

## **The Pathway to Becoming a Sister of Mercy**

The pathway to becoming a vowed Religious Sister of Mercy leads a woman on a journey of continual discernment and prayer. Throughout the journey, Sisters of Mercy will companion you in your discernment and in your exploration of life as a Sister of Mercy.

### **The Attraction: A Time of Enquiry**

During this phase you will talk with a member of the Vocation Team or another Sister of Mercy about your desire to follow Jesus as a religious woman. From the Sisters you will learn about the Mercy Congregation and how we live out God's mission.

### **Exploring the Attraction: A Time of Accompaniment**

When ready to engage seriously with the Sisters of Mercy, you will begin a phase of accompaniment. Here, a designated Sister will companion you and meet with you for regular times of prayer and discernment to enable you to get to know more about the Congregation and to meet other Sisters. This may take up to 12 months.

### **Experiencing the Attraction: A Time to Come and See**

During this time you are invited to deepen your relationship with the Sisters of Mercy by living and participating in community life. You will continue in your regular employment or study while you, and the community, mutually discern your call to Religious Life. You make a formal agreement with the Congregation regarding mutual expectations during this time. This experience lasts approximately 12 months.

### **Choosing the Attraction: New Membership Time of Novitiate**

The Novitiate marks a formal entry into the Sisters of Mercy. During this time (typically two years) you will deepen your understanding of the call to Religious Life. It is a time for you to grow in personal holiness and to develop your spirituality, your belonging in Mercy, your living of community life and your participation in mission. There will be courses of formal study that will help you develop in these areas. At the end of this time, through communal and personal discernment you will request an invitation to profess your first vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and service of the poor as a Sister of Mercy.

### **Deepening the Attraction: Newly Vowed Membership**

As a new religious sister, under the guidance of a formation director, you will have opportunities for ongoing formation to develop your understanding of the commitment you have made. You will take increasing responsibility for your spiritual and professional development. It is a time to discern with the Congregation your readiness to make a permanent commitment as a Sister of Mercy. The period from profession of first vows to perpetual profession is generally a period of up to 6 years, with a renewal of vows after 3 years.

### **Perpetual Profession: Embracing the Attraction Permanently**

As your call to life as a Sister of Mercy is confirmed you make a life-long commitment to God and the Congregation in your perpetual profession of vows. Mercy is pure gift. Our response is to live out this mystery of love-in-action, by being "centred in God for whom alone we go forward or stay back."

Catherine McAuley

## **The Vows which we profess as Sisters of Mercy**

Religious life for Sisters of Mercy is about call and response to God and God's mission as vowed religious women.

Religious vows are promises made to God. Impelled by Mercy, we Sisters take three vows: Poverty, Consecrated Chastity and Obedience. Following the example of Catherine McAuley we respond to the Gospel call and commit ourselves to the service of those who are poor, sick and uneducated.

**The Vow of Poverty** is a vow to live simply. We share life in common and use goods for the benefit of one another and those we serve. We hold sacred all of creation including Papatūānuku, Mother Earth. Interdependence and a lack of attachment to wealth is a witness to keeping hope alive in our world today.

**The Vow of Chastity**, sometimes called celibacy, calls us to live expansively in a non-exclusive way so that God's love may flow through us in our relationships with others. We are strengthened to live the self-sacrificing love of the vow of chastity by being centred in God in prayer, community and mission and through our relationship with the Risen Christ. Chastity will always be a mystery – a mystery of love.

**The Vow of Obedience** invites us to listen inwardly and outwardly to God leading us in our lives. Communally, we discern the signs of the times, bringing forth our individual and collective gifts in the service of mission, to further the Reign of God for the wellbeing of people and creation.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **How do the Sisters spend their day?**

Every day for a Sister is slightly different and every day differs from another Sister's day. What is important to us is nourishing ourselves in Eucharist, spiritual reading, Prayer of the Church (Divine Office) and personal prayer. Sometimes prayer seems "good", other times "not so good", but perseverance is there. Catherine McAuley said, "Prayer is a plant, the seed of which is sown in the heart of every Christian. If it is well cultivated and nourished, it will produce abundant fruit but if it is neglected it will wither and die." We strongly value community commitment to our Sisters and ministry in the service of others. There will also be time to recreate so we maintain balance in our lives. We live our lives according to our Mercy Constitutions.

### **What kind of ministries are the Sisters of Mercy involved in?**

Our priority is to live faithfully our call to Mercy and to witness the loving kindness of God. Each Sister offers herself and her gifts in the service of others. Sisters may be engaged in the incorporated ministers of the congregation, in the works of a diocese or in the wider community. [Click here](#) to find out more about Mercy in action.

**Do you have free time?** All Sisters are encouraged to recreate, refresh and renew themselves. How they choose to use this time is their own decision. Common choices include: walking, tramping, music, movies, concerts, TV, sharing with friends, reading, family time.

**The original Sisters of Mercy seemed to wear special clothes. Why don't you?** When the Sisters of Mercy began they wore the clothing of the women of the day. Gradually this developed into the

black and white habit special to Sisters of Mercy. After Vatican II, when the Sisters were asked to return to their founding spirit Sisters moved back to wearing the clothing of the women of the day. All Sisters wear a silver ring and Mercy Cross to signify their commitment.

**Am I eligible for religious life if I have not been celibate?**

Yes, though part of your pre-entry discernment would be to discover whether you are able to live a celibate life. A person does not have to be a virgin to make religious vows.

**How old do I have to be to become a Sister of Mercy?**

When joining the Sisters of Mercy women are usually aged at least 21 years old.

**How would I join the Sisters of Mercy?**

The process takes a number of years. As a first thing to do, we invite you to contact a Sister and talk to her about this desire of yours. The email contact is [vocations@mercy.org.nz](mailto:vocations@mercy.org.nz) The stages will ultimately lead to the taking of perpetual vows. Vows are a serious promise freely made to God in community. The vows are poverty, celibate chastity and obedience. We also promise to give our lives to the service of the poor, sick and uneducated.

***Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life.***

***The Summer Day, Mary Oliver***