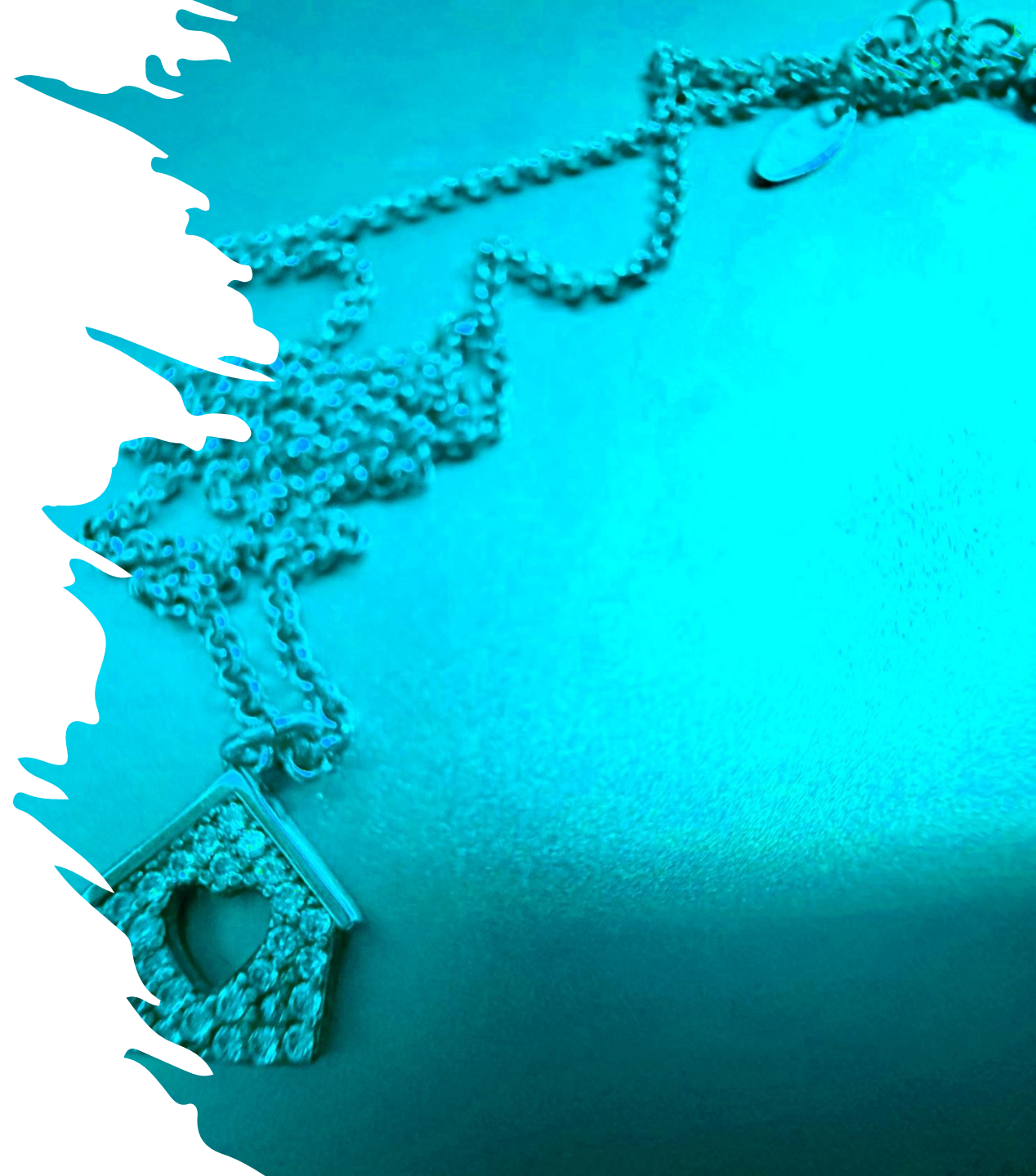


What does home
mean to you?



A MERCY
INSPIRED
FORMATION
RESOURCE

WHERE MERCY DWELLS

ELIZABETH BLOM



Catherine reminded us:

*“The poor need
help today, not
next week.”*

MERCY INTERNATIONAL CENTRE



Poverty wore a
woman's face...
Poverty still wears
a woman's face





KLOE'S STORY

Kloe's testimony is a profound embodiment of Monique Deveau's assertion that "the poor do not need our pity. They need our solidarity." Her life story reveals the devastating impact of generational trauma, homelessness and poverty, but it also shines with resilience and determination to break the cycle. Her words remind us that those experiencing poverty are not passive recipients of charity but active agents of change when supported with genuine solidarity.

"Home life, I was surrounded by substance, alcohol abuse, domestic violence, sexual assaults, mental health, poverty, and neglect," Kloe shares. At just 12 years old, she was homeless, sleeping in parks and breaking into public toilets for safety. Yet she carried within her the fierce determination to protect her siblings and to create a better life: "I thought that I could break the cycle."

Her turning point came when she received housing support: "If it wasn't for housing support, I would have [gone back]. I felt like I was given back my power and I felt fearless. It created a pathway out. It provided not just safety and hope, but freedom and opportunity and a chance."

Through programs like YPI (Young Parent Influencers) and the Lady Musgrave Logan Housing Project, Kloe found healing and growth.



*“The cry of the
earth and the
cry of the
poor are one.”*

Pope Francis

REFLECTION PROMPTS

1. How do you understand ecological disaster as a justice issue, not just an environmental one?
2. How might your own choices, in consumption, advocacy, or solidarity, reflect the values of Mercy in responding to ecological crises?
3. Where have you seen resilience and hope rise up in the face of devastation and how can you stand with those who are most vulnerable?

TOOLKIT FOR ACTION

Empathy

Create opportunities for intergenerational dialogue on climate, housing and resilience.

Connection

Elevate the voices of women and children experiencing homelessness to shape housing and climate solutions.

Creativity

Organise a “Letter to Leaders” campaign amplifying women’s voices. Collect reflections, poems or testimonies from women about housing insecurity and send them to policymakers.



The Toolkit for Action in
Where Mercy Dwells invites
us into three dispositions

that reshape how
we respond:

Empathy

Connection

Creativity

Catherine opened
the door then; we
are called to open
doors now.



CHAPTER 1: CATHERINE'S DOOR WAS OPEN

*"The poor need help
today, not next week."*

– Catherine McAuley

The story of Mercy began with an open door. Catherine McAuley did not set out to found a religious congregation. She simply opened a home — The House of Mercy — for women and children who had nowhere else to go.

Catherine's Ireland was scarred by the Penal Laws, which stripped Catholics, especially poor women, of land, power, and education. Generations of women were left without the means to secure housing, inherit property or pursue education, rendering them and their children vulnerable to poverty

and displacement (MacCurtain, 2010, 368-369).

In this landscape of exclusion, Catherine's vision was nothing short of radical. The House of Mercy on Baggot Street was more than a building; it was a public statement that women's lives mattered, that dignity could be restored and that faith was inseparable from justice. She created not only shelter, but community, education and hope.

Today, in Australia and around the world, the patterns of exclusion echo Catherine's era. Families wait years on housing lists while rents soar. Women remain trapped in cycles of violence because leaving means homelessness. Children bear homelessness in their bodies,

through disrupted schooling, anxiety and lost opportunities. Tent cities rise in our suburbs and under bridges, silent witnesses to systems that wound.

To look "then and now" through the lens of Mercy is to see that the call has not changed: open doors where the world closes them, disrupt systems of exclusion, and embody welcome as both resistance and grace.

In today's world, as housing becomes a privilege rather than a right, we hear Catherine's voice echo:

*Relieve the misery and
address the causes.*

As Mary C. Sullivan rsm (2021)
reminds us,

“The action of mercying is more than doing the works of feeding, clothing, sheltering and comforting. It is also persistently acting to remove what causes the need for such mercying: the unjust policies, the oppressive structures, the widespread ignoring of and casual indifference toward human suffering, the complacent attitudes of supremacy that allow such suffering.

We are to be those who amplify Lazarus’s voice at the rich man’s gate, who stand with the Syrophoenician woman pleading for her daughter, the Josephs of Arimathea daring to approach the Pilates of this world, and the

Peters and Johns boldly teaching the temple leaders at the Beautiful Gate.

Through such mercying, we may slowly awaken ourselves and others from the harmful sleep of our inhumanity.”

To reflect on Catherine’s response to homelessness is to examine our own. How do we open our doors, our hearts and our systems to those who have been pushed aside?

Where Mercy dwells,
justice stirs.

Where women rise,
communities
are restored.

Where children are safe,
the Gospel lives again.

Let this resource not be an ending,

but a beginning of solidarity,
of hope and of the world
reimagined.

*“Foxes have holes, and
birds of the air have
nests; but the Son of
Man has nowhere
to lay his head.”*

– Luke 9:58



‘Homeless Jesus’ by sculptor Timothy Schmalz. Learn why he created a sculpture depicting Jesus as a homeless person, sleeping on a park bench.

WATCH: <http://bit.ly/4mMrIUf>

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where do I see displacement happening in my own community?
2. What parallels strike me between Catherine's era and our own?
3. What does mercy look like in my community today?

TOOLKIT FOR ACTION

Empathy

Host a discussion group comparing historical Mercy responses to today's housing challenges.

Connection

Share Catherine's story alongside local housing statistics in parish or school settings.

Creativity

Create a "Mercy timeline" art or photo project comparing Catherine's era and today's housing crisis, showing continuity of the call to welcome.

LISTENING TO CATHERINE WORDS

Listen to the words of Catherine McAuley as preserved in her letters; reflect on the spirit and tone of her voice through her written words.

Where to Access Catherine McAuley's Letters:

Online Archives

Mercy International Association – Mercy Heritage (Preservica)

mercyworld.org/spirituality/mercy-heritage-preservica

Sisters of Mercy, Ireland – Cause for the Canonisation

sistersofmercy.ie/cause-for-the-canonisation-of-catherine-mcauley

Published Books

The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818–1841 – Edited by Mary C. Sullivan, RSM (Four Courts Press, 2004).

The Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1827–1841 – Edited by Sr M. Angela Bolster, RSM (1989).

Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy – Mary C. Sullivan, RSM (1995).

Reflection Ideas:

- Read one letter slowly, imagining the context and emotion behind her words. Notice her choice of language, tone and expressions of faith, care and humour.
- Consider what values and convictions she models for us today.

In the spirit of Catherine, may we choose to see clearly, feel deeply and act boldly. May we not only walk alongside those who are displaced, but disrupt the systems that create displacement. There is still much work to be done!

Catherine's Era (Ireland, 1800s):

- Penal Laws stripped Catholics, especially poor women, of land, power and education
- Poor women and children displaced due to social control, discrimination and poverty
- Catherine responded with safe shelter, education and a House of Mercy for women and children
- A moral response born out of faith and justice.



“Catherine with children”
© Sister Marie Henderson, RSM
mcauleyimages.com
mhendersonrsm@gmail.com

Today (Australia, 2020s) in brief:

- Women over 55 are the fastest growing homeless demographic (<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/age-discrimination/projects/risk-homelessness-older-women>)
- First Nations women face systemic injustice (<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/homelessness-and-homelessness-services>)
- Women and children are displaced due to domestic violence, unaffordable housing and lack of support
- Mercy ministries today respond with housing services, advocacy, trauma support and education
- A continuation of that legacy challenging systemic causes, not just treating symptoms.

**God of Shelter and Mercy,
You placed a dream
in the heart of Catherine,
to walk with the poor,
to honour their dignity.
Open our hearts,
that we may
open our doors.
Strengthen us
to respond to
the cry of the poor,
and the call
of your justice.
Amen.**

Fratelli Tutti addresses themes related to homelessness, violence, family, women and children, whilst emphasising the need for solidarity, justice and care for the vulnerable. Here are some relevant excerpts to explore:

HOMELESSNESS

On migrants and refugees:

“Many migrants have fled from war, persecution and natural catastrophes. Others, rightly, ‘are seeking opportunities for themselves and their families. They dream of a better future and they want to create the conditions for achieving it.’”

(FT, #37)

On poverty and exclusion:

“Some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence.” (FT, #18)

VIOLENCE

On war and conflict:

“War is a failure of politics and of humanity, a shameful capitulation, a stinging defeat before the forces of evil.” (FT, #261)

On terrorism:

“Terrorism is deplorable and threatens the security of people... It is due to an accumulation of incorrect interpretations of religious texts and to policies linked to hunger, poverty, injustice, oppression, and pride.”

(FT, #283)

FAMILY

On family bonds:

“In families, everyone contributes to the common purpose; everyone works for the common good, not denying each person’s individuality but encouraging and supporting it.”

(FT, #230)

On the elderly:

“By isolating the elderly and leaving them in the care of others without the closeness and concern of family members, we disfigure and impoverish the family itself.” (FT, #19)

WOMEN AND CHILDREN

On women’s dignity:

“We should also recognize that ‘even though the international community has adopted numerous agreements aimed at ending slavery in all its forms... millions of people today – children, women and men of all ages – are deprived of freedom and forced to live in conditions akin to slavery.’”

(FT, #24)

On children and education:

“Education serves by making it possible for each human being to shape his or her own future.”

(FT, #187)



- restore agency and hope
- Spiritual accompaniment that honours trauma and nurtures resilience

These are not isolated services — they are interconnected ministries rooted in relational justice. They reflect Catherine McAuley’s own vision of mercy “walking the streets.”

Women: Carriers of Daily Heroism

“The Church acknowledges the indispensable contribution which women make to society through the sensitivity, intuition and other distinctive skill sets which they, more than men, tend to possess” (EG #103).

And yet, “doubly poor are those women who endure situations

of exclusion, mistreatment and violence” (EG #212). In our communities we meet such women daily. Women who carry their families with extraordinary heroism, resisting despair, defending their children and daring to seek safe housing against all odds. Their resilience is not only inspiring, it is profoundly theological, showing us the strength of Christ revealed through human vulnerability. Children: The Most Defenseless “Among the vulnerable for whom the Church wishes to care with particular love and concern are unborn children, the most defenceless and innocent among us” (EG #213).

But Pope Francis also names the children exploited in begging, labour, or trafficking: “Where is your brother or sister whom you

are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labour?” (EG #211).

Inspired by Catherine McAuley’s legacy, Mercy ministries continue to respond to the needs of women and children. “All of us are called... to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel” (EG #20).

Poverty and Homelessness: The Cry We Cannot Ignore

“God’s heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself ‘became poor’ (2 Cor 8:9)” (EG #197). Poverty is not a natural inevitability, it is the result of social and economic structures that exclude.

“Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as agriculture, fishing and forestry” (LS, #25).

When the poor are forced into unsafe housing, their relocation must not “heap suffering upon suffering,” but instead involve their voice and choice in creating decent and sustainable homes (LS, #152).

Laudato Si' challenges us to consider the legacy we are leaving:

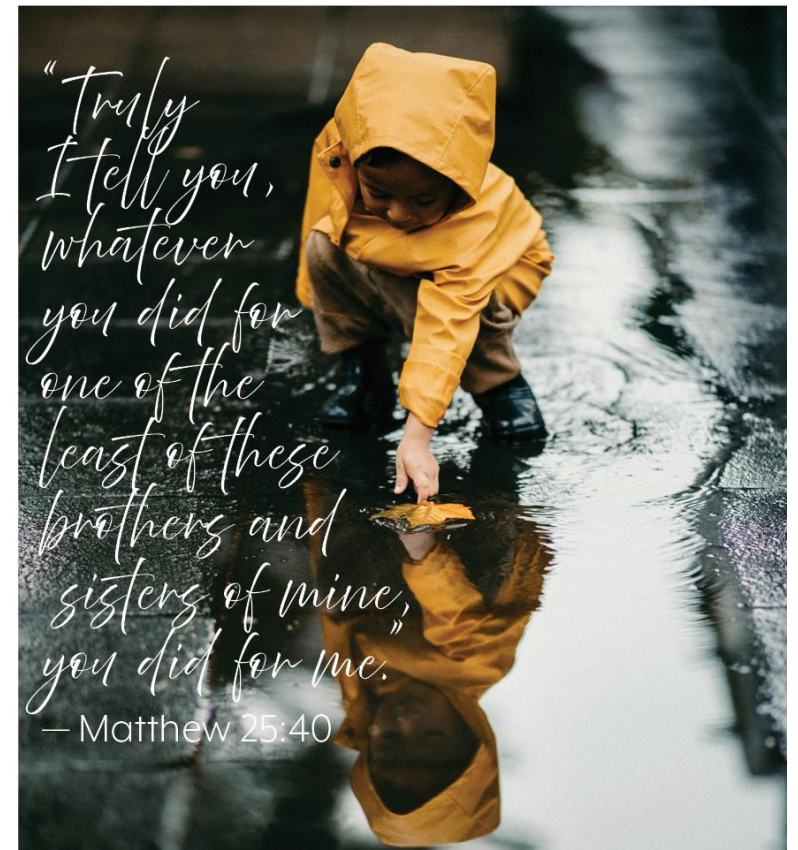
“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (LS, #160).

“The notion of the common good also extends to future generations... Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice” (LS, #159).

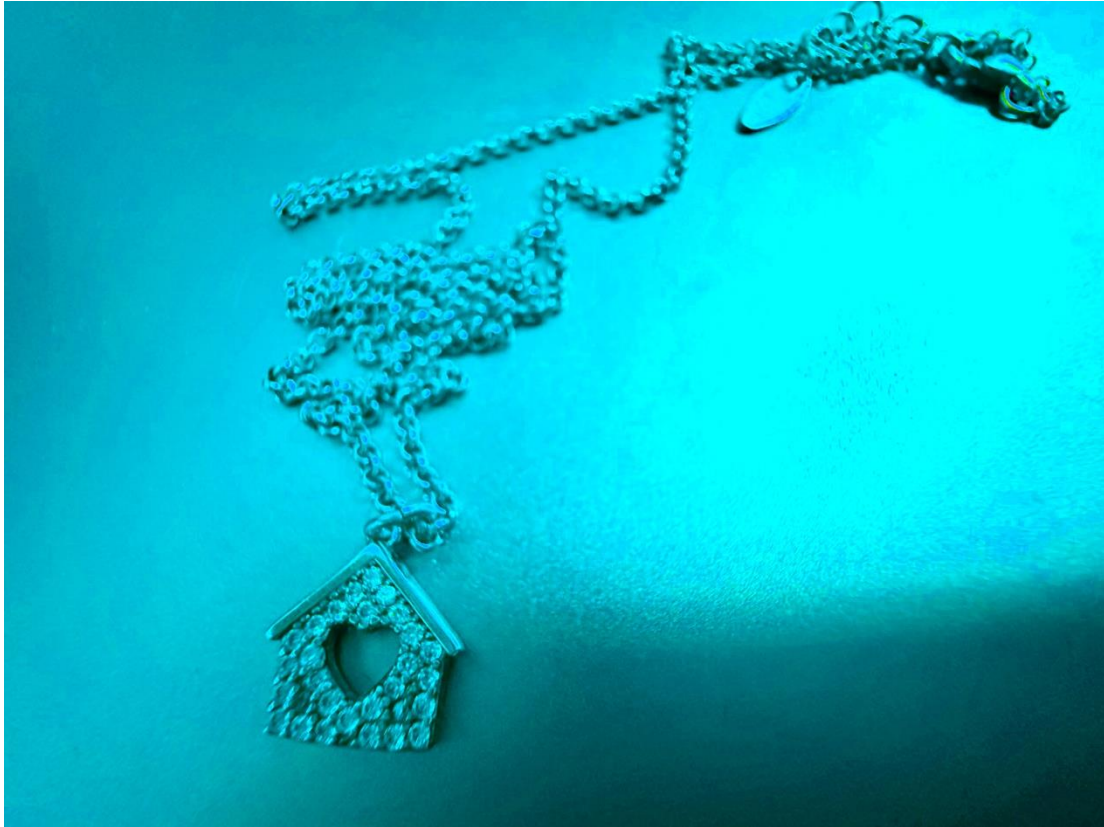
The encyclical also reminds us that renewal begins in our most intimate circles. The family is described as the “heart of the culture of life” (LS, #213), a place where we learn care, respect, and harmony with creation. Just as Catherine McAuley embodied a spirit of mercy in small, practical gestures, we too are invited into daily practices that resist exploitation and nurture new ways of living. As Francis writes:

“An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” (LS, #230).

To see with new eyes is to recognise that ecological devastation, housing insecurity, and social displacement are intertwined realities. Women and children at the margins reveal the consequences of our choices and call us into a solidarity that is both practical and profound.



Where Mercy Dwells



"Mercy is the supreme act by which God comes to meet us; it is the way which opens our hearts to the hope of an everlasting love."

– Pope Francis, 2015)

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mean to you?

