

# Imaging Mercy Today

## 'Getting up again' to answer Mercy's call

Ngā mihi atawhai - greetings to all in mercy! Distinguished Mercy author Mary C Sullivan rsm is surely counting the weeks until her new biography on Catherine McAuley, *The Path of Mercy*, is published in the United States early next year. Last month, she was in Birmingham, England, to present a series of talks at a reflection day for Sisters of Mercy from throughout the United Kingdom. In one of these, she spoke about the urgent need to recover the founding zeal of Catherine and the first Sisters of Mercy.

Challenged these days by increasing age and falling numbers, Sisters may need reminding that words like retrenchment and retirement are unknown to either the Gospel or to Catherine and her first companions. "I would say that of course we have to adjust our ministry and our lives to our physical capacity," said Mary Sullivan, "but that's not equivalent to bowing out of the picture or retiring. I don't think we retire until we breathe our last breath."

Concern about numbers and ages can certainly take over, she told her listeners. "But the suffering, the poverty, the sicknesses and ignorances of our world have not disappeared. In fact, they have got worse, both locally and globally; we know more about them, and they cry out to us with more vehemence and urgency. So there is today a profound need for the continuing renewal of our founding zeal."

That original zeal is reflected not just in Catherine's life, but in the women who learned from her and who adopted her attitudes as their own. "We wouldn't be here today if there was only Catherine McAuley," said Mary Sullivan. "It's all those other women, whose names are known to us or not, who learnt sometimes from her or from women who had learnt from her, who learnt primarily from the spirit of Jesus Christ what it meant to be a Sister of Mercy."

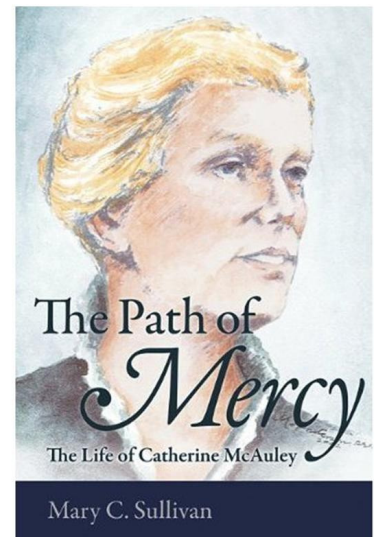
"If you read the story of any early Mercy founder, you'll be astounded at what they did. We sometimes are so cau-

tious, so well planned, and so strategically committed, that to do things merely on the invitation of those in need seems to us unwise. As far as I can figure out, every new foundation that Catherine McAuley made was to some place, sight unseen, where she had never been before," Mary Sullivan noted. "These days, we would have sent an advance team to buy the mattresses or whatever."

Early founders named by Mary Sullivan were Mary Vincent Whitty, "42 when she made the foundation in Brisbane, Mary Clare Moore, 25 years old when she led the foundation to Bermondsey, and Mary Francis Creedon, 30 years old when she went to Newfoundland. In these three

This is the cover of a new book on Catherine McAuley, to be published next February by the Catholic University of America Press.

The first full-length biography on Catherine to be written in over 50 years, the book draws extensively on primary sources and questions aspect of earlier accounts.



Author Mary C Sullivan (left) is professor emerita of language and literature at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Her other published works on Catherine McAuley include an edited collection of over 320 extant letters.

### Getting going for Mercy

E Te Atua, hoatu manawa  
God, whose breath brings our world to birth,  
call us once more to life;  
in a world tempted so easily to despair,  
renew your gift of hope in each of us  
by the warmth of your embrace.

As another Spring bursts about us,  
help us to get going once more;  
keep us from retiring or giving up,  
while there is still work for us to do.  
May we learn from Mercy's founding zeal  
to see what waits for us to get up today.

Tihei mauri ora!

we see the fulfillment of all Catherine's hopes: for their founding zeal, their following of Christ, their personal Christ-likeness, their acceptance of the cross, their purity of intention, their initiative (starting orphanages at the drop of a hat), their courage in the face of non-hopeful ecclesiastics; and all the rest of the currents of the spirit of Christ, in solidarity with the poor, the humiliated and the oppressed."

Mary Sullivan ended her reflection by quoting from a letter of Catherine's, written to Frances Warde at Carlow in 1840, when she confessed to being so tired that "the name of another foundation would make me sick – but they say I would get up again." Getting up is the persistent call of the Gospel, Mary Sullivan concluded. Mercy people do not retire from their commitment to serve the poor. Each day is a new beginning, another chance for us to share in Jesus' mission of mercy. What gets us up today? - Dennis Horton