

The Business of Our Lives (Paper 4 of 6)

BY MARY REYNOLDS RSM

WHAT distinguished Catherine from other philanthropists of her day was her ability to imagine life differently. Many of her contemporaries were prepared to provide hand outs but could not imagine or even desire a society where those who were oppressed, marginalised or excluded would find a central role and a sense of belonging in that very society. Catherine's genius was that she could stand as a bridge between the rich and the poor, employing whatever advantage her own background and her connection with people of influence afforded her in the relief and advancement of poor people. She had a particular ability to address immediate need in a practical and loving way while at the same time addressing the systemic issues that underpinned those needs.

Catherine was not a 'Lady bountiful' bestowing her favours on the waifs and strays but rather an instigator of professional services that would empower those who were now powerless because of the oppressive structures imposed on them. She saw no virtue in poverty. Anything that advanced human dignity was worthy of her attention and so the scope of her ministry and the span of those to whom she ministered was amazingly wide and varied.

Three extraordinary elements came together in Catherine – her innate love and concern for people, her faith belief and conviction that she encountered Christ in every person in need and her fertile imagination that envisioned an alternative society. As Joanna Regan RSM expresses it: "By courageous, contagious concern for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the poor, the sick and the ignorant, she broke through the impossibilities of her time. She animated many to walk with her. She animated others at centres of wealth, power and influence to share in her heroic efforts. She connected the rich to the poor, the healthy to the sick, the educated and skilled to the uninstructed, the influential to those of no consequence, the powerful to the weak – to do the work of God on earth".¹

Catherine had already exemplified this multifaceted approach while still living in Coolock. She went regularly to the village carrying with her provisions for the poor and sat for hours with them, listening to their woes and advising and consoling them. Among the poor were Catholics formerly employed as servants in the 'big houses'. They had been employed as cooks, housekeepers, footmen,

coachmen, gardeners, stewards and were reasonably comfortable but they had fallen on very hard times when the 'big houses' began to close in the wake of the Act of Union and the owners went to live in London. In this way, Catherine acquired an intimate knowledge of the poor and thus she developed extraordinary love for them and admiration for their fortitude. Her attitude was so different to other benefactors who, while 'giving alms', still considered the poor as belonging to the lowest stratum of society and as menial, dishonest, untruthful.

Catherine also undertook to instruct the children of Coolock whom she gathered into the gate-lodge. In this, she had support of the local Catholic priest, Father Nugent (it was he who received William Callaghan into the Catholic Church). Father Nugent was later transferred to Abbey Street and Liffey Street Parish in the city centre and because of his association with Catherine at Coolock, he invited her to assist in a school for poor girls which he opened.

Catherine held that the best way to assist those in need was to train them to help themselves, and with this as her guiding principle she taught plain and fancy needlework and set up a shop where finished goods could be displayed and sold. This was a time when all garments, both plain and elaborate, had to be sewn by hand, so there was a ready outlet for such work which she persuaded many of her rich friends to purchase. The girls were taught to be self-respecting and to be proud of their ability to earn a livelihood by the work of their hands.

It was while working at the school that Catherine met with the little homeless orphan thrown out on the street by a heartless landlord, and it was in visiting one of the nearby hovels, that she came upon the utterly neglected and eccentric Mrs Harper. Both of these she took to live with her in Coolock.

However, Catherine could not meet all the needs that presented. There was the case of the pretty servant girl in one of the 'big houses' who came to her because the son of the house was sexually harassing her. She asked Catherine to get her into a safe refuge where she could earn a recommendation for future employment. Catherine sought help through a charitable group only to find that the committee responsible for placements was not to meet until the following week. The young woman disappeared

and Catherine never forgot the pain of that experience, one of those which gave rise to her acting principle: "The poor need help today, not next week".²

Once Catherine came into her fortune, her first resolve was to look after girls such as that distressed young woman she had been unable to help. She realised that Coolock House was much too small for her purposes – care of servants seeking employment, mothering orphans, educating and training poor girls. It was thus that the site at Baggot Street was acquired and the House of Mercy was built. Hardly had it opened its doors than women arrived seeking protection and poor children from the local lanes and alley ways found their way there. Shortly, the House of Mercy assumed the status of a modern sheltered workshop, an employment bureau, a night hostel, an orphanage, an adult education centre and an elementary school. Catherine, knowingly or unknowingly, had placed it in one of the most exclusive quarters of Dublin at a time when the still unrevoked Penal Laws forbade the erection of Catholic buildings on the main street of Irish cities and towns. In a sense this was a symbol of who and what Catherine was. Today we might call it 'liminality'.

Liminality is all about risk and has been described as a counter-cultural movement on the frontier, opening up new horizons, indicating new possibilities, fuelled by a new vision of the future. Many agree that Catherine's unambiguous response to the needs of the poor and the disadvantaged, places her in a strikingly liminal context as a woman who targeted those virtually unexplored areas of human need and exclusion which constituted the dark spots of the Ireland and England of her day. What Catherine envisaged was utterly prophetic. At a time when social work as we know it today was in the womb of the future, in an age when women were severely discriminated against, she organised and led others in a liminal crusade for human betterment through the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy. She became a reformer of remarkable energy and compassion and her 'programme of Mercy' broke through contemporary and, until then, impregnable barriers of indifference and discrimination.

Catherine's ministry to the poor, sick and ignorant propelled her into areas of home and hospital visitation, into specialised nursing care and into education at primary, secondary and vocational or technical level. In all of those areas she crossed new frontiers. Her foundational enterprise was directly aimed at enabling poor people and affirming them through education, healing, safeguarding their faith and alleviating their hardships through her concern and immediacy, as shown, for example, during the cholera epidemic.

We know that Catherine's own life was scarred by poverty and privation in consequence of which she was able to relate to the poor from the vantage of a lived experience. She was indeed sensitised towards those who were hungering not only for food, but for religion, education, peace, kindness, recognition and justice.

A touching example of Catherine's counter-cultural way of dealing with the poor is to compare her system of support with the Poor Law system of 1838 which set up the workhouses or poorhouses.³ This depraved and unjust system which insisted that only those who came to reside in a designated poorhouse could get help, served to make paupers of those, who more often than not, sought nothing more than temporary relief to tide them over difficult periods.

Initially, Catherine and her companions were treated with contempt by those in charge of the workhouse hospitals and, while the South Dublin Union did not grant permission for the sisters to visit or "to attend upon the sick and the infirm of their own persuasion", they had gained access earlier in the other foundations outside Dublin. They also went to assist people in their homes, bringing them food and comfort, as well as serving the needs of those who called to Baggot Street. In six years alone, 772 homeless and unemployed women were welcomed into the House of Mercy where they experienced friendship, prayer, love, peace, compassion and hope. Young women of good character who had employment, yet not sufficient means to provide safe lodging, were invited into it at night, as their home. There was even a soup kitchen there, the account of which comes, with a small hint of annoyance, from the artist Clare Augustine Moore. She says: "There was soup to be made for a hundred, sometimes more, and they had to pass through to the office down to the dining hall in squadrons... so there was work and dirt and discontent, as well as derangement of the office business and inconvenience in the management in the House of Mercy".⁴ In the midst of all this, Catherine insisted on "the kind word, the gentle compassionate look and the patient hearing of their sorrows".⁵ She trusted and accepted all who came to her for help and invariably acted on her conviction that "it is better to relieve a hundred imposters – if there be any such – than to suffer one really distressed person to be sent away empty".⁶

Catherine's special love for the sick and dying was born, no doubt, out of many years accompanying such people. Her personal gift of loving care of the sick flowed from her direct experience of nursing her own mother, and then her adoptive mother, Mrs Callaghan. She also gained experience from her visits to the sick poor, struggling to live in

wretched hovels around the back streets of Dublin and Coolock. The most searing experience of her earlier years was being at her mother's death. But out of these experiences there was distilled the most tender love for the sick and dying expressed in devoted and skilled care for them, whether it was for the poor in their homes or in the temporary depots set up during the cholera epidemic. She included in her original rule: "Great tenderness must be employed and when death is not immediately expected, it will be well to relieve the distress first and to endeavour by every practicable means to promote the cleanliness, ease and comfort of the patient, since we are ever most disposed to receive advice and instruction from those who are evinced compassion for us".⁷

An invitation to attend the victims of the disastrous cholera plague came just as the young congregation was forming in 1832. The attentiveness of the sisters to the care of the sick must have been already well recognised because it was to them that the Board of Health appealed for help when the plague struck. The Archbishop had no difficulty in giving his approval for them to minister to the cholera victims. He did, however, call to the convent to ask them to take every precaution against contagion, and to be careful not to attract attention by the dress they wore in the streets.

Catherine and her companions worked endless hours at the makeshift hospital set up in Townsend Street. She agreed that, as long as the plague ravaged the city, the sisters would do shifts on duty, beginning at 8:00am and ending at 8:00pm. Their presence at the hospital gave great comfort and reassurance and helped to overcome the fears of many who had actually been too frightened to go into hospitals before the sisters took over nursing. They had got the notion that the doctors wanted to kill them, and some of them believed the rumour that cholera sufferers were in danger of being buried alive in order to curtail the contagion. Force had to be used to remove some of them from their dreadful living places. Certain unscrupulous orderlies in the hospitals were accustomed to consume the stimulants which the doctors had prescribed. Catherine soon remedied that disorder and she and the other sisters soothed the last hours of many a sufferer. It is said that Catherine used to treat the patients with the homely remedy of heated port wine and that they found it a wonderful palliative. At the height of the fever, deaths in Dublin averaged over 600 a day but it was noted that there were fewer casualties in Townsend Depot than anywhere else.

It was Catherine's concern for the sick and especially the dying, whom she felt needed support and counsel in a particular way, that impelled her to visit Catholic

patients in Dublin's hospitals, which at that time were all under Protestant patronage. The good standing she had in those hospitals because of her medical connections through her brother and brother in law who were both doctors, and the assumption, which she did not dissuade, that she was Protestant as they were, gave her a ready entry, notably to Sir Patrick Dun's, Mercer's, Madame Spencer's, the Coombe, and the Hospital for the Incurables in Donnybrook. Catherine did have a desire to found a Catholic hospital as Mary Aikenhead did in 1834 but her dream was not realised until 20 years after her death when the Dublin Mater was founded in 1861.

Catherine's approach to education was an offshoot of her ideals to empower the poor by providing them with necessary opportunities and to assist the emancipation of women through the medium of education.⁸ While the penal embargo on education of Catholics still prevailed, in 1825 Catherine travelled to France with Fanny Tighe (who later entered the Presentations in Galway) to acquaint herself with how the De la Salle Brothers and the French Sisters of Charity were engaging with the education of children in the slums. To appreciate the daring and courage that this demanded, we have only to recall the immense responsibilities that Catherine was then carrying – supervising the building of Baggot Street, assisting in the education and training of the young girls in Abbey Street, and the family commitments of caring for the five Macauley children, the two Byrns, the two orphans and Mrs Harper, all whom were still at Coolock. Yet, she was determined that her system of education would suit the needs of the poor, would respect their cultural and political aspirations and would form them in their faith.

One can almost hear the De la Salle philosophy echoed in her observation that "To teach well, kindness and patience, though indispensable will not suffice without a judicious method of imparting knowledge". Her own personality, and no doubt the example of the Daughters of Charity, caused her to proclaim: "Be ever ready to praise, to encourage, to stimulate, but slow to censure, and still more slow to condemn".⁹ Surely her observations in those French schools as well as her own experience led her to say that "if the children are made to feel that their teachers are their best friends, it will be easy to manage them", and that "if children are given enough to do they will never deserve punishment".¹⁰

We are not sure how much of the French system Catherine replicated in her schools' curriculum, or whether some of the value system of the post French Revolution was more attractive to her than that of the Kildare Street Schools which promoted a thoroughly

British ethos. Certainly, she would have gleaned from them an educational methodology that gave faith formation a central place. Yet, she ensured that she would benefit from the Kildare Street system too, if for nothing more than to become acquainted with its proselytising methods. Catherine again did not dissuade her hosts of their assumption that she was Protestant; yet she used the opportunity of her visits to the schools to get the names and addresses of enrolled Catholic children and, no doubt, to pay a follow up visit to their homes.

Catherine actually approved of the pedagogical expertise of the Kildare Street Schools and took copious notes during her visits. It is likely that these visits introduced her to the Monitorial or Lancastrian system, that is, where a senior pupil was deemed as an assistant teacher. She was the first to introduce this system in Catholic educational circles and she trained and salaried monitresses prior to 1836 when the government's Marlborough Training School was opened – although exclusively for boys.

Baggot Street also enjoyed the status of a monitress training centre. Indeed, schools as far away as Newry were petitioning Catherine for women qualified as monitresses. Bishop Blake, formerly curate of Westland Row, and a good friend of Catherine wrote to her in January, 1836: "I am informed by Mrs Brydon, Principal of the most respectable establishment for the education of young ladies in this town [Newry], that as she is in need of an assistant in her school, she has applied to you with hope of obtaining through your recommendation a young woman well qualified for such a situation".¹¹ The Mrs Brydon referred to was superior of the 'Rich Poor Clares' in Newry.

There also exists a very interesting letter from Catherine to Mary Anne Doyle in which she advised the Tullamore Sisters "to try to get a well qualified monitress from the Model (Training) School until your sisters know the method... She should be paid a small salary out of what the Board allows".¹² Catherine was ahead of her time in recommending salary as this did not become practice for years later. By 1877, Catherine's Baggot Street School was formally recognised as Ireland's first Training School for Female Teachers and given the title 'Sedes Sapientiae'.

Before the National Schools system was founded, Catherine had opened Baggot Street to 200 poor children. Again this was a daring thing to do. It was government policy, enforceable by penal legislation, to hold Catholic children in ignorance. Such enforced ignorance was nothing short of a cancer in Irish society and eliminated Catholics from advancement in virtually every worthwhile area of life. At first, she continued what she had pioneered in Abbey Street, the promotion of self-help through

blending the academic with the technical in her school curriculum. However when the government established the National Schools system, she was the first foundress to place her poor schools within it (July 13, 1834). Her reason for taking this step was threefold.

First, she foresaw great evangelical possibilities. "This school," she wrote, "which is as much under the direction of the superintending priest and the sisters as could be desired... Religion instructions are given every day from three til half past three, and any hour in the day we may say what we please to them – hence I could have no objection to be subject to the regulations anywhere."¹³ Second, the much dreaded and unpopular inspectorial system of the new Schools Board held no hazards for the intrepid Catherine. She was convinced that her pupils would benefit from credits obtained by undergoing the examinations set up by the Board. "We intend to have our new school," she said, "connected with the Board of education. The children improve so much more expecting the examination."¹⁴ Third, she welcomed the stipend per pupil that the Board guaranteed. In Limerick, for example she pointed out that this would bring in £40 a year to the sisters there.

Before 1839, Catherine had embarked on secondary education, principally in Carlow, Cork and Naas. She had also attempted to found a secondary school in Kingstown. She saw the need for pension schools to educate children of better-off, middle class parents for whom the fees demanded in the pay schools were prohibitive. The pension or fee was nominal, and for those whose parents could not afford it, Catherine cancelled the debt. She believed that education for the middle classes could alert them to the needs of the poor and would possibly be a seed-bed for vocations. She wrote thus to Josephine Warde in Cork:

"The pension school in Carlow is making great progress. You must get their regulations... Some sweet young persons [are] amongst them who bid fair to become sisters... The girls are obliged to acquire a perfect knowledge of the lessons at home so that to hear the classes is all – one the French class, another grammar and geography, and so on. They have already commenced at Naas and have eighteen pupils – also a poor school".¹⁵

The departure from the usual procedure of opening a poor school in Cork stemmed from Catherine's unwillingness to jeopardise the nearby poor school of the Presentation Sisters which was their only source of apostolate and revenue. By the time of Catherine's death in 1841, the overall network of Mercy schools in Ireland was providing the type of education for the deprived which helped

to liberate thousands of young Catholics from the darkness and disadvantages of illiteracy and discrimination.

Through the Works of Mercy, Catherine always aimed to set people free. Her whole thrust in education was to liberate the poor from ignorance and economic dependence. Likewise, the House of Mercy was a place where the young women who came for shelter were provided with instruction in their faith and with practical skills that would equip them to work for a living.

Catherine's way of assisting the poor was very 'hands on', but she did not stop there. She always aimed to bring the human face of suffering into the vision and consciousness of the well-to-do as a way of challenging them to share their resources with the poor. It was with this in mind that she built her convent in the 'up market' area of Baggot Street. The presence of the poor was not welcomed by everybody there but some hearts were eventually changed and a network of support was established, while resources were connected with human need. She also established pension schools, an initiative which caused some controversy at the time, one of her purposes being to imbue a sense of responsibility for the poor in the more well-off students.

How would Catherine respond to today's needs if she lived in our times?

Joanna Regan RSM has suggested that:

"If Catherine had lived at the end of the twentieth century, instead of the cries of the poor children of Dublin haunting her dreams, the cries of a suffering world would have troubled her sleep. She would no doubt have turned her energy to global interrelationships of rich and poor, knowing that as long as in any country the poor, the sick, the uneducated are oppressed or marginated, the light of the Gospels is dimmed, and peace and justice in the world remain elusive ideals.

In the contemporary world, in spite of energetic measures to alleviate the ills of society – poverty, sickness, ignorance – the poor, the sick, the ignorant abound; the alienated, the lonely, the deserted and the abused abound.

In a world of indifference concerning belief, the erosion of faith in God and intranscendent reality has spawned self destructive greed, selfishness and lifestyles of outmanoeuvring one another. Out of the consequent erosion of integrity in word and work, dishonesty, brutality and destructiveness abound".¹⁶

Against this background, Regan asks: "When were spiritual and temporal works of Mercy – performed with tender courage – more needed?"¹⁷

All of us are invited to see, with the clear vision of Catherine, the situation in our world, in our society, our own community, our own family. Where are the needs that cry out for our attention? What are the needs we overlook because they are almost too close and too ordinary for us to observe? It always comes back to the simplicity and the complexity of the question: Are we doing Mercy, and serving the 'poor, sick and ignorant' in accordance with the needs of our times and in a world very different from hers, and even from the one in which many of us grew to maturity? Ours is one of shifting values, of chaos and confusion, of upheaval and rapid change. Mercy values do not change in their essence; their expression, through action in particular contexts, will change, and must change. Mercy has to be expressed in new ways in relation to actual situations in our own society and in the global society.

We are surrounded on all sides by those who still crave for "the kind word, the gentle look, the patient hearing of sorrows". We know too the 'spiritual hunger' of so many of our time and their need too calls us, to respond. Catherine's words about the privilege we have of being among those whom Jesus has "graciously permitted to serve him in the person of His suffering poor"¹⁸ is a daily call to generosity in our service of healing love and practical care for the sick, for the refugee, asylum seeker or new immigrant, for the homeless, the unemployed, the depressed, the 'drop-out'.

But we have to sort out what has to be let go of in order to meet the challenge of the present time. We are not called to hold on to or to maintain any work, any situation, without carefully discerning why we are engaged with it. In some way, the sorting out is being done for us by the changes of our time. We have already faced radical changes in our ministries and our community arrangements. We have moved on from many former ways of doing Mercy. At times, we have to be open to sustain the impetus of Mercy by surrendering our part of ministry to others. We have to face the challenge of letting go cherished works or roles. There is something here of the quiet wisdom of the dying Catherine: "If the Order be my work, the sooner it falls to the ground the better. If it is God's, it needs no-one".¹⁹

It is right that we should allow ourselves to grieve for so much of what has gone but it is equally important that we take heart from the evidence we see of our openness to change, our willingness to relinquish many of our former securities. It is important for us to listen to the promptings of Catherine, the woman who risked all for the sake of the poor. She was ready to undertake new and revolutionary things in her time and she did them with a simple

practicality, with a passion for the poor that energised her and with a huge trust in the Providence of God. To be like Catherine, we need to have some of her passion for the poor to energise us for action.

A Mercy sister recently expressed it thus:

“What could hold us back from this passion? Is it routine or lack of challenge? Is it fear of change or fear of consequences? Are we fatigued because there are fewer of us or because we experience the loss of those who have left us?

Catherine spent her life and all her inheritance for the poor... Our lives are not given us only for our own personal development, enjoyment and fulfilment. Our resources are not for our own security now and in our retirement years. If our option is for the poor, then we ask ourselves: how does each personal and collective decision further the consciousness of the dominant culture or advance the alternative vision? How much are we co-opted by the values of society rather than moved by the Gospel?”

Before I finish I would like to mention Mercy International Association (MIA). The MIA was established “*To stimulate and inspire Sisters of Mercy, their associates and colleagues in ministry, to continue the work of Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, in ways which are both creative and appropriate to the needs of the world for the time being*” and “*to respond to the cry of the poor*”.

In the past few years the vision has been refocused to further emphasise the global outreach to the poor and to ensure that the charism and spirituality of Mercy is accessible to all who are connected with Mercy worldwide. For some, it may be possible to come to the Mercy International Centre (MIC) in Baggot Street, to drink, as it were, from the wellspring of Mercy. Sisters, associates, co-workers and friends from around the world visit the cradle of the Sisters of Mercy in order to deepen their understanding of the congregation’s heritage and to reflect on how the spirit of Catherine McAuley might be dynamically re-interpreted for our times.

In our developing vision for MIC, the hope is that it will become “the iconic centre of Mercy International, the public flagship of its global mission and ministry of response to global poverty, a place of welcome and hospitality and home to the great heritage of Catherine. We hope too that it will be a centre for the development of mercy theological reflection and spirituality and place of renewal and nourishment of Mercy charism and ethos”.

We know that an actual visit to MIC will not be possible for all so our intention is to share its richness as widely as possible through technological possibilities that will soon

be at our disposal in a new updated website. I therefore encourage you to keep connected with Mercy around the world in this way. It provides a marvellous means of mutual support as together we strive to respond in Mercy to today’s needs and as we ensure that God’s great charism of Mercy will be handed on.

Catherine’s words of encouragement are as true for us today as they were for her early followers: “We ought to have great confidence in God in the discharge of all these offices of Mercy, Spiritual and Corporal, which constitute the business of our lives”.²⁰

¹ Regan, p. 135.

² Quoted as an acting principle rather than a saying or a maxim in Carmel M. Bourke RSM, *A Woman Sings of Mercy*, E.J.Dwyer, Sydney, 1987, p. 8.

³ See reference in Letter 252 in MCS2.

⁴ MCS1, p. 209.

⁵ Familiar Instructions, p. 138.

⁶ Familiar Instructions, p. 136.

⁷ MCS1, p. 298.

⁸ Cites Helen Burns RSM, “Some Lasting Efforts, Mercy Tradition and Secondary Education”, a publication of the Secondary Education Association, 1985 in Carol Estelle Wheeler RSM, “Catherine: A Reflection on Values from Mercy Tradition”, pamphlet published by Mercy High School, Baltimore, c. 1985, p. 7.

⁹ Cited in Angela Bolster RSM, *Catherine McAuley, In Her Own Words*, Dublin Diocesan Office for Causes, 1978, p. 41 (herein referred to as Bolster).

¹⁰ Cited in Bolster, p. 41.

¹¹ Letter 34 in MCS2.

¹² Letter 190 in MCS2.

¹³ Letter 101 in MCS2.

¹⁴ Letter 124 in MCS2. For context see Letter 114 n. 42 in MCS2 and MCS 1, p.15.

¹⁵ Letter 131 in MCS2.

¹⁶ Regan, p. 135.

¹⁷ Regan, p. 135.

¹⁸ MCS1, p. 297.

¹⁹ Reference in Familiar Instructions, p. 136.

²⁰ MCS2, p. 462.

To Assist in Your Reflection and Prayer (The Business of Our Lives)

Take some time to be in touch with your own place in the mission of mercy.

As you reflect on Catherine in her practice of Mercy, what moves or inspires you?

In Catherine's company, reflect on the significant qualities that she pointed out are needed in a Sister of Mercy: "*An ardent desire to love God and to serve the poor*". Compare her words with those of the Declaration of Women Religious Leaders (ref International Union of Superiors General, UISG): "*Our passion for Jesus Christ and for humanity and creation impels us to become weavers of hope and of life*". How do these statements speak to you today?

Read the following quotations from Diarmuid O'Murchu: "In the past 'charism' was largely identified with teaching, hospitalisation, the dispensation of charity and care to the poor and marginalised. Today we are called beyond what was a focus largely on charity to one that makes justice-making for the sake of the kingdom our absolute priority. It is our grieving on what we need to let go that liberates a more coherent energy empowering us to embrace something essentially new". How do these statements speak to your reality today?

In May 2007, the UISG stated: "Contemplating the Word of God, we are called to read the signs of our times with the eyes of God and with our women's hearts. The Word calls us to seek a prophetic response to the challenges we have seen and the cries we have heard: the longing of woman to rediscover her dignity and her true place in society and in the Church; the groaning of our wounded earth for recognition of its sacredness as the home of all; the thirst for a deeper communion between believers of all religions; the distress of millions of immigrants and displaced persons, of children and women victims of human trafficking seeking a more human life; the call of the Spirit to create in our congregations links of reciprocity with lay people so that the charism of each congregation may be lived beyond existing structures". Prayerfully consider your prophetic response in the context of Exodus 3:7,10-12.

Converse with Catherine about the challenges offered by UISG and sense her reactions. Write a dialogue with her expressing the desires and fears you may have when you consider your call to Mercy mission today.

