRICANE plagues have ravaged the country—floods, floods and more floods and mudslides and death.

In 2010 the EARTHQUAKE plague struck, and it was over in minutes.

Followed by the CHOLERA plague that lasted for years.

Now in 2020 there is the CORONAVIRUS plague...

And yet, when I visit a woman who has not eaten—the plague of HUNGER—SHE still offers me the only chair in the house.

—Sister Karen Schneider, MD



We prayed, we cooked,

we cared for others

CHIRIQUÍ, PANAMA

You are all my neighbor

I work in the rural areas—in the mountains with the Indigenous Ngäbe-Buglé population—and cannot travel because of the quarantine. So I prepared food from our pantry and shared it with the healthcare staff at our local clinic and with those in charge of town security.

My family has experienced the pain of receiving the news that my nephew came down with COVID-19, showing mild symptoms. It was a moment of great fear and helplessness, when you feel the strength of Jesus sustaining you, when you experience the love of the merciful God who helps in such long moments of waiting, when you hope that the person will continue to get better. When that hope also brings you to say to God, “His will be done” if things get worse.

I want to continue being a woman of Mercy who does not question God and who asks God to be good to everyone. COVID-19 has threatened us all. We will get out of this crisis if we all become aware that we are responsible for taking care of our neighbors.

—Sister Edith González



Because the pandemic prevented her from going to her usual ministry, Sister Edith González cooked meals for the staff of the local health clinic and for town security officers in Chiriquí, Panama.



Sister Mary Fanning, who lives in Baltimore with Sister Fran Demarco, holds a cake intended for a sister who had recently finished chemotherapy. The cake was left outside her door rather than risk her health by joining the celebration during the pandemic.

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Listening for the invitation

I serve at Mercy Medical Center, as director of Mission Services and as minister to employees. After spending four weeks “sheltering in place” at home, I learned that making face masks and preparing meals for others left a void that needed some attention. My search for an alternative to regular mission walks at Mercy led me to experiment with “mission calls” to each of our 25 nurse leaders. With each check-in call, I vicariously experienced their fears and fatigue, the risks and sacrifices demanded of them during this unprecedented time of COVID-19. I sensed their gratitude and surprise for taking time out of my “busy” schedule to call rather than email my grateful message of support and prayers from the Sisters of Mercy.

There are blessings to being sheltered-in-place and enjoying longer periods of prayer and reflection. One is to hear again the invitation to pay attention to the invaluable and often mysterious ways God uses us to bring hope to others in seemingly small ways.

—Sister Fran DeMarco

Sisters in Guyana bought food and packaged it in bags for their elderly neighbors, including at least one who was afraid to come outside. Mercy Associate Marietta Campbell sent the provisions up to her in a basket.

PORTLAND, MAINE

My heart is in Haiti

Hunger and poverty have not taken a break—not here in the United States, and especially not in Haiti, already poor and forgotten by so many.

In quarantine, my time has been spent at my computer—my window and door to the world outside. Thanks to the many donors who hold the mission of Mercy Focus on Haiti in their hearts, we have continued to feed children each morning with an egg and provide them a meal at noon, even though school is shut down. The elderly residents at Maison Bon Samaritan also have two meals each day and health care. The people in Haiti have been entrusted to our care and are still cared for by our partners in Haiti, the Religious of Jesus and Mary sisters.

I have found tremendous gratitude in my prayer, that through technology, I can still make a difference. For this I will be forever grateful. I cannot be in Haiti now. But my heart and my spirit can be present there, until I can return.

—Sister Dale Jarvis

WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA

Keeping sight of the God within

Recently, I received a welcomed jolt to my spirits. Over a period of two weeks, I hand-wrote notes to members of the pastoral care team and to the sick and shut-in of my parish. For me it was a small task. However, what I received from some of them in return was greater and unexpected. I experienced a rush of joy as some responded: “Thank you for being a spiritual cheerleader during this time!” “Thank you for being a sign of hope!” “Your message arrived right on time!”

In my desire to let others know I was thinking about them, I was reminded that I had lost sight of the God within. I had given the hope that I had failed to acknowledge for myself. The impact of that moment was incredible!

Today, the present has become a soul-searching journey of faith, hope and charity; a sacred time to be vigilant, excited about possibilities and amazed by the many places and people where God dwells.

—Sister Larretta Rivera-Williams



GEORGETOWN, GUYANA

The essentials, and prayer

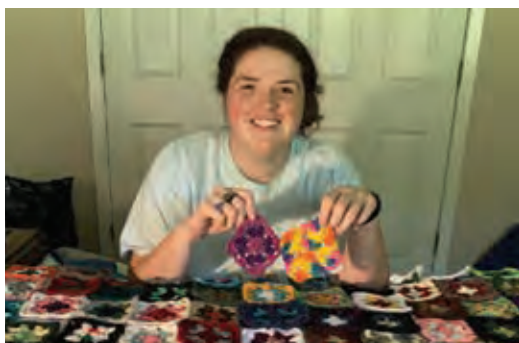
Since we cannot go out to our ministries, we discussed how we could help the poor, and we pooled our money. We purchased food items, filled bags, put on masks and distributed the bags to the elderly, who were unable to or afraid to go shopping. Some were our Mercy Associates. They were very grateful. One creative lady let down a basket on a long rope from her window. We placed a bag of essentials into the basket, and she pulled it up. She laughed and thanked us!

What can Mercy do to relieve the suffering world? We are praying constantly the pope's prayer for protection and healing of the virus. I pray especially for the thousands dying that they ask for forgiveness and prepare for heaven. I repeat the mantra, “God forgive them, God heal them, God save them, God protect us, God heal us, God save us.”

—Sister Catherine Marie Glynn-Williams

The pandemic brought out our creativity, in small and large

ACTS OF HOPE in the future



Sister Kelly Williams' students all received "granny squares" she crocheted for them. She prayed over each one.

BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI

Sharing a piece of myself

I teach eighth- and ninth-grade theology, and as our school has gone digital, I've made videos every day of reflections for my students. Doing this has been a really great experience. My eighth-graders made memes about Catholic social teaching, and we're working on artistic representations of the Beatitudes.

I'm a regular crocheter, and I have been making each of my students a "granny square" for the end of the year. As I make each one, I pray for whichever student will receive it. It's a way I can share a piece of myself with all of them.

—Sister Kelly Williams

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

To God's amusement, they grew!

I received two packs of seeds last year, a parting present from a stay at Mercy by the Sea Retreat Center. They'd been sitting next to my homemade planter—I had avoided planting them because I lack a green thumb.

Two weeks into stay-at-home, I said a prayer and sprinkled the seeds into my planter and a reused egg carton. To my surprise, and God's amusement, they grew! Now, I'm wondering: What does one do with pepper and basil seedlings in a walk-up apartment in Philadelphia?

This time of pandemic has been much like my planting experience: dread of the unknown, gratitude for new growth and warm sun, and bewilderment at what the future holds. But in these peaks and valleys, I am both inspired by and grateful for my Mercy community.

—Elizabeth MacNeal
Mercy Associate

CINCINNATI, OHIO

It feels like an act of hope in the future

We have been making masks and reusable bags for the St. Vincent de Paul food pantry, as well as masks for ARISE, in Texas, and extra protective gowns for our infirmary, just in case they should need them.

In addition, Mercy Montessori School has a small farm where the kids usually do a lot of the work. Since school is out, I've been helping with the chickens, the bees and the planting. I love feeling connected to the Earth in a way I haven't been before, and to plant and tend feels like an act of hope in the future at a time when I am often anxious and uncertain.

—Sister Colleen O'Toole



Growing seedlings has helped Mercy Associate Elizabeth MacNeal get through being quarantined at home in Philadelphia, where she works for Mercy Volunteer Corps.



Kendyl Bingham, class of 2020 at Mercy Academy in Louisville, Kentucky, was one of many art and design students who created uplifting Mercy artwork during the pandemic.

MARIAN WOODS, HARTSDALE, NEW YORK

The enjoyable tasks of a sort-of gardener

Out of an abundance of caution, we were all invited to make masks, first for our staff, then for ourselves and now for anyone who needs them. Sewing wasn't a skill everyone had perfected, but cutting, pinning, ironing and finishing made it a productive and rather enjoyable task—in small doses.

A few of us are gardeners of sorts, and wheedling tiny seeds into healthy tomato, squash and herb plantings is almost exciting, especially in anticipation of produce shortages this summer.

And writing. Writing in a time of pandemic keeps me sane and safely occupied.

—Sister Pat Kenny

SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

Praying with each stitch

It felt as if they were mocking me, the piles of fabric that had sat untouched for months on my table. I bought them to make a wedding quilt for friends from Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo, gorgeous Native prints that my friends loved. But life got in the way and the quilt went unmade.

Instead, I turned the cloth into masks for the Santa Fe Indian Center just down the road. Then I sewed more for the Pueblo Action Alliance in Albuquerque to distribute to Pueblo communities throughout New Mexico. A Diné friend was making masks to send home to the Navajo Nation, so I made more for her.

I prayed into each mask and honored the friends for whom the fabric was originally purchased so that their love would be added. And I am still sewing.

—Melissa Mendonca
Mercy Associate

Where have you found God in this experience?

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

The ministry of presence

It's so important to connect with the homeless through Mercy Pedalers, especially now. They don't have the opportunity to watch TV or access to newspapers, so when they see us, it's good we can share what's going on, how to stay safe, where to get food and showers. They're anxious and concerned about their health. It's important to do social distancing but also to talk about how they're doing, to let them know we're connected, that we'll try to come tomorrow and keep that sense of anxiety down so they don't feel left out. They really miss the hot coffee and the one-on-one.

I'm wondering, because I'm a hugger—that one-on-one contact is so important to the homeless, because they're deprived of that social contact—how will that change? Will I be able to go back to that? Is there another way of connecting without hugging? That's very serious. It's easy to adjust for the time being, but I don't want to do it permanently. I like that human connection, so I pray we'll be able to do that and not worry we'll catch something. It really has affected me with this ministry, because Mercy Pedalers is about the ministry of presence. It's about entering someone's space and feeling safe, and the closer you get in that space, the closer the relationship is. It really is about being present to the moment and allowing God to work internally with you that gives a sense of hope. That has helped me not get too anxious, but to ask God, where are you in the midst of this? I find it hope filled.

—Sister Libby Fernandez



Lori Kelly, a Mercy Pedalers volunteer in Sacramento, California, dons a Wonder Woman mask to distribute food to people experiencing homelessness.

Even during quarantine, there is still church. Sister Terry Kimingiri distributes communion to children at the St. John Bosco Boys' Home in Georgetown, Guyana, during Mass.



Sister Roxana Contreras, RN, is still able to provide medication to the patients of the rural mental health clinic where she works. Here, she interacts with them through her apartment window in Chulucanas, Perú.

CHULUCANAS, PERÚ

The poor, God's dearest friends

Our town was especially hard hit by COVID-19. Sister Maria Elena Anto Pasache responded by distributing food to needy families and, with a special fund, providing electronic tablets for students in Centro Betania, an occupational training school. To receive the computers made the students' faces beam.

Sister Roxana Contreras, a highly qualified registered nurse (RN), has made medicines available at very low cost to clients in her rural mental health project. She has also tried her hand at bread making. Initially, it was a disaster—even dipping it into coffee, it was too hard to eat!—but finally with delicious results.

I, in my ministry of accompaniment (spiritual direction), listen to stories of sickness and loss that speak of how God takes into God's heart the poor, God's dearest friends.

The solidarity and gratitude of our people can only show God's face of mercy.

—Sister Marielena McKenna



GEORGETOWN, GUYANA

Global pandemic, global contemplation

For many of us, this may be the first time we have felt so little control over our own destiny and the destiny of those we love. Hope comes in knowing that God suffers with us through this pandemic, for she is a God of mercy, mystery and wisdom.

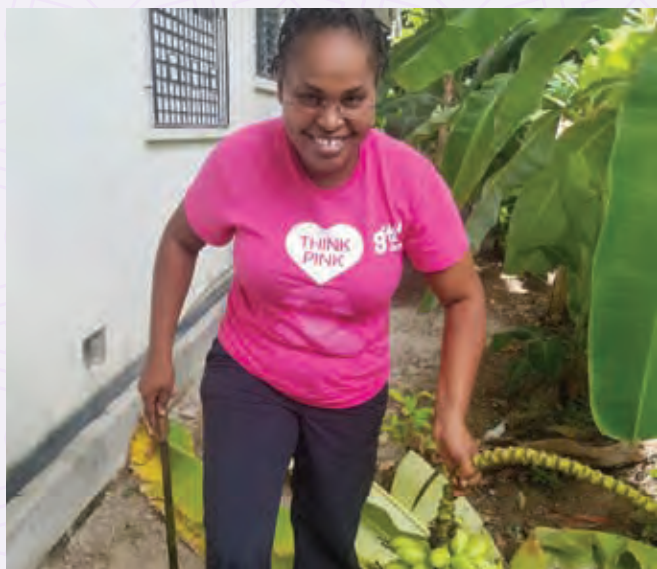
Prayer life has changed, as we are more conscious of the vulnerability that comes with the disease. We feel separation from loved ones and the loneliness that accompanies them until they recover or are united with God in eternity.

We feel the invitation to trust the new spirit leading us as we are called to respond to our suffering world at this time: Giving food baskets to the elderly or offering alternative transport to our staff rather than public transport. We have received and shared the merciful presence of God.

Moments of laughter: A staff member requests a day off because someone has sneezed on her at the bus stop. When someone sneezes and one or two sisters say “corona” instead of “bless you,” it lightens our conversations.

A global pandemic can only be countered by a response that is grounded in global contemplation. Among the fruits of our global contemplation are wisdom, energy, new directions, new language, courage and new hope.

—Sister Terry Kimingiri



CHIRIQUÍ, PANAMA

All these people live Mercy

To be a Sister of Mercy in these times is being present with the people on the deserted streets, even if you have no words, but they know you are there, and that is what we have shared in this quarantine. It is enough for us to say that we are sisters and brothers, no matter who you are.

Mercifully offering and sharing our resources with those who have the least, taking care of other men and women, protecting them by making masks, providing food and snacks for all the healthcare staff, the “bugoday” (regional police) and others who are giving their lives, risking their health 24 hours a day, every day, just to take care of our health. All these people live Mercy.

And God is present in every moment that I have experienced, listening to the voice of a mother who cannot be with her son who has COVID-19, saying to me, “Sister, I trust in the infinite mercy of God towards all those who are in the room with my son.”

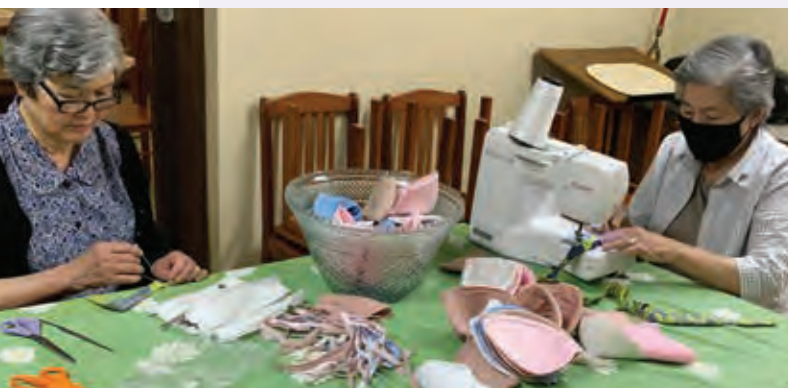
Then there is a knock at the door. “Sister, do you need anything I can help you with?” It’s the laborer, a driver, someone who delivers produce. How can I not recognize the presence of God in each of them? I feel that we are being more mutually supportive, more united, more like brothers, sisters, children of the only one God.

—Sister Nieves Jiménez

At the Meadowbrook Convent, in Guyana, Sister Terry Kimingiri harvests plantain. Gardening has been one of her joys during the pandemic.



Our Ministries Go On



At the Mercy Heights Convent in Tamuning, Guam, Sisters Mary Agnes Palacios, left, and Brigid Perez got creative as they made masks for caregivers, using padded bras.

TAMUNING, GUAM

The strangeness of our COVID-19 reality

The effect of the virus has tested the community in its care of others. Sisters on the frontlines of hospital and school ministries were wracked with the stress of keeping COVID-free or keeping their schools afloat. Our sister working in the operating room (OR) shared her sorrow of distancing and quarantining for fear of infecting fragile members of the community. The sisters in education shared the hardship of having to furlough staff and manage distance learning, the new normal in education at this time.

Three sisters received grant money from the GHR Foundation to be distributed to those severely affected by the pandemic. Ministry to the homeless has intensified. The Guam Community and Mercy Associates sponsored lunches for the OR department of Guam Memorial Hospital in support of and gratitude to the medical staff. Mask-making for our caregivers was a project at Mercy Heights Convent.

The dying and death of a sister during this pandemic brought out the strangeness of our COVID-19 reality. Funeral services were scaled down. No more than 10 could attend the burial. Thankfully, a creative solution was developed in which sisters, family and associates could participate via BlueJeans. “Community in prayer” during final preparations for burial (cremation) and our sister’s funeral engaged all the sisters on Guam in their respective convents.

This experience has indeed brought us back to a place of solitude, opening the door of Mercy to the heart of compassion, kindness and care. In the softness of these days, we can now hear the birds sing.

—Sister Marian Arroyo

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

Being attentive to the Spirit

I’m an ICU chaplain at St. Francis, a trauma 1 hospital. The past two months have been very busy, with high emotion, and many deaths each day. It is heartbreaking because people just want to see their family members; in response, I put my phone in a baggie and give it to the nurse to allow some visual interaction between patient and family.

It is important for me to be in touch with God and the movement of God’s Spirit. A question I ask myself is, “Am I aligned with where God wants me to be today?” My rounding is to go door to door and pause to pray for each patient and his or her family. In my office, I will call family members to let them know I am keeping them in prayer.

I stopped at one patient’s door. Later, near the end of the day, a small part of me said, you can make this call tomorrow; but I called and got the man’s son. He said they had just returned from burying their mother, who died of COVID-19 at this hospital. The patient had not been able to go to his wife’s funeral, as he is now fighting the virus. I asked if there was anything significant that I could help facilitate for them. The son mentioned that at 7 o’clock, they would pray the Kaddish and wondered about a candle. I brought a battery-powered tea light and arranged with the nurse that she would light it when the family was gathering for prayer that night.

It is a difficult story. I felt that I cooperated with God’s grace to try to bring some comfort to this family.

—Sister Nancy Donovan



Sister Nancy Donovan, center, an ICU chaplain, has been providing communion to three ICU nurses before they begin their shifts caring for COVID-19 patients.



After the April death of one of the Jamaica Community's eldest members—Sister Mary Paschal Figueroa, who was 101—Sisters Winnie Njuguna, left, and Susan Frazer visit her grave.

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

God and mercy and hope will abound!

During the pandemic, when I hear “stay home,” my heart breaks for my companions who remain street homeless or who stay in shelters that are open only at night. Their experience is “stay out,” magnified by the closing of a myriad of services. Even at the Hub of Hope in Philadelphia, we have had to scale back.

But a small group of men and women gather in what’s called “The Living Room.” They are amazingly grateful and have renamed it “Our Sanctuary.” When I look back to these challenging days, it is the faces of these men and women, whom I affectionately call “My Corona Companions,” that will be embedded in my heart.

Even though the lightness and joy formerly felt in this program are missing, gratitude, respect, resiliency and sense of community have all emerged. One humbling experience after another! These are the faces of Mercy. These are God’s blessed poor. These are the men and women who teach me every day. Yes, how grateful I am for my Corona Companions!

Prior to COVID-19, many other formerly homeless persons frequented The Living Room. We had formed close-knit bonds, and most days included a celebration of some part of life. These members have been asked to “stay home.” When we return to some type of normalcy, will the former members return? What will The Living Room look like? What will Our Sanctuary feel like? What will the new experience be? One thing for sure ... God and mercy and hope will abound!

—Sister Eileen Sizer

KINGSTON, JAMAICA

All is not lost

I am calling and texting my students from Alpha Academy to find out how they’re doing, because I know that some of them come from very poor areas. We have tried to get food packages for them—they have nothing to eat, most of them.

There is a big scare about food security, because a lot of our food comes from the United States. I like farming, so I have increased my lot for the garden, and I’ve also been able to supply food to our older sisters. I am taking care of what is there so we have food, we don’t go hungry.

One of the things I’ve been fearing is when we have different lockdowns. One place with many people was on lockdown for two weeks. Then they started coming to me for food packages. Most people there have the virus, and I don’t know who is sick. I have to say to myself, be compassionate, because in those two weeks, they are suffering. It was pure stress. I’m like a parent who wants to take care of their children.

Thank God I have that garden. Every morning I see hope, I see life coming up, and I say, oh, thank God. All is not lost.

—Sister Winnie Njuguna



Elevating the Climate Crisis to Pandemic Proportions

Watching the world flip upside down with the steady spread of the coronavirus has been disconcerting for everyone. Life has quickly turned into a one-lane existence, filled with lots of time at home, outside if you are lucky, and the grocery store if you are cautious. In a span of days, weeks and now months, the world has rallied to combat this crisis. Humanity collectively accepted the reality of quarantine, put the right people on the front lines and began to “flatten the curve.” We have adapted and pushed forward resolutely, united in this global fight.

As a young person, my life has changed drastically, as well. My senior year of high school was cut short, my memories to be made now turned to wisps of imagination: no graduation, no proper goodbyes ever spoken. But my peers and I enthusiastically sacrificed for the greater good, putting our lives on hold like everyone else to save others, particularly those most at risk.

During a Zoom call with friends, the topic of climate change came up, how we missed our planned Earth Day rally and how the coronavirus was affecting the climate and planet.

The more we talked, the more I thought about the irony of the situation. We young people were acting for older generations because of the coronavirus, when they have never taken up the same mantle against the climate crisis, something that continues to affect everyone on the planet. So, why the disconnect? Why has the world so rapidly and seemingly with such ease agreed on the coronavirus emergency when the climate crisis has been rapping at our door for decades, demanding a response?

Psychologists say it is difficult for the human mind to comprehend a situation as overwhelming as the climate crisis. Its magnitude and wide-reaching effects cause the human brain to downplay a sense of urgency, as it simply cannot grasp it. The droughts, floods, hurricanes, wildfires and other intensified natural disasters that result from climate change are not often immediately connected to the “idea” of climate change in the mind, thus delaying our response time.

And yet, as young people, my generation looks to the oncoming crisis with anxiety, while older generations don’t seem to be as forward-thinking—even as climate change impacts their daily lives.

The sense of urgency that the coronavirus elicits is just not found with the climate crisis. Coronavirus is traceable, touchable and felt upon impact. Its effects are likewise far-reaching and undeniable. As pressing as climate change is, it simply does



Young people around the world participated in the 2019 Global Climate Strike.

not hold the same weight, particularly for those in privileged or wealthy positions who will never feel its direct effects. The reality of the two crises, however, is intrinsically tied.

The lessons from this global response can and must also be applied to the climate crisis. Diseases similar to coronavirus are inherently connected to rising global temperatures, deforestation, urbanization and population growth, and the health of all people will be impacted by the effects of climate change. As young people, we are asking older generations to step up as we are now stepping up for you and act for the wellbeing of our shared planet. To fight coronavirus, we must all be as healthy as possible. To fight the climate crisis, our Earth must be similarly healthy, and its inhabitants prepared to cultivate a united front against environmental injustice and exploitation.

— Cate Kelly

Cate Kelly worked as the Sisters of Mercy justice intern in Omaha, Nebraska, and recently graduated from Mercy High School.



Re-envisioning Vocation Work for a Virtual Era

It's been said that vocation ministers are some of the folks most frequently “on the road.” You can often find a vocation minister “trip-ping about,” as Catherine McAuley wrote, working with high school or college students, engaging volunteers and other young adults on service experiences, being part of retreat teams and offering discernment days in various locations. All of that changed as a result of the COVID-19 “stay-at-home” orders. Vocation ministry is still on the road, but with more of a virtual dimension now, too.

We've continued to take as a guide the same priorities as before, most notably wanting to develop and deepen relationships with young adults. The liaison roles vocation ministers developed earlier in the year have helped us stay connected and attentive to opportunities and unique needs expressed by our Mercy partners: Mercy Education System of the Americas (MESA), Conference for Mercy Higher Education (CMHE) and Mercy Volunteer Corps.

In this time when we can't simply invite a discernor over to someone's house for dinner, vocation ministers have organized online faith sharing,

prayer and conversation with others in the Mercy family. Venues are being re-thought. Some vocation ministers partnered with colleges and universities to serve as online spiritual guides for a Lenten Busy Person Retreat, where a young adult met with a spiritual guide to grow in awareness of God's presence and direction in her/his life. Others offered Easter faith sharing via Google Hangouts, Zoom and other platforms.

Vocation ministers also keep in touch with those with whom we've had contact by providing resources around Lent, the Mercy Earth Challenge, pandemic prayers and reflections, and the Critical Concerns. Some sent out reflection questions, and the shared responses deepened the conversation and connection.

Vocation ministers support the Nuns & Nones (N&N) movement and its efforts to create communities of care and contemplation that incite courageous action. This group has also had to re-envision ways of nurturing and forming community. One vocation minister serves on the N&N advisory council and has had the opportunity to be part of a multi-day strategic planning online retreat with the core team.

Vocation ministry serves both to build awareness of religious life as a viable option to a broad audience—including those who may have little contact with sisters—and to strengthen the existing relationships of those who are already familiar with sisters.

Virtually, we are partnering with newer members to share stories of their lives and choices to become a Sister of Mercy.

A Facebook Live series titled *Sister Talk* began in May. Through targeted invitation, we hope to reach the growing number of Catholic young adults living in the Southwest and western parts of the United States. Thanks to Sisters Colleen O'Toole, Kelly Williams, Amanda Carrier, Maria Teresa Muhuhu, Danielle Gagnon and Margie Tapia for being willing to share your stories. Seeing and hearing your stories gives confidence to others that vowed religious life is a viable option. *Sister Talk* may serve as an initial point of contact for a new relationship that can be developed over time.

The Institute vocation ministers also sponsored a Zoom evening of reflection geared toward Mercy college and university students and Mercy volunteers and alumni. *Pentecost Amidst the Pandemic*, led by Sister Marie Michele Donnelly, was held on May 31. This online forum was an opportunity for those steeped in a Mercy tradition to meet others from diverse locations who share the same values.

The Institute New Membership Team planned a video update for members during the Spring 2020 gatherings. Unfortunately, many were canceled because of the pandemic. However, it is clear that we are all in this together! We all need to be in relationship with young adults virtually or in person wherever we are. We are all animators by virtue of our Mercy witness.

—Sisters Mary Kay Dobrovolny and Michele Schroeck, on behalf of the Institute New Membership Vocation Ministers





Maggie Stickler, class of 2020 at Mercy Academy in Louisville, Kentucky, was one of many art and design students who created uplifting Mercy artwork during the pandemic.



Corrections

Hibiscus by Sister Carol Kell, above, was incorrectly attributed to another artist in the May/June 2020 issue.

On page 15 of the May/June 2020 issue, we incorrectly identified the sister who was arrested for planting tulip bulbs on the grounds of a fracked gas power plant in Rhode Island. Sister Mary Pendergast was arrested.

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