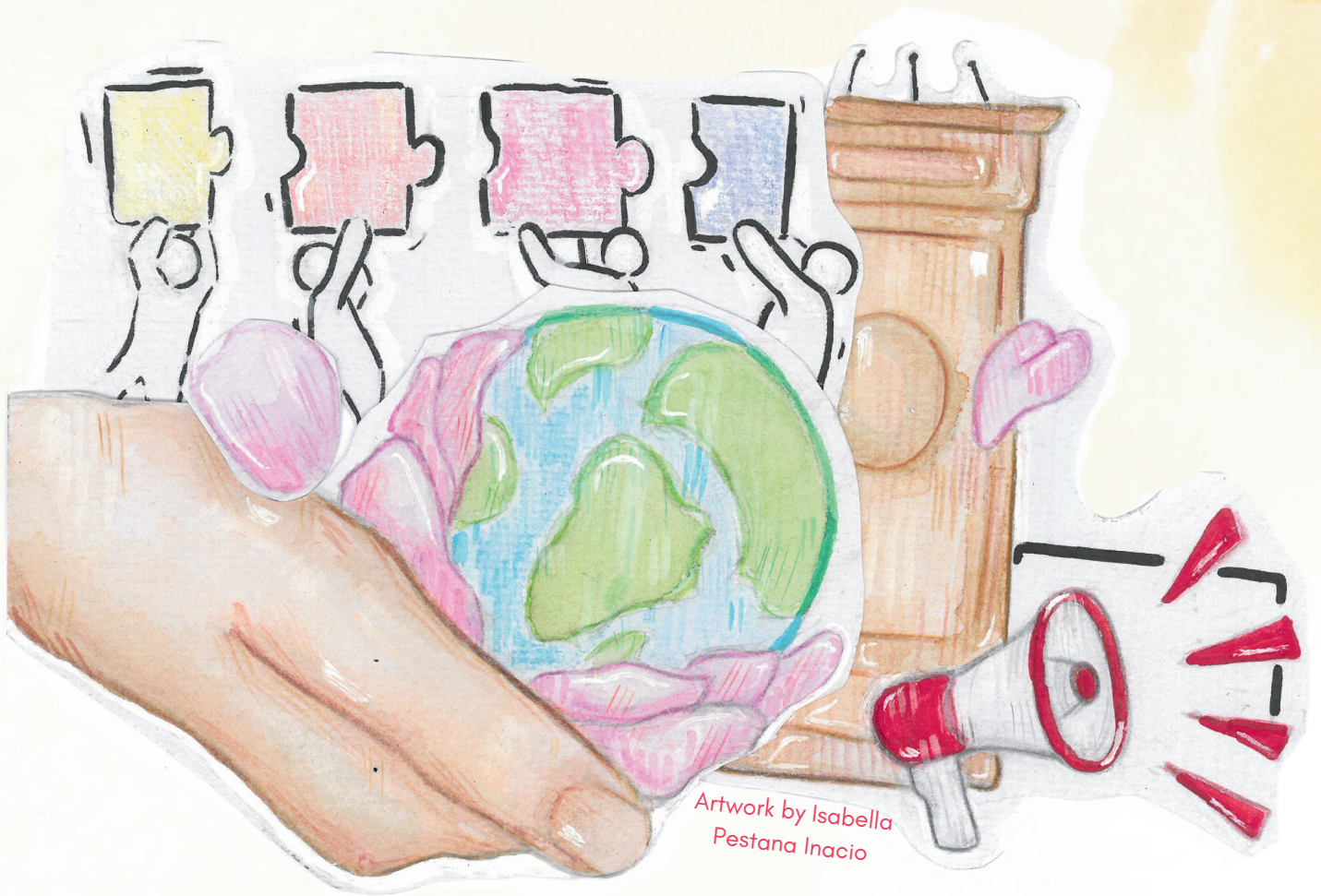


Sarah Terry

Cohort Four

Mercy Ambassadors' Programme



Artwork by Isabella
Pestana Inacio

Creating Global Citizens for the 21st Century

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INTRODUCTION

This report explores the journey of the Mercy Ambassadors' Programme, an initiative that **nurtures courageous, compassionate young leaders who engage the world with clarity and purpose.**



This programme did not begin with a curriculum. It began with a calling. In 2014, Sr Barbara, then principal of St Teresa's, challenged me as a young teacher - who, until then had known little of Catherine McAuley's legacy - to dream of something that would root students more deeply in Mercy values. From this invitation, the Mercy Ambassadors' Programme was born.

At the heart of our mission at St Teresa's School lies a question: **what does it mean to educate for mercy and justice in 21st century South Africa?**

South Africa is a land marked by profound contrasts: rich in cultural heritage, yet still reckoning with the legacy of Apartheid; home to vibrant youth, yet burdened by inequality, racism, and gender-based violence. It is in this context that our students live, learn, and lead.

We cannot teach them mercy without also teaching them justice. We cannot speak of compassion without naming bias. We cannot form young leaders without confronting the systems that have historically excluded so many.

The Mercy Ambassadors' Programme is both global and deeply local. Through exchanges with Mercy schools in Australia and the United States, students have encountered the shared struggles of people across the world: from climate injustice to colonial trauma, migration, and systemic discrimination.

Through partnerships with Mercy ministries in South Africa - including Winterveldt*, Mercy House and Immaculata - they have seen first-hand what it means to serve with dignity and solidarity.

The project documented in this report **emerged from a simple, powerful question: how do we equip young people with the tools to navigate and transform the realities of a post-apartheid society through a Mercy lens?**

It is underpinned by a belief that education is not only about academic success, but about **forming ethical, empathetic young people who are prepared to challenge injustice and lead with mercy.**

Informed by my participation in the Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship, by immersions in Glencree, Louisville and Baggot Street, and by dialogue with mentors and Mercy Sisters, this report seeks to document and celebrate a process of transformation—one that continues to evolve, ripple, and inspire.

The title - *Creating Global Citizens for the 21st Century* - is both my vision and my commitment. In these pages, you will meet students, hear their stories, view their artwork, and **witness their emergence as leaders of courage, conscience and compassion.**

In a world fractured by inequality and the lingering effects of historical injustice, the Mercy Ambassadors' Programme, at St Teresa's School Johannesburg, **serves as a living response to the call for compassionate leadership and social justice. Rooted in the charism of Catherine McAuley** and shaped by the vibrant complexity of South African society, **this initiative seeks to form courageous young leaders—global citizens who carry the spirit of mercy into the world.**

the future is
FEMALE

“SOCIAL JUSTICE IS PROMOTING A JUST SOCIETY BY CHALLENGING INJUSTICE AND VALUING DIVERSITY. HUMAN BEHAVIOUR AND INHERENT BIASES CAN UNDERMINE EVEN THE MOST WELL-INTENTIONED SYSTEMS. IT CHALLENGES US TO THINK ABOUT OUR OWN SOCIETAL STRUCTURES AND THE WAYS IN WHICH WE MIGHT WORK TOWARDS A MORE EQUITABLE WORLD.”

John Rawls - *The Theory of Justice*



Who I Am and What I Am Passionate About

My name is Sarah Terry, and I am a high school teacher at St Teresa's School in Rosebank, Johannesburg.

I have the privilege of teaching Drama, Mathematics, and Life Orientation, and being a part of a community that is deeply rooted in Mercy values. My journey with this work has been both deeply personal and profoundly transformative.

Although St Teresa's has long been part of my family's story - my mother and aunt attended the school - I only began to fully appreciate its legacy when I started teaching there in 2013. At that stage, I knew little about the history of the Sisters of Mercy or Catherine McAuley's vision, except for some colourful stories from my relatives. That changed when Sr Barbara, then principal, offered me what she called "a challenge": **to create something that would engage students more meaningfully with the Mercy charism. That challenge became the Mercy Ambassadors' Programme.**

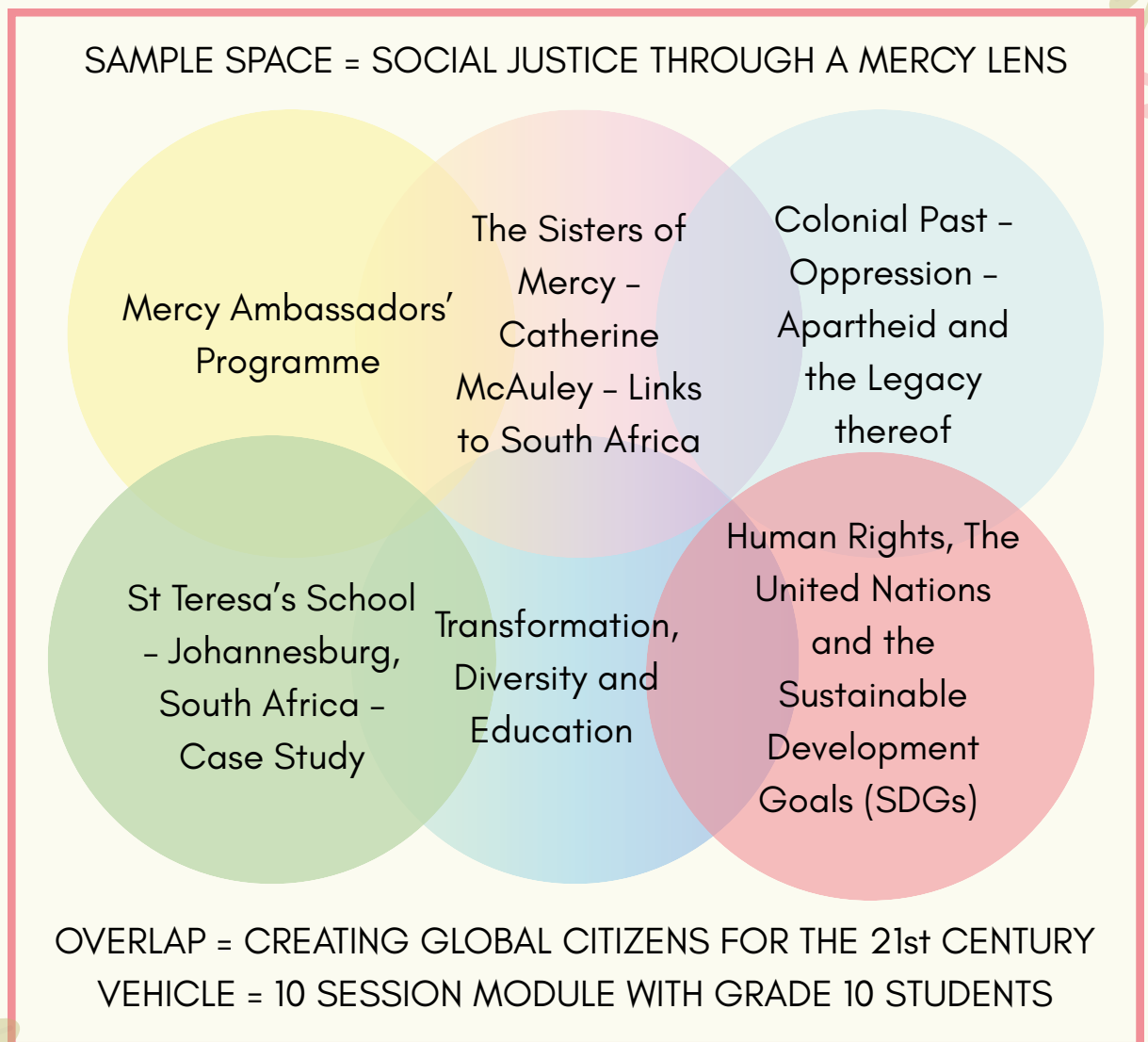
I am passionate about education as a vehicle for transformation. **I believe that young people are capable of incredible insight and empathy when given the tools, space, and support to grow.** I am particularly driven by the themes of social justice, human rights, diversity, and reconciliation - both within the South African context and the broader global one. I am also acutely aware of my own position of privilege, and I strive to hold space for discomfort, honesty, and growth - both for my students and myself.

As a Drama teacher, I have seen firsthand the power of creative expression in unpacking difficult truths and inspiring change. **I encourage students to use art, performance, poetry, and storytelling as ways of reflecting on their learning and speaking their truths.**

My passion lies in empowering young women to become critical thinkers, courageous advocates, and compassionate leaders—**global citizens who will step into the world with mercy in their minds, hearts, and hands.**

WHY THIS WORK MATTERS

Born of a teacher's reflection and a Mathematician's lens, this current development of the programme grew from a Venn diagram with six intersecting spheres:



At the centre lies the **shared commitment to Social Justice through a Mercy Lens**, expressed through a ten-session curriculum with Grade 10 students.

It is a vehicle for transformation.

The Call to Mercy Leadership

"When young people are meaningfully engaged in ways that truly dismantle barriers and break down systems of exclusion, whether based on age, gender, class, ethnicity, or other facets of identity, they change not only their own lives but also the systems in which those lives are situated.

They practise and apply skills for building a democratic society that is based on human rights. They develop long-lasting skills that contribute to greater social cohesion, less crime, more stable communities, more effective workplaces, and better decision-making regarding health. Their work ripples outwards from the local to the global, from individual empowerment to collective social change. Meaningful Youth Engagement."

Women Deliver, 2019.

“At the heart of the Mercy Charism is the education, empowerment, and encouragement of women.”

Mercy Emerging Leaders Fellowship Impact Report

Mercy leadership is not about position or prestige. It is about **enacting dignity in everyday choices**. At St Teresa's, we understand **leadership through the lens of service, presence, and advocacy**. It is rooted in the everyday, the local, the relational.

Leadership emerges not only in the headlines of public campaigns but in the **quiet courage of students who choose inclusion, speak up for justice, or support a peer in need**.

The Mercy Ambassadors' Programme intentionally cultivates this kind of leadership. Inspired by the Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship (MELF), it invites students to view themselves not as passive recipients of tradition, but as co-creators of Mercy's ongoing mission. Leadership here is not top-down, but participatory.

Students are encouraged to **lead through action, reflection, and storytelling**. Catherine McAuley modelled a radical, grounded style of leadership—**one that stood beside the poor, challenged unjust systems, and embraced the transformative power of education**. Her legacy compels us to ask: **What does courageous, compassionate leadership look like today, especially in a South African context?**

In a nation still healing from apartheid, still grappling with racism, inequality, and gender-based violence, Mercy leadership must be responsive and deeply contextual.

Mercy Ambassadors are trained not only to understand injustice, but to respond to it. Each student is asked: Where do you see the need for Mercy in your school? In your community? In your world? Their responses reflect the complexity of their lives—and the richness of their potential.

From confronting personal bias to exploring national history and global human rights frameworks, students walk a path that fosters deep critical engagement. They do not merely learn about leadership—they practise it, imperfectly and bravely, within the safe space of the programme. Through community service, advocacy projects, international dialogue, and creative expression, they grow into young leaders whose work embodies the Mercy values of justice, compassion, hospitality, and respect.

As Catherine McAuley said, “The poor need our help today, not next week.” Mercy leadership begins in the now. In classrooms, on stage, in kitchens making sandwiches, and in art studios creating protest posters—our Ambassadors are already leading.

Mercy in South Africa:

An Historical Overview

The presence of the Sisters of Mercy in South Africa began in 1897, when five courageous women from Strabane, Ireland, responded to a call from Bishop Gaughren to establish a Catholic girls' school in Mafikeng. Arriving under difficult conditions, these pioneering Sisters laid the foundation for Mercy education and service in the country. **During the Siege of Mafikeng (1899–1900), the Sisters remained behind to care for the wounded, a defining act of bravery that earned them widespread respect.**

As their ministry grew, the Sisters expanded into Johannesburg, Pretoria, and beyond—founding schools, caring for the sick, visiting the poor, and educating across racial and cultural lines, even during apartheid. One pivotal moment was the relocation of the Novitiate and Mother House from Mafikeng to Rosebank in 1930.

It was here that St Teresa's School was born, growing into a vibrant centre of learning and Mercy identity.



The First Sisters in Kimberley, South Africa

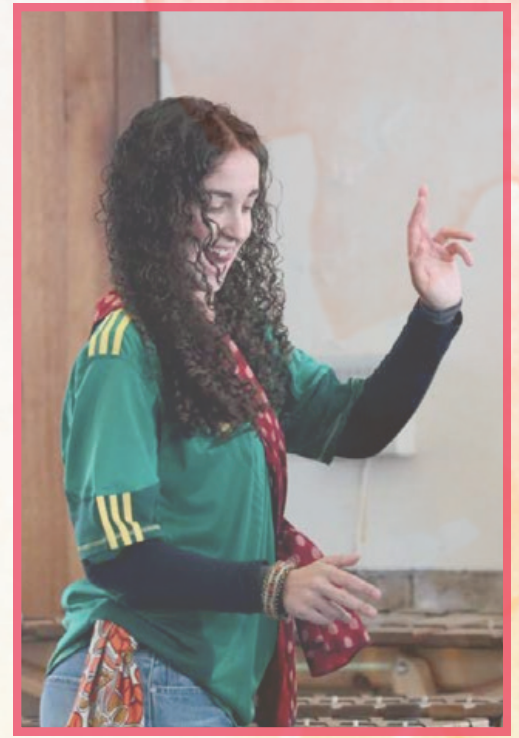
Today, the Sisters' presence continues through powerful ministries that live out Catherine McAuley's call to serve the vulnerable. In Winterveldt, an area originally established for displaced communities under apartheid, the Sisters initiated an adult education programme that expanded into a holistic development centre. This includes a clinic for HIV and AIDS—especially for child-headed households—as well as nutritional gardens, a bakery and sewing workshops.

At Mercy House, Sister Colleen offers refuge to women and children who have faced domestic abuse or trafficking.

Meanwhile, the Immaculata Shelter, led by Sister St John, provides temporary accommodation, meals, and dignity for people experiencing homelessness.

Students from St Teresa's actively support these ministries—making soup, donating toiletries, or helping assemble 'Handbags of Hope' for survivors.

These ministries represent **Mercy in action: hands-on, hope-filled, and committed to restoring human dignity.** They are a vital part of the legacy that students inherit and embody as they step into leadership roles shaped by faith, justice, and compassion.



The Story of St Teresa's School

St Teresa's School in Rosebank, Johannesburg, stands as a proud testament to the enduring spirit and vision of the Sisters of Mercy.

Established in 1930 following the relocation of the Novitiate and Mother House from Mafikeng, **the school began humbly in the garage of a house** on Sturdee Avenue. Led by Mother Joseph, Mother Magdalen, and four other Sisters, the school rapidly expanded—new classrooms and a chapel were soon constructed to accommodate the growing number of students and the surrounding Catholic community.

The school's development was part of a broader mission by the Sisters of Mercy to provide education, healthcare, and spiritual support across South Africa.

In the decades following its founding, St Teresa's evolved into a leading independent Catholic girls' school, known for its academic excellence, strong ethos of service, and deep connection to Mercy values.

Despite the segregated realities of apartheid South Africa, **the Sisters remained committed to inclusivity and dignity. They welcomed children of all races and backgrounds and challenged the injustices of the time through their example and outreach.** This legacy of resistance and reconciliation continues to shape the school's identity today.

St Teresa's is home to a **richly diverse student body, reflecting the vibrant, multicultural makeup of Johannesburg itself**. Learners come from a wide range of racial, linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. This diversity is not only acknowledged but celebrated—woven into the school's curriculum, culture, and leadership. It strengthens **the school's commitment to dialogue, empathy, and social justice, and prepares learners to navigate and transform the complexities of the world beyond the school gates**.

St Teresa's not only honours the Mercy tradition through its curriculum but also through daily life. Mercy Day is celebrated every year on the 24th of September—South Africa's Heritage Day—as a time to reflect, serve, and celebrate the Sisters who have given so much. Students actively engage with the wider Mercy community, including supporting ministries like Winterveldt and Immaculata, and participating in local acts of service.



Cards made by students for the Sisters at St Teresa's at our annual Mercy Day tea.

The eco-brick programme run at St Teresa's not only teaches environmental awareness and recycling but also provides practical skills to young people and community members. **These plastic-filled bricks are repurposed for construction and symbolise the integration of ecological consciousness with social justice.**

From its humble beginnings to its current role as a beacon of Mercy education, St Teresa's School continues to inspire generations of young women to lead with compassion, serve with courage, and act with justice.



Ecobricks, made by St Teresa's students.

The Mercy Ambassadors' Programme



"WE MUST REGAIN THE CONVICTION THAT WE NEED ONE ANOTHER, THAT WE HAVE A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS AND FOR THE WORLD, AND THAT BEING GOOD AND DECENT ARE WORTH IT."
POPE FRANCIS, FROM 'LAUDATO SI', PAGE 229.



Origins and Vision

The Mercy Ambassadors' Programme was born in 2014 out of a challenge, an invitation, and a growing awareness of the need for intentional engagement with social justice through a Mercy lens.

At the time, the then-principal Sr Barbara encouraged the creation of a student-centred initiative that would connect students to the values of Catherine McAuley and the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy.

Its foundation rests on the belief that meaningful **education goes beyond academic achievement—it must cultivate empathy, moral courage, and a commitment to the common good.**

It has taken students to Mercy schools in Louisville (USA), Melbourne (Australia), and to Mercy International in Dublin (Ireland), and **introduced them to the lived realities of First Nations peoples and survivors of conflict and systemic injustice.**

This new component, *Creating Global Citizens for the 21st Century*, is deeply rooted in the identity of St Teresa's.

Developed as part of the Mercy Emerging Leaders Fellowship research project component, on the original ethos and vision of the existing programme, students participate in a 10-session curriculum in Grade 10 that **explores identity, bias, South African history, the Sustainable Development Goals, and leadership.** These sessions are practical, reflective, and artistic—inviting learners to engage with complex issues through a Mercy lens.

Above all, the Programme **empowers students to ask difficult questions, reflect on their own assumptions, and take meaningful action in their communities.** It is not a once-off initiative but a **sustained process of transformation**—awakening Mercy in the hearts of young women who are learning to lead, to listen, and to love in radical, justice-seeking ways.



Grade 10 students engage with the 10 module programme.

i) Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals

The Mercy Ambassadors' Programme places **human rights at the core of its curriculum, recognising them as essential to justice, dignity, and global citizenship.** Students are introduced to foundational human rights documents - most notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights - and encouraged to reflect on how rights are upheld, contested, or violated in their own lives and communities.

In connecting Mercy values with global frameworks, the programme makes deliberate use of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These 17 goals offer a shared global vision for peace, equality, and environmental stewardship by 2030. Through structured sessions, students engage critically with the five goals (to the right) in particular.

Rather than treating these as distant or abstract ideals, learners are challenged to ground them in the South African context. They explore how legacies of apartheid, systemic racism, economic inequality, gender-based violence, and environmental degradation are woven into everyday life in Johannesburg and beyond, thus creating the link to the global context.

This critical lens fosters powerful dialogue. In one session, the topic of ecobricks—a sustainable solution for plastic waste—was used to explore both climate action and creative community building. In another, the girls discussed Black Economic Empowerment and the lingering effects of white privilege. **Their insights reflect a deepening awareness of the connections between human dignity, justice, and responsibility.**

Through the lens of Mercy, students are not only learning about the SDGs—they are becoming young leaders equipped to live them out. This section of the programme helps them shift from awareness to advocacy, **embodying Catherine McAuley's vision of urgent, hands-on compassion for those most vulnerable.**



“After all, equal rights are also more than a human right. It is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

Gender equality is the unfinished business of our time. It is paramount to end the multiple forms of gender-based violence and secure equal access to quality education and health, economic resources and participation in political life for both women and girls and men and boys.”

Antonio Guterres, CSW 2025



Watch Ororiseng Lerefolo perform her poem, *Vuka! Africa*.
Click on the image to watch the full performance, and the title to read the poem.

‘It pays homage to the history of the Sisters of Mercy who have long campaigned for the rights of women and girls, particularly in oppressive, patriarchal societies.

Secondly, we recognise the persistent inequality that continues to limit opportunities for women around the world to embrace positions of leadership. **Women show remarkable strength and courage in pushing past these norms to challenge unjust systems. And we believe this should be celebrated.’**

MELF Information Booklet

ii) Post Apartheid South Africa: Legacy and Transformation

South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994 marked a historic shift from institutionalised racism and oppression to the ideals of a nation built on the values of human dignity, equality, and freedom. Yet, thirty years later, the legacy of apartheid continues to shape the realities of many South Africans. While the Constitution promises justice and human rights, structural inequalities remain entrenched in housing, education, healthcare, and access to opportunity.

The Mercy Ambassadors' Programme invites students to explore this complex legacy with honesty and courage. Rather than presenting the post-apartheid era as a resolved chapter, the programme frames it as an ongoing journey of transformation. It asks: **What does justice look like today? Who is still excluded? How do we carry forward the work of truth and reconciliation?** Most countries have a similar colonial past and can truly benefit from work of a similar nature.

Through discussions, storytelling, and artistic responses, students engage with themes such as spatial injustice, white privilege, generational trauma, and the long-term impact of the Group Areas Act.

These conversations are often emotional and challenging—but they are necessary. They provide a framework for understanding both the progress made and the work still to be done.

Importantly, students are encouraged to locate themselves within this narrative. They **reflect on their own identities, experiences, and positions of privilege or marginalisation. This personal connection makes the history relevant and urgent.** By understanding how the past continues to shape the present, students are better equipped to act with purpose and compassion.

Transformation is not just about policy change - it's about healing, accountability, and relationship. It requires honesty, humility, and action. In this way, the Mercy Ambassadors' Programme **becomes a space where historical understanding meets moral responsibility, and where young people begin to imagine- and build - a more just and equitable future.**



iii) Education as a Catalyst for Social Justice

In this session, I felt very informed especially after the video. I felt I understood human rights a bit more and felt confident that if any one asked me what human rights were, I could deliver. The video was very powerful in that sense and carried a meaningful message. Also providing a small history lesson about the timeline and how human rights came about. Ms Terry explained the slides and video really well leaving me feeling informed and having more of an understanding of how the Sisters of Mercy link and have a massive role in the topic of Human Rights.

Some of the reflective writing of one of the Grade 10* students, after our first session together.

‘Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world’

Nelson Mandela

* Grade 10 students are roughly 15 - 16 years old.

At St Teresa's, we believe that **education is not neutral. It either reinforces systems of inequality - or it actively challenges them.** The Mercy Ambassadors' Programme intentionally positions education as a tool for liberation, transformation, and justice.

South Africa's educational system continues to bear the scars of apartheid. While access has expanded, **disparities in resources, quality, and outcomes remain stark. Learners in underfunded schools often face overcrowded classrooms, limited access to technology, and systemic barriers to success.** For students at St Teresa's - many of whom come from diverse racial, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds - this awareness creates an ethical imperative: to use the privilege of quality education not for personal advancement alone, but in service of the common good.

The Programme encourages students to examine the purpose of education. They are asked: Who does education serve? Whose knowledge is valued? What stories are told - and which are left out? These questions form the foundation of critical inquiry, equipping students to engage thoughtfully with their own schooling while recognising the broader societal context.

Through sessions on South African history, identity, privilege, and power, learners come to understand that true education must include emotional intelligence, ethical awareness, and civic responsibility. They are exposed to the writings of Human Rights defenders, social justice advocates, and Mercy leaders - creating connections between personal growth and collective action.



Artistic expression, drama, and storytelling deepen this process. **Whether composing protest poems or painting visions of reconciliation, students are empowered to use their voices in pursuit of justice. In this way, education becomes a living, breathing tool for healing and hope.**

The Programme does not claim to fix South Africa's educational inequality—but **it plants seeds. Seeds of awareness, of compassion, and of courage. Seeds that will grow as these young women carry Mercy into the world, not as spectators, but as change-makers.**

Overview of the 10 session framework

Session 1:

Introduction to the Programme

Students are introduced to the goals of the Mercy Ambassadors' Programme and begin reflecting on what it means to be a global citizen rooted in Mercy values.



Session 2:

Who Was Catherine McAuley?

Participants explore the life, mission, and enduring influence of Catherine McAuley as the foundation of Mercy leadership.

Session 3:

Core Concepts of Social Justice

This session unpacks essential terms like bias, diversity, and equity to build a common understanding of justice in action.



Session 4:

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Students examine global goals and assess how their school community contributes to—or could better support—these shared objectives.

Session 5:

Feminism and Womanhood

The concept of feminism is explored through personal reflection and discussion on the evolving meanings of womanhood

Session 6: Understanding Bias and Identity

This session helps students identify personal and societal biases while exploring how identity is shaped and expressed.

Session 7: Identity and Self-Knowledge

Learners reflect on the puzzle pieces of their identity, deepening self-awareness and empathy for others' stories.

Session 8: Advocacy and Courage

Through stories of courageous leaders and activists, students consider their own potential to speak up and act for justice.

Session 9: Individual Reflection and Journaling

Students are given space to process their journey, connecting their growth to Mercy values and personal responsibility.

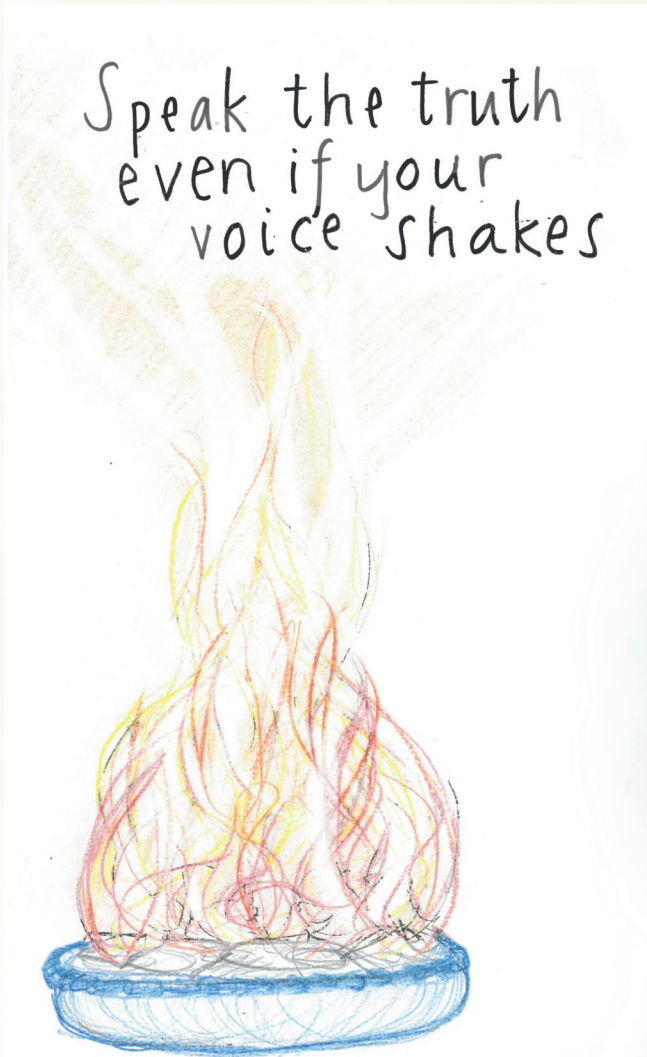
Session 10: Celebration and Looking Ahead

The programme concludes with shared reflections and a celebration of the community formed through learning, growth, and action.



iv) Methodology and Pedagogical Approach

The Mercy Ambassadors' Programme is grounded in a holistic, student-centred approach that integrates critical pedagogy, experiential learning, and Mercy spirituality. **It is not a traditional academic course, but a transformative process rooted in encounters, reflection, and action. Its design draws inspiration from Paulo Freire's concept of education as a practice of freedom—one that empowers learners to question, challenge, and reimagine their world.**



The methodology blends multiple teaching strategies:

- **Dialogue circles** create space for students to share stories, listen deeply, and build trust.
- **Creative expression** through drama, poetry, and visual art allows students to reflect emotionally and imaginatively on their learning.
- **Critical analysis** of history, systems of oppression, and global goals, cultivates independent thinking and ethical awareness.
- **Reflective practice** through journalling, group debriefs, and peer discussions helps integrate personal growth with broader insights.

This pedagogy affirms the learner as both a knower and a seeker. **Students are not passive recipients of knowledge—they are co-creators of a justice-seeking community.**

Each 45 minute session is designed to meet students where they are, while gently stretching their capacity for self-awareness, empathy, and action. Prayer, ritual, and silence are also included, providing moments of grounding and spiritual nourishment amid the weight of the topics.

In all things, **the pedagogy reflects Catherine McAuley's approach: practical, relational, and rooted in the urgent needs of the world.**

v) Artistic Work and Student Voices:

Art has always been a language of liberation.

In the Mercy Ambassadors' Programme, creativity is not an add-on—it is a core mode of learning, reflection, and advocacy. Students are encouraged to translate their insights and emotions into artistic forms, **allowing what is often hard to articulate in words to be expressed through colour, movement, voice, and design.**

Throughout the 10-session journey, **students responded to key themes—identity, injustice, privilege, and mercy—through poetry, painting, performance, photography, and installation.** Inspired by South African Protest Theatre traditions, Mercy spirituality, and the concept of art as resistance, learners used artistic expression to confront personal and collective histories.

Importantly, **the emphasis was not on artistic perfection but on authenticity, intention, and impact.** Many students discovered confidence they had not known they possessed—finding voice through verse, clarity through colour, and courage through collaboration.

"Dramatic Arts engages us with past and present narratives that talk to the complexities of being a South African. **It makes no attempt to hide the truths associated with the complex issues we manage on a daily basis.** The subject provokes us to consider our individual subject positions and collective attitudes, and to **interrogate our thinking about our historical past and contemporary present as South Africans.**

It offers no apologies and no answers to many of the big questions we as a nation are currently trying to tackle in our attempts to shake off the burden of our apartheid past and to work through the considerable baggage we carry with us and through which we filter much of what we say and do."

- Dramatic Arts Subject Assessment Guidelines, [2024](#)

vi) Voices of the Ambassadors



UKUTHULA
PEACE

ITHEMBA
HOPE

UBULUNGISA
JUSTICE

UBUBELE
MERCY

The heart of the Mercy Ambassadors' Programme lies in the voices of the students who have walked the journey. **Their reflections reveal transformation - not only in what they think, but in how they feel, lead, and act.** Through storytelling, creative expression, and candid conversation, they have grown in courage, compassion, and critical awareness.

In journalling exercises, many students shared that **they had never been invited to speak about race, privilege, or inequality in such a personal and supported way.** Others found language for feelings they had long held but never voiced. For some, it was the **first time they had reflected on their family's role in apartheid or considered their own positionality in society.**

*"As a South African girl, I can't imagine a world without race. I don't think you can have a conversation about our country or where we are now, or the status quo without talking about race, specifically about race ... What race really is. **For me, it is language, cultural identity.**"*

*"I also think there is guilt associated with having conversations about race. It's not that people don't want to engage in the conversation, it's that they feel they don't have a right to, or it's not appropriate to. It's also the idea of exposure. **We don't know what other people are going through unless we listen and hear what other people are going through.** I would never have thought of that because I'm not affected by that. It just goes to show if you're not affected by something, it's often easy to overlook issues."*

“I came to realise that I do hold power. I think I’ve been made to believe that because I am a black woman then I am automatically powerless. But after doing that exercise I learnt that I am quite the opposite. I do hold power and I found I hold quite a lot of power compared to other people. I may have not checked off being white, male or straight but I checked off almost everything else such as being upper middle class, going to a private school. I look powerless according to the stereotypes but I’m not and to me that was a really cool thing to find out. I am privileged despite the stereotypes and I am grateful for that privilege.”

“Seeing where I fit into society and comparing/contrasting this with peers grounded the idea into reality, rather than holding it as an abstract concept.”

“I feel that the subject has been fun, inclusive and has created a safe space for everyone to share and be themselves without judgement. Without the pressure of judgement from peers, we have the space to grow as individuals and better ourselves in a community. We have better built bonds between one another (at least - I have) and the programme inspires us to take responsibility for the future we are made to live in and the world around us.”

“It also made me think about how unfair our society is towards minority groups, and how the power cycle has remained unchanged for way too long.”



Grade 10 students perform a scene where a debate at the UN is happening between world leaders, from Mike van Graan’s play, *Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Metaphors*.

Please click the image to watch the scene. The play was written to educate audience members about the Sustainable Development Goals.

**THEY
REFLECTED
ON
IDENTITY**

"Before this, I didn't really know how to talk about being Coloured* in South Africa. Now I feel like my story matters."

"As a white girl, I realised I'd never been taught how to hold space for someone else's pain. **This programme taught me to listen without needing to respond.**"

"The biggest lesson? To listen.
To really listen to someone's experience without trying to fix it."

**AND THEY
IMAGINED
NEW WAYS TO
LEAD**

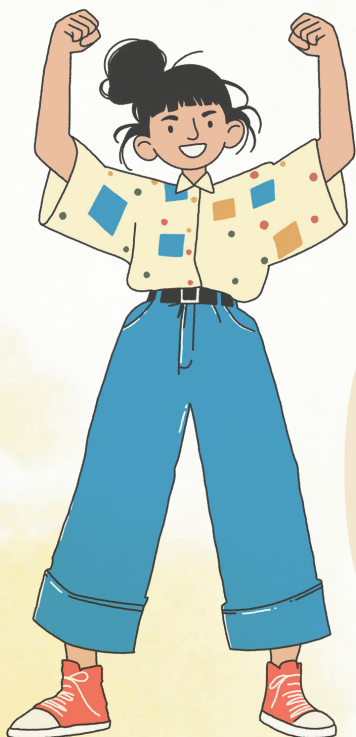


"I used to think leadership was about being in charge. Now I know **it's about being willing to sit with hard truths—and still act with kindness.**"

"I used to think I needed to wait to make a difference.
Now I know I can start with small actions today."

"**I realised how many stories we never hear**-especially about women, especially about the past."

*Please see the Glossary of Terms on Page 37 for an understanding of the term 'Coloured' in a South African Context.



vii) Facilitator Reflections

Lize Els-Booyens, the Deputy Principal of St Teresa's School, and all around glorious human being, has helped immensely with the Mercy Ambassadors' Programme, having played an integral role in holding space for transformation.

Her reflections offer insight into the challenges, breakthroughs, and unexpected gifts of guiding young people through such a powerful and often emotional journey.



Trust and Relationship:

Lize noted that building trust was the foundation of every successful session. **Students engaged most meaningfully when they felt safe, seen, and heard.** Consistency, gentle guidance, and openness created the conditions for vulnerability and dialogue. Many girls expressed that the circle format, regular check-ins, and one-on-one conversations helped them feel respected and empowered.

Holding Discomfort:

One of the most challenging aspects of facilitation was navigating discomfort, especially when sessions touched on issues like white privilege, racism, or gender-based violence. "Sarah had to balance honesty with sensitivity, making space for complex emotions while ensuring no voice dominated. These moments required courage, humility, and constant reflection."



Learning as Mutual and the Role of Reflection:

Both Lize and I were challenged to reflect on our own assumptions, privileges, and leadership styles. We could definitely describe the experience as “soul work” and “a ministry as much as a lesson.” This deepened our connection to Mercy.

Built-in time for journalling and debriefing proved essential. We saw how important it was not to rush through sessions or focus solely on outcomes. **The richness was in the process. Reflection helped students integrate what they had learned, identify their growth, and imagine their next steps as Mercy leaders.**

To summarise:

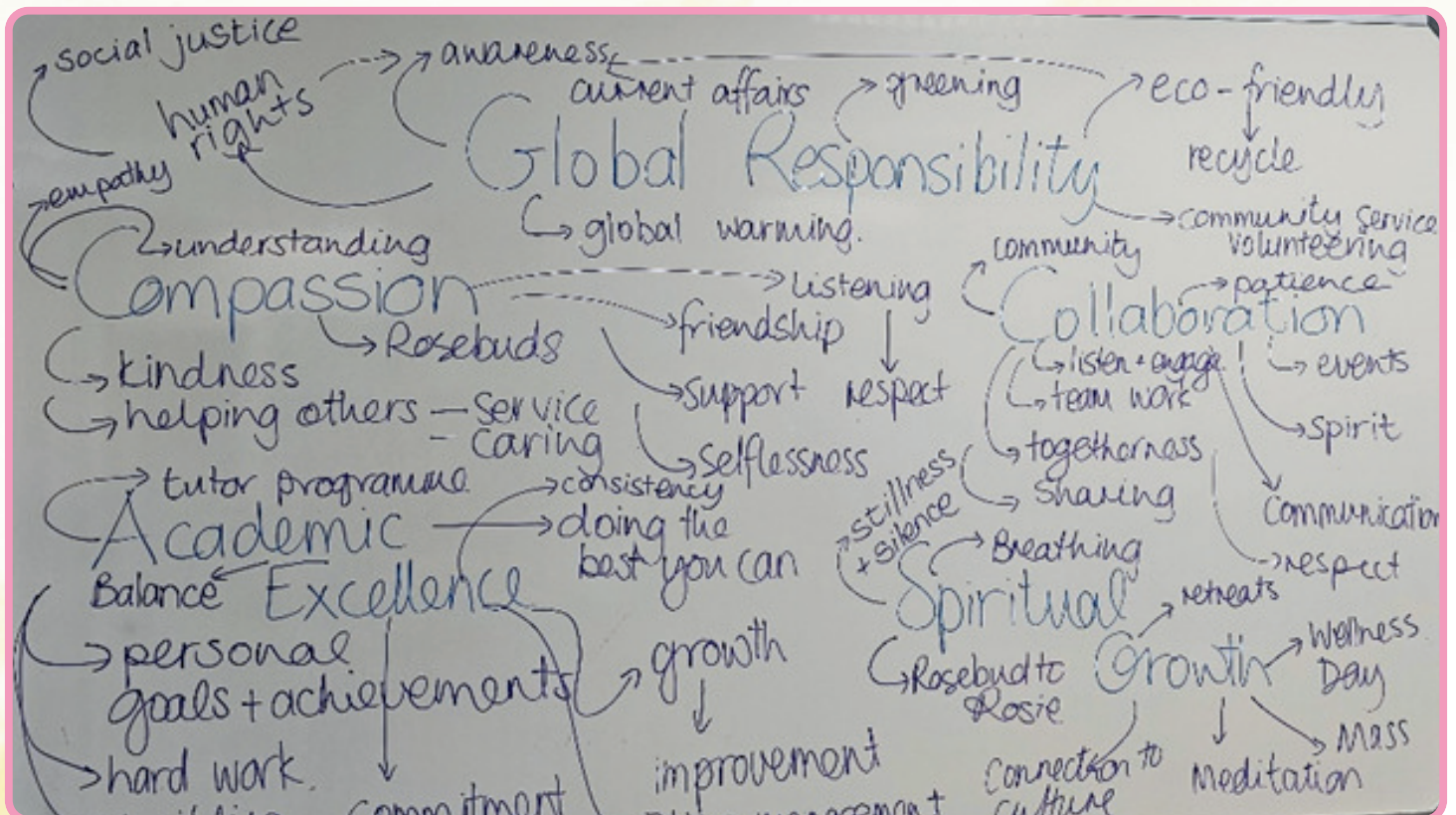
- Trust-building was essential. Students engaged more deeply as relationships grew.
- Students responded best to sessions that linked local realities to global ideas.
- Storytelling and creative expression were powerful tools for reflection.



Grade 10 students perform a scene titled *The Sea of Poverty* from Mike van Graan's play, *Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Metaphors*.

Please click the image to watch the scene and click on the name of the playwright and the title of the play to read more about them. The play was written to educate audience members about the Sustainable Development Goals.

Beginning with Mercy values creates a shared language and ethical foundation. Compassion, justice, dignity, and service must be more than words on posters—they must be lived, modelled, and embedded in every session. Students found confidence and clarity when they could connect abstract ideas to values they understood and respected.

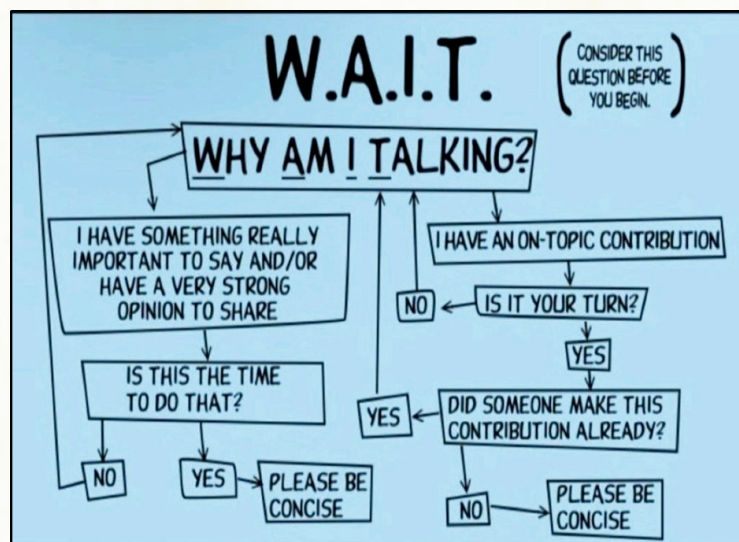


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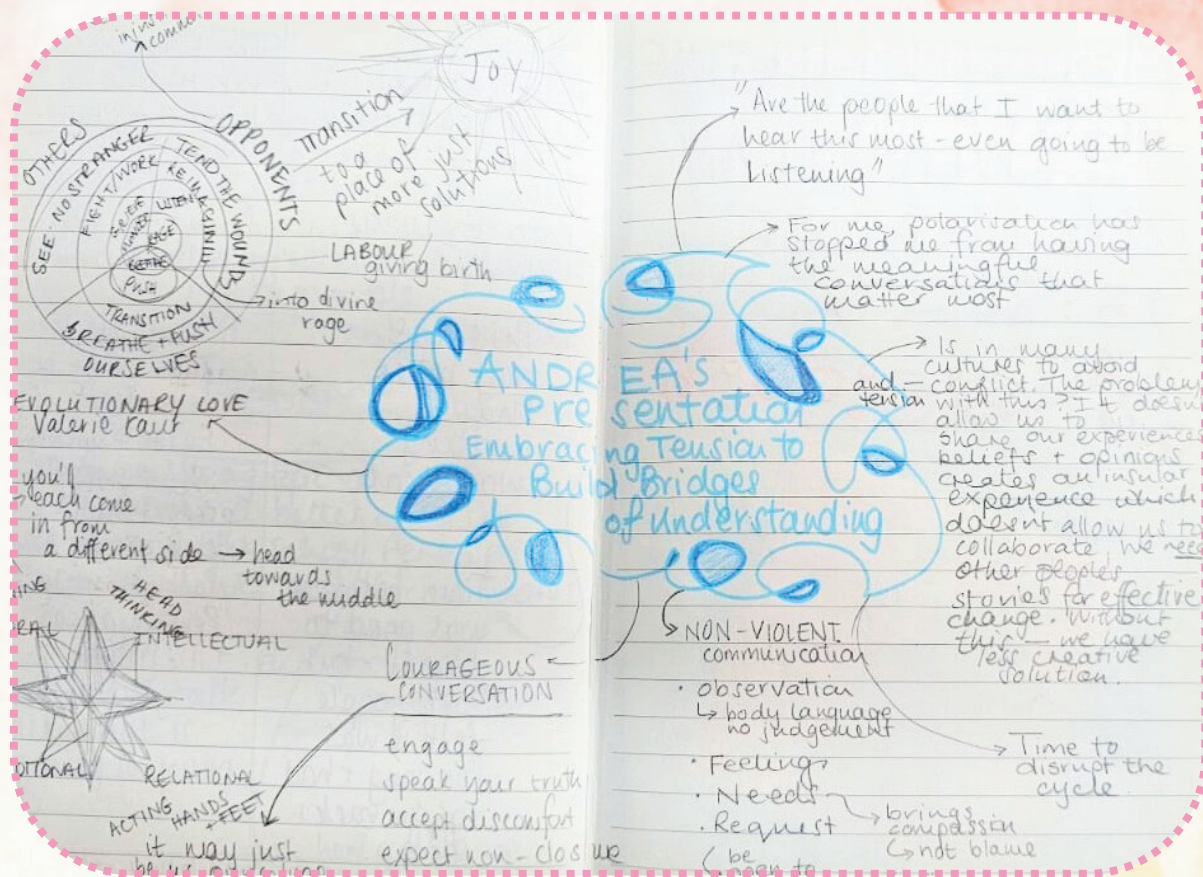


Honour Process over Product

Transformation takes time. The programme's impact was strongest when students were given space to reflect, make mistakes, and return again. Trust-building, story-sharing, and slow thinking created deeper outcomes than rushing toward performance or assessment. **Mercy formation is not an event—it is a lifelong unfolding.**



Students were asked to consider this diagram during our sessions.
Please click on the image to find out more.



Embrace Discomfort as a Catalyst for Growth

Sessions dealing with privilege, oppression, and identity were often met with discomfort. But **I learned not to shy away from this. When held in a respectful, relational space, discomfort became a doorway to deeper insight.** Encourage courageous conversations (Andrea Haller – Cohort 3 – and her project about Courageous Conversations was very useful here) rather than comfortable consensus.

Centre Student Voice

The most meaningful sessions were those shaped by student questions, reflections, and responses. Co-creation led to stronger buy-in. **Allow space for students to lead, create, and innovate. Their stories are not only valid—they are vital.**

Keep the Vision Long Term

This programme should not be a once-off project. Its strength lies in its consistency, its spiral nature, and its presence in the life of the school year after year. **With each cohort, the Mercy flame is passed on and renewed.**

Celebrate Creative Expression

Artistic expression helped students process emotion, build confidence, and claim agency. Include poetry, visual art, music, and performance as core pedagogical tools—not add-ons. **The integration of art allowed multiple entry points for students of different personalities and learning styles.**



Grade 10 Students perform a scene from *Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Metaphors* titled *The Three Little Pigs*, by Mike van Graan. Click on the image to watch the full performance.



ix) Challenges.....

1.

Emotional Weight of the Topics:

Sessions dealing with apartheid, gender-based violence, race, and trauma brought up strong emotions—grief, guilt, anger, confusion. While these emotions are necessary parts of transformation, they were difficult for students (and me) to carry. It was crucial to build in time for debriefing, journalling, and quiet reflection.

Navigating Privilege and Discomfort:

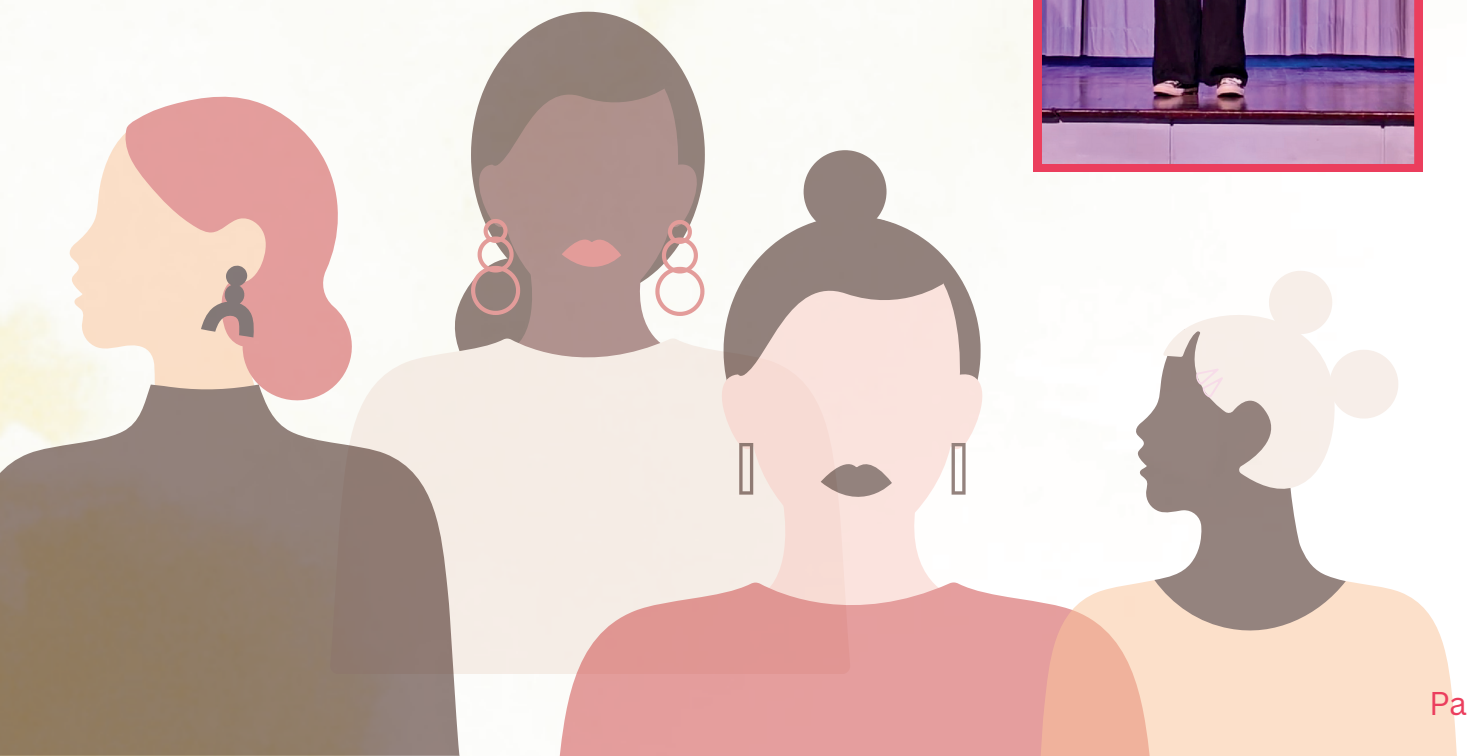
Students came from different backgrounds, with varying levels of awareness around race, class, and systemic injustice. Creating a space that felt inclusive and brave—not just safe—meant learning to sit with discomfort.

2.

Palesa Tshidzumba performs her poem,

The Torch of Blind Ambition.

Click on the image to watch her performance, and on the title to read the full poem.



... and Learnings

1.

Students are ready:

Young people are hungry for spaces of truth and connection. When given the tools and support, they rise to the challenge with honesty, insight, and grace.

Mercy Values are a Compass:

Compassion, justice, respect, and dignity grounded even the most difficult conversations. Mercy language helped hold complexity and guide moral discernment.

2.

3.

Creative Mediums Transform Learning:

Poetry, drama, art, and silence helped students move beyond intellectual understanding to embodied wisdom. **Many learners found their voice not in debate, but in creative expression.**

Transformation Ripples Outward:

Students took their learning into assemblies, leadership spaces, family conversations, and future choices. **The impact extended far beyond the 10 sessions—into identity, vocation, and community.**

4.



X) Implementation Toolkit and Handbook

To support educators and Mercy schools who wish to replicate or adapt the Mercy Ambassadors' Programme, I have **developed a practical and values-driven implementation toolkit.**

Rooted in the experience of St Teresa's School, this toolkit is designed to **guide facilitators in launching a transformative journey that aligns with local needs while staying true to the Mercy ethos.**

This is not a prescriptive curriculum but a flexible, modular guide. **Facilitators are encouraged to adapt content to their students' context, cultural background, and community needs.**

Sessions may be used as a full programme or integrated into Religious Education, Life Orientation, History, Dramatic Arts or Social Studies classes.

Above all, **the toolkit is an invitation to listen deeply, lead gently, and build a Mercy-inspired space of transformation.**



Watch Lilitha Nyobole perform her poem, *South Africa, Our Rainbow Nation.*

Click on the image to view her performance and the title of the poem to read the full piece.



Xi) Future Visions: Scaling the Programme

The success and transformative impact of the Mercy Ambassadors' Programme has generated a bold and hopeful vision for its future. As a living expression of Catherine McAuley's mission, **this programme is not a static project but an evolving invitation to justice, reflection, and leadership rooted in Mercy.**

This future vision is not about replication but regeneration. It seeks to honour the courageous roots of the Sisters of Mercy while imagining a new generation of leaders—compassionate, bold, and grounded in faith—who will carry Mercy into a world in need.

Following positive feedback from all relevant stakeholders, the Principal of St Teresa's has asked me to continue running the 10-part module in 2026 and beyond. I look forward to applying everything I've learned to refine and strengthen the programme each year, adapting it to meet the unique needs and dynamics of each new group of Grade 10 students.

In doing so, we will continue to form Global Citizens of the 21st Century - Women of courage, conscience, and creativity.



Kopano Taiwo's artwork in response to the programme.

A Tribute to the Sisters of Mercy

Service was the hallmark of Catherine's leadership. She worked from a place of deep personal awareness and reflection, and saw even in the most marginalised members of society an inalienable dignity that could be honoured through practical and compassionate works of Mercy.

Mercy Emerging Leaders Fellowship Impact Report

This programme would not exist without the vision, courage, and faith of the Sisters of Mercy.

Their legacy is woven into every thread of the Mercy Ambassadors' journey—from the call to justice, to the compassionate listening, to the deep belief that education can heal and transform.

Since their arrival in South Africa in 1897, the **Sisters of Mercy have lived their mission with humility, resilience, and boldness.** They built schools from scratch, opened clinics and shelters in forgotten places, and **stood beside those who were marginalised and silenced. In doing so, they planted seeds of dignity, access, and hope.**

They modelled a leadership that was both tender and fierce, always rooted in the Gospel and the example of Catherine McAuley.

To the Sisters of Mercy, past and present: we thank you. **You have shown us that love is a verb, that justice is a calling, and that Mercy is a lifelong pilgrimage.** This report is dedicated to your memory, your ministry, and your **unwavering hope in the power of education to change the world.** Your legacy is not only in institution - but in lives transformed, in systems questioned, and in hearts opened.

To the Sisters who welcomed all children, resisted injustice, and built schools from nothing—this report is for you.

A glossary of Terms:



BIAS:

Is any thought or action that discriminates or disproportionately favours one person or group of people over another, based on superficial or inaccurate perceptions of the person or group.

DIVERSITY:

Having a range of people with various racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural backgrounds and various lifestyles, experiences, and interests.

EQUITY:

The term “equity” refers to fairness and justice and is distinguished from equality. Whereas equality means providing the same to all, equity means recognising that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances. The process is ongoing, requiring us to identify and overcome intentional and unintentional barriers arising from bias or systemic structures.

APARTHEID:

The legal system introduced by the National Party in South Africa (1948–1994) which enforced the segregation of people according to race. Laws such as the Pass Laws, the Group Areas Act, and the Immorality Act were central to this system. Although apartheid was only made law in 1948, the oppression of non-white people in South Africa began much earlier, in 1652, when Jan van Riebeeck arrived in the Cape and established the first European colony there.

COLOURED:

In South Africa, “coloured” is a widely used and socially accepted term describing a distinct cultural and ethnic community with mixed ancestry, often including African, European, and Asian heritage. While it originated as an apartheid-era racial classification, many people proudly embrace “coloured” as a marker of identity, heritage, and belonging. It is a normal part of everyday language in South Africa and carries none of the offensive connotations the term holds in countries such as the United States.

EQUALITY:

The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, or opportunities. (Oxford Dictionary)

A glossary of Terms:



INTERSECTIONALITY:

In social theory, is the interaction and cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination affecting the daily lives of individuals, particularly women of colour. The term also refers more broadly to an intellectual framework for understanding how various aspects of individual identity—including race, gender, social class, and sexuality—interact to create unique experiences of privilege or oppression. The term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Britannica)

RACE vs ETHNICITY:

“Race” is usually associated with biology and linked with physical characteristics such as skin colour. “Ethnicity” is often linked with cultural expression and identification. However, both are social constructs used to categorise and characterise seemingly distinct populations. It is a contentious term, particularly in countries that are former colonies, such as South Africa.

SOCIAL JUSTICE:

is the belief that everyone deserves equal rights, opportunities, and treatment regardless of their race, economic status, sexuality, or gender identity. (Dolan-Reilly, 2013)

SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION:

When the rules, policies, or everyday practices of an organisation or part of society unfairly disadvantage a group of people - not because of one person’s actions, but because the system itself is set up in a way that keeps them at a disadvantage.

TRANSFORMATION:

In a South African context, the term “transformation” is generally used to express a change from the systems in place during colonialism and apartheid to something that is in line with our democratically developed Constitution, and which achieves real lived equality and non-discrimination in all spheres of life.



Acknowledgements of Gratitude

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to a number of people who have made this journey possible.

Firstly, to **Sister Angela Reed, Mayet Latonio**, and **Sister Paula Anamani** - fondly known as the Princess of Samoa - for leading the MELF journey with such dedication and generosity of spirit. You have made this an extraordinary experience.

Secondly to **Cecilie Kern, Isabel Salter and Tylia Barnes**, who have been sounding boards at various moments throughout this journey, thank you.

Of course, none of this would have been possible without the generous **support of our donor**.

I am deeply and enduringly grateful for this investment in our work.

To my **fellow cohort members**, thank you for your constant guidance, encouragement, and companionship throughout this process. You have always been there.

To my principal, **Elsa de Bod**, and my deputy principal, **Lize Els-Booyens** - both of whom I consider dear friends - I could never have done this without you. You have supported me at every step, never hesitating to give your time, advice, and understanding.

Lize, your presence at every session of this module has meant more than words can say.

To **Viviana Adinolfi**, thank you for guiding me through the unfamiliar world of Canva - I can now jokingly add “designer” to my CV, proving once again that teachers are never “just” teachers, but wear countless hats, and to **Christine Griever** for assistance with videography and advice whenever I needed it.

To **Claire Leonardi** and **Peter Terry**, thank you for proofreading my work and providing invaluable input. Your attention to detail is beyond compare.

Thank You



Acknowledgements of Gratitude

To **Mike van Graan**, playwright of *Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Metaphors*, thank you for allowing your work - a play about the Sustainable Development Goals - to be showcased without royalties or hesitation. Your generosity and commitment to meaningful storytelling are inspiring.

To **Nicholas James Mycroft**, my partner through it all - thank you for your patience, for being my sounding board, and for supporting me through the tears, as well as the triumphs.

To **my parents**, thank you for answering the phone in moments of doubt, distress, or exhaustion, and for always believing that I would get through this year.

To **Sister Barbara, Sister Therese, Sister Connie**, and all of the Sisters of Mercy in South Africa, especially at St Teresa's, your support has been a gift. From the very moment I started at St Teresa's and I heard the words, "I have a challenge for you," your encouragement has meant more than you know.

To the **Grade 10s of 2025 - my Mercy Ambassadors**, may you always be compassionate and Globally Responsible Citizens. Thank you for fully engaging with this Programme.

And finally, to **Sister Margaret Daly**, my mentor - even though you are on the other side of the world, it has felt as though you were right beside me. Your kindness, calm, and steadfast presence have guided me through every step. I am more grateful than words can ever express.

Thank You

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