



Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School Mission Statement

Rooted in the Catholic faith and charism of Mercy, Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School educates, inspires, and empowers young women to be merciful in spirit, innovative in thought, and courageous in leadership.

Mission of the Alumnae Association

The Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School Alumnae Association promotes a lifelong sisterhood of support among current and future alumnae and empowers all to advance the School's mission

Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School Belief Statements

We believe in the spirit of Mercy

- Acknowledging God as our core of existence, we model our lives on Jesus Christ.
- Positive moral and Catholic values are fundamental to personal growth, social responsibility and global competency.
- Gwynedd's foundation is built on the core values of compassion, justice, service, and respect for the dignity of all persons. These values are the charism of Catherine McAuley, the foundress of the Sisters of Mercy.

We believe in the strength of community

- Through ongoing service, the Gwynedd community fosters respect for the dignity of all persons.
- Students become competent, compassionate women in an enriched, balanced environment cultivated by positive role models.
- Faculty, in collaboration with parents, motivate and challenge each young woman to achieve her highest potential.

We believe in the value of education

- Participation in the Mercy Education System of the Americas (MESA) spans six countries and offers a global perspective to our students.
- Gwynedd develops and nurtures the whole person: intellectually, spiritually, morally, physically, emotionally, and socially.
- Educators inspire a fundamental love of life-long learning that requires reflection and action.

We believe in the power of women

- Each student succeeds in a supportive environment that encourages development of her distinct abilities, talents, and interests.
- Gwynedd women are educated, inspired, and empowered by Mercy to effect change for the greater good.
- Through the global network of Mercy sisterhood, Gwynedd Alumnae advance Mercy charism and offer opportunities for mentoring and paths to success in careers for all women.

A Brief History of Catherine McAuley

The chronology is a modified version of the chronology in Mary Sullivan, *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (Four Courts Press and University of Notre Dame Press, 1995, 2000).

The Beginning

When Catherine McAuley was born in Dublin on September 29, 1778, the sorrows and blessings of her next forty years were still hidden in what she would later call the Providence of God.

Her father James died in 1783, and her mother Elinor, in 1798. Catherine then learned the purifying lessons of personal poverty and daily dependence on the mercy of others, especially the mercy of God. In 1803, when she became the household manager and companion of an elderly, childless, and wealthy Protestant couple, at their home in Dublin and then at their estate in Coolock, she did not dream that when William Callaghan died in 1822, Catherine Callaghan having died in 1819, she would become the sole residuary legatee of their estate and much of their savings.

In 1824, her inheritance now settled, Catherine implemented a longstanding desire: she built a large house on Baggot Street, Dublin, as a school for poor girls and a shelter for homeless servant girls and women. But in August 1827, a month before the House of Mercy was opened, her sister Mary died of consumption, leaving her husband, Dr. William Macauley, a surgeon, and five young children, ages six to sixteen. Thus a new wave of responsibilities and losses began to affect Catherine's life.

Foundation

On September 24, 1827, the House of Mercy on Baggot Street was opened. Anna Maria Doyle and Catherine Byrn, Catherine McAuley's first co-workers, moved into the House, while Catherine herself divided her time between Coolock House, her brother-in-law's home, and Baggot Street.

In January 1829, four months after she had sold the Coolock estate, Dr. William Macauley died suddenly. Catherine was now the legal guardian of nine children: her nieces and nephews, two young cousins, and two orphans. As the number of lay co-workers at Baggot Street increased, so did severe lay and clerical criticism of the

House: Why did these women look like a religious order, yet not abide by the normal regulations of religious orders? Who was this "upstart" Miss McAuley? Why was the "unlearned sex" doing the work of the clergy?

By 1830 Catherine and her co-workers realized that the stability of the works of mercy they performed, including visiting the sick poor in their homes and in hospitals, and their continued appeal to co-workers, called for revision of their lay community. So, on September 8, Catherine, Anna Maria Doyle, and Elizabeth Harley entered the Presentation Convent in Dublin to begin formal preparation for founding the Sisters of Mercy.

Early Years

On December 12, 1831, Catherine McAuley, Mary Ann Doyle, and Mary Elizabeth Harley professed their religious vows as the first Sisters of Mercy, thereby founding the congregation.

They returned immediately to Baggot Street where seven more women received the habit on January 23, 1832, including Catherine's niece Mary Teresa Macauley. By Spring three hundred poor girls were attending the school on Baggot Street and countless women and girls were welcomed in the shelter. Then the cholera epidemic of 1832 hit Dublin, and though Elizabeth Harley had just died on April 25 of consumption, Catherine agreed to staff a cholera hospital on Townsend Street. The sisters nursed in shifts from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. for the next seven months. The first profession ceremony took place at Baggot Street in January 1833; in November 1833 Mary Teresa Macauley died of consumption; in January 1834, Catherine's second niece, young Catherine Macauley, entered the religious community; and in October, the new parish priest of St. Andrew's, Dr. Walter Meyler, closed the convent chapel to the public, thereby cutting off income from the collection at the second Mass on Sundays, on which support of the House of Mercy depended. Yet despite illnesses, deaths, and Dr. Meyler's lack of support, these early years of the Sisters of Mercy were, as Catherine believed, overshadowed by "a most Providential guidance."

Expansion

The rapid expansion of the Sisters of Mercy in the six years 1835-1841 flowed from Catherine McAuley's ever generous response to human need.

She founded nine additional autonomous Convents of Mercy in Tullamore (1836), Charleville (1836), Carlow (1837), Cork (1837), Limerick (1838), Bermondsey, London (1839), Galway (1840), Birr (1840), and Birmingham (1841), and branch houses of the Dublin community in Kingstown (1835) and Booterstown (1838). She traveled with the founding parties by stage coach, canal boat, steam packet, and railway, humorously enduring the fatigue and inconvenience such travel entailed, and remained at least a month with each new community, anxious to "begin well," so the poor could be immediately served, and claiming: "God knows I would rather be cold and hungry than that the poor in Kingstown or elsewhere should be deprived of any consolation in our power to afford." Back in Dublin her niece Catherine died of consumption in August 1837; a two-year controversy over appointment of a chaplain to serve the House of Mercy erupted with Dr. Walter Meyler; a lawsuit was unfairly settled against her for the cost of building a poor school in Kingstown; and her nephews Robert and James died in 1840 and 1841, respectively. In the midst of these sufferings and others, which she chose to embrace as the "Cross of Christ," she wrote hundreds of affectionate, even humorous, letters to the sisters in the new foundations, and submitted to officials in Rome her proposed Rule and Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy. By May 1841, Catherine now almost sixty-three, was worn out by her many labors for "Christ's dear poor" and "tormented" by a persistent cough.

Final Months

Pope Gregory XVI confirmed the Rule and Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy on June 6, 1841, but Catherine McAuley did not receive the approved document, in Italian, until three months later.

Her energies in the summer of 1841 were occupied with retreat instructions for postulants and novices, preparations for reception and profession ceremonies on August 19, and plans for the departure of the founding party to Birmingham on August 20. In Birmingham, she was tired and confined to one room, her cough worsened by fresh air. En route home, she visited the site of the future convent in Liverpool, and took her companion, a novice, to visit her parents who were grieving the death of her sister. Back at Baggot Street by September 21 she saw a physician who declared her right lung "diseased." Making light of his verdict, she nonetheless delegated some of her responsibilities to her assistant, though she herself wrote loving letters to many sisters, scarcely mentioning her illness. At the end of October she became bed-ridden, and was anointed on November 8. Only on Wednesday, November 10, was her condition

generally recognized as beyond hope of recovery. As she lay dying on November 11, fully aware of the fatigue and sorrow of those around her bed, she made one last request: she asked a sister to tell the community to "get a good cup of tea-I think the community room would be a good place-when I am gone & to comfort one another-but God will comfort them." She died that evening at ten minutes to eight, and was buried the following Monday, in the newly created cemetery at Baggot Street. A handmade sign was hung in the House of Mercy, begging the solicitude of the poor girls and women whom she so loved: "Pray for the soul of poor Catherine McAuley."

Sisters of Mercy CRITICAL CONCERNS

The Sisters of Mercy were founded out of a deep concern for the needs of persons who are poor. Today, we focus our ministry on those needs identified through our "critical concerns." We address these concerns through prayer; our own communal life as a religious congregation; education; advocacy with legislators and other leaders; and corporate engagement.

Immigration

Believing firmly in the dignity of every person, we work for just and humane immigration laws in the U.S., address policies that push people to flee their countries, and examine the global impact of immigration.

Earth

We believe in the need for sustainability of life, supporting both a lifestyle and legislation that acknowledge everyone's right to water and the need to address climate change.

Racism

We believe racism is an evil affecting us all. We work to recognize and dismantle institutional racism in order to become an anti-racist multicultural community.

Nonviolence

We work for peace through prayer, education, personal and communal practices of nonviolence, and legislative advocacy to reduce armed conflicts, gun violence and human rights abuses.

Women

Through our schools, colleges, health-care institutions and spirituality centers, and through our legislative advocacy, we give special attention to women's education, health and spirituality.