

SCARBORO MISSIONS

THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

April-May 2016 \$1.00

GOD'S NAME

IS Mercy

Dear friend of Scarboro Missions...

Thank you for your faithful prayers and generosity to us. We will continue to be good stewards of all your gifts as we put ourselves at the service of others.

Cover: Pope Francis embraces Vinicio Riva who suffers from neurofibromatosis, a non-infectious genetic disease. Vinicio has long known the unkindness of strangers as a result of this disfiguring disease. In November 2012 he travelled from northern Italy to St. Peter's Square to attend a public audience with the pope and was overjoyed when Pope Francis went to him and embraced him without hesitation or fear.

Credit: L'Osservatore Romano



Volume 97, Number 2
April-May 2016

Publisher: Scarboro Foreign Mission Society
Editor/Designer: Kathy Gillis
Website: www.scarboromissions.ca

The Scarboro Foreign Mission Society (Charitable Reg. #11914 2164 RR0001) is a Roman Catholic missionary community involved in mission overseas and in Canada. Founded in Canada in 1918 by Fr. John Fraser, Scarboro's initial purpose was to train and send missionary priests to China. Forced to leave China after the Second World War, Scarboro began working in the Caribbean, Asia, and Latin America.

Scarboro Missions magazine publishes four editions each year, plus the calendar. The articles published represent the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Society.

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Printed in Canada and mailed from Toronto East L.P.P., Scarborough, ON. Return postage guaranteed. ISSN 0700-6802

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Important changes

Scarboro Missions has entered a time of change and discernment as its members get older and fewer in number and its overseas mission presence diminishes. After much prayer and consideration, the Society has begun a process to join other Roman Catholic religious communities in a new residence in Scarborough, Ontario, to be constructed by 2018. As a result of these changes, *Scarboro Missions* magazine will cease publication in 2018. Renewal notices are no longer being issued, but everyone who wishes to receive the magazine may do so at no charge until the last issue. We hope you will continue to journey with us until 2018.

We are always happy to hear from you, our readers and friends, and we welcome your comments and suggestions. God bless you.



By Kathy Gillis

Thank you, Pope Francis

In preparing this special issue, I have been privileged to immerse myself in the pope's call to Mercy. Pope Francis launched this Jubilee Year of Mercy on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception—December 8, 2015—to remind us of the depths of God's merciful love brought to us in the person of Jesus. Through Jesus we come to know the face and the mind of God, and all that God is calling us to be.

December 8, 2015, is also the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. Launching the Jubilee on this day, the pope is reminding us of the event that brought the Church into the modern world. Vatican II calls us to uphold the dignity of the human person, to work with other religions and with all people of goodwill in the search for a just and peaceful world, and to understand and live the Gospel as disciples of Christ. Today, the Earth itself and many who inhabit the planet are in desperate need of mercy. Vatican II calls us to live

mercy in our time.

This Jubilee Year gives us a chance to reflect more deeply on what it means to live mercy. What does the word really mean? Pope Francis says that mercy is the very heart of the Gospel. He calls us to open our minds and hearts to God's mercy, a mercy that is promised and committed, a mercy without bounds, a mercy as shown by Jesus' life, his words, and his actions. Jesus brought redemption, hope, dignity, compassion, and life to all the world, not just to those who suffer, but also to those who cause suffering, because we are all both deserving and undeserving. That is the depth of God's forgiving mercy. Mary knew this mercy in her soul and spoke about it in the Magnificat.

I hope this special issue of the magazine helps us to enter more fully into this Jubilee Year. I am grateful to all of our contributors who have shared their understanding of what the call to mercy means, not just for Christians but for all

people. Writing their reflections was for many of them a blessed time of learning and discovery as they sought to unravel the breadth of meaning to this word, *Mercy*—a sacred word I think, spoken of in Scripture, in Catholic Social Teaching, and in the teachings of other faith traditions.

Mercy is the way of love, compassion, inclusion, forgiveness. Mercy helps us to regain hope, no matter what we have done. Mercy is the way of peace, serenity, and joy, for ourselves and for all the world. Thank you, Pope Francis, for setting us on this journey of transformation and for helping to deepen our faith as we come to know God, the One Who Is Merciful. As we begin to understand God's mercy to us, may we grow in courage to walk the path of Jesus and to live and be mercy to others.∞

New to the Scarboro Missions website:

100 years of mission: The Scarboro Missions Archives, with the help of the Internet Archive digital library, initiated a project to create digital copies of all *Scarboro Missions* magazines, formerly called *China* magazine, from the inaugural issue of November 1919 through to 2008. In addition to the more recent editions (2009 to present) already online, this now provides free public access to the nearly 100-year history of the Scarboro Foreign Mission Society as told in the pages of the magazine. This resource provides a window into the Canadian Church's prophetic response to the times and a changing world. Please visit:

www.scarboromissions.ca/scarboro-missions-magazine/previous-issues

Scarboro blog: Members of the Scarboro Missions community share their homilies and Scripture reflections on the Sunday or weekday liturgical readings. Please visit:

www.scarboromissions.ca/category/weekly-reflections



The mystery of mercy

A reflection on Misericordiae Vultus (the Face of Mercy) issued by Pope Francis for this Extraordinary Jubilee—a Holy Year of Mercy

By Fr. Jack Lynch, S.F.M.

“We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and humanity, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.”

Pope Francis, Misericordiae Vultus (The Face of Mercy), MV #2

Mercy is defined as a kind or forgiving treatment of someone who could be treated harshly. It is also expressed as compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm. God's mercy and kindness have been appreciated for centuries, especially by the psalmists: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long” (*Psalms* 23.6).

With his extraordinary jubilee, Pope Francis invites us during this year to reflect on mercy and our call to be merciful as God is merciful. In his Papal Bull, “The Face of Mercy,” Francis gives us a beautiful reflection on the meaning and nature of mercy, and above all, on God who has been so merciful with all of humanity throughout history.

Before Francis, two recent popes, John XXIII and John Paul II, strongly

recommended that mercy be at the centre of the Church's proclamation and praxis. John XXIII observed that “mercy is the most beautiful name and the most beautiful way to address God.” In his opening address at Vatican II, the pope made people sit up and take notice when he stated that the Church has condemned the errors of every age with the greatest severity, but “now the spouse of Christ wishes to use the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity.”

John Paul II, in his second encyclical *Dives in Misericordia* (Rich in Mercy), called mercy “love's second name” and expanded on John XXIII's “medicine of mercy.” John Paul II also met face-to-face with his would-be assassin and forgave him.

I still recall the photo of Francis embracing a man suffering from a disfiguring disease. I recall his gentle presence among prisoners he has visited, and his first Holy Thursday as pope washing the feet of young men and women in a detention centre in Rome. He has reached out to the city's homeless and invited them to the Vatican for a tour and a meal with him. In all his travels as pope, he has included meetings with the poor and marginalized, continually reaching out to people on the peripheries. I find in Pope Francis a precious harmony between his preaching and writings and his actions.

A description of God's nature

Reflecting on the Papal Bull, Dr. Alessandro Rovati writes, “When Christians speak of mercy, they are not merely advocating for gentleness, compassion, generosity, and understand-

ing. Mercy certainly entails all of these things, but mercy is first and foremost a description of God's nature. The call to become merciful (*Matthew* 5.7) is not simply an invitation to a more non-judgmental way of looking at others and ourselves; it is the invitation to ‘be merciful as your Father is merciful’ (*Luke* 6.36); that is, to participate in the very way in which God loves his creatures.”

Yes, God readily forgives us and invites us to be forgiving to others and to ourselves. A number of years ago when I was going through a difficult period, I remember speaking with George Freemesser, a Basilian priest, a psychiatrist, and a friend. When I told him I was going on a retreat during Holy Week, he invited me to reflect on Peter, but not Peter the sinner who denied that he knew Jesus. George looked at me and said, “Jack, I want you to think about Peter who went to the garden and cried. Peter hadn't understood what Jesus was saying about mercy all the time he was with him. Jesus was abundantly merciful and forgiving, and he invites us to be merciful to ourselves, accepting his forgiveness and moving on.”

It has only taken me a few years and a lot of grey hair to catch on. Mercy is not merely refraining from condemning; it is being generous with others and with ourselves as God has been immensely generous with us.

When I read the Gospels I see a very merciful Jesus. The essential characteristic of his ministry is compassion. Everything in Jesus' life radiates mercy. The image of Jesus crucified between two thieves speaks of his identifying with the poor and marginalized. “His person



L'Osservatore Romano

“ Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life... Nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy...The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters.”

Misericordiae Vultus
(The Face of Mercy), #10

Pope Francis opens the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica to inaugurate the Jubilee Year of Mercy at the Vatican on December 8, 2015. “The door of a church...is the boundary defining welcome and exclusion,” said late Cardinal Virgilio Noe in his 1999 book, “The Holy Door in St. Peter’s.” Sixteen bronze panels depicting the story of Jesus’ mercy decorate the door.

is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with the people...the signs he works, especially in favour of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy.” (MV #8) Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth. Yes, mercy is a person and to truly encounter mercy as Christians, we need to encounter the person that is Jesus.

In this Jubilee year, Pope Francis is inviting all of us as individuals and as Church to witness to God’s mercy. “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life...Nothing in her preach-

ing and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love...The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.” (MV #10)

Pope Francis tells us that the Church is commissioned to announce God’s mercy, which is “the beating heart of the Gospel” and must penetrate the heart

and mind of every person. The Church is to behave like Jesus who went out to everyone without exception. “In the present day,” the pope writes, “as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action...Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father.” (MV #12)∞



The ways of mercy

In the glaring light of Divine Mercy, we are all revealed as both undeserving and blessed

By Kathy Murtha

Pope Francis' little but mighty book, "God's Name is Mercy," is one of the most beautiful and brilliant expositions of Christianity I have ever encountered. He brings us back to the indisputable essence of our faith and reclaims the primacy of mercy. Mercy erases borders, demolishes walls, and builds bridges. I intend to keep this precious little book close at hand. It has given me much to ponder.

I initially found his message hard to grasp because we are influenced by a culture immersed in a reward/punishment system, one that places judgement over mercy. Judgement is easy because it is clear: black or white, right or wrong. Anything other than judgement feels like a cop out. Fr. Richard Rohr says that judgement appeals to the ego, which likes nothing more than to feel separate and superior to others. Judgement gives us a false sense of power and control. Being fashioned into the clay of this mindset and hardened over time, we project our way of being onto God. Rohr perceptively remarks that "God created us in His image and we returned the compliment by creating God in our image." In our image, God becomes the God of Judgement who is constantly making his list and checking it twice to see who is naughty and nice.

It is no wonder that I struggle to grasp the centrality of mercy and its profound implications. I need to rid myself of the toxic image of God fabricated by my human mind. I need to let go of my addiction to certainty, to control, and to superiority, and plunge myself into the ocean of Divine Mercy. Only in this way can Divine Mercy penetrate my judge-

“ God, whose name is Mercy, is forever at the threshold, like the father of the prodigal son, awaiting the very sound of our footsteps to rush out and enfold us in His loving embrace.”

mental heart of stone and refashion me so that I can be a channel of transformative love.

A higher level of consciousness

Pope Francis' affirmation of mercy is a bridge to help me get there. The Jubilee Year of Mercy is essentially a pressing invitation to move to a higher level of loving consciousness that defies human logic and common sense. We are called to move away from a consciousness that is rooted in a sense of scarcity, marked by stinginess, forever measuring, weighing, and judging who is worthy and who is not—making sure that people get what they deserve. This consciousness is driven by fear and inevitably creates borders that separate and exclude. It insists on a world of meritocracy, in which people are rewarded only for their ability and achievement. This way of being gives us the illusion that we are in control, in the right, and have our act together. However, this illusion comes at a great cost as it blocks the flow of Divine, lifegiving, "refreshing" mercy, a word used by Jane Sagar, a participant at Scarboro Missions' recent retreat on mercy.

A higher level of loving consciousness is rooted in a sense of abundance that finds expression in a joyful spirit of generosity. This is the consciousness that

Jesus sought to instill through his parables of celebrating and feasting at the return of the undeserving, in the finding of unexpected treasure, in the outpouring of wine from water, and in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. All of this shatters our painstakingly neat, rational distinctions of the worthy and unworthy. In the glaring light of Divine Mercy we are all revealed as both undeserving and blessed. Once we allow ourselves to experience the unconditional, limitless flow of Divine Mercy, we are propelled out into the world to become bridge builders of mercy.

To allow ourselves to be led to this higher level of consciousness is no easy feat. It helps to realize that we are not alone. God, whose name is Mercy, is forever at the threshold, like the father of the prodigal son, awaiting the very sound of our footsteps to rush out and enfold us in His loving embrace. Pope Francis goes even further and states that even if we cannot take any steps in God's direction, if we simply desire to move in that direction God will be there to engulf us in His liberating Mercy.

Spiritual means and tools

Each one of us must find the spiritual means and tools to move into the unfamiliar, borderless, and transforming territory of a higher loving conscious-



Left: Scarboro lay missionary Ashley Aperocho living mercy and hope at a soup kitchen in Georgetown, Guyana. Often the poor are stigmatized, shamed, and blamed for being poor. Governments and societies live mercy by upholding human dignity and addressing the root causes of poverty.

“ We are called to move away from a consciousness that is rooted in a sense of scarcity, marked by stinginess, forever measuring, weighing, and judging who is worthy and who is not—making sure that people get what they deserve.”

ness. I am particularly drawn to the parables of Jesus that seek to en flesh and usher in Jesus’ vision of the Kingdom of God. These logic-defying descriptions of God’s Mercy have the sacramental power to lead us to a level of consciousness whereby we can begin to glimpse the Kingdom.

Most importantly, I am longing for a prayer life that will effectively nudge me towards this level of consciousness and keep me returning to the eternal fount of Divine Mercy. I seek a prayer life that moves me beyond my limited self, transforming me into the face of Mercy and keeping me in the flow of Love. I feel called to a prayer life that draws me away from my self-preoccupations and sends me out into the world to be merci-

ful as God is merciful.

In seeking to develop such a prayer life, I have been blessed to be introduced to the forgotten traditional practice of Christian Meditation as taught by Fr. John Main and Fr. Thomas Keating. It is a form of prayer that moves us beyond the noisy chatter of our judgemental minds. This form of prayer holds the possibility of Divine transformation by calling us to abide in the inner presence of the Loving Trinity.

Mercy by its very nature flows out, builds bridges, and leads to transformative encounters with the “other.” The Mercy of God is unlimited and inexhaustible—a wellspring upon which Jesus drew and which is freely available to all.∞

Kathy Murtha coordinates Scarboro’s Mission Centre, a meeting place for groups and organizations. The centre also offers and facilitates retreats and workshops, including the weekly program, “Centering Prayer and the Spiritual Journey.”

**Mercy retreat for women
June 25-26, 2016:**

*See ad on the back cover for the upcoming Mercy retreat, “The centrality of mercy and the bridges it builds,” at Scarboro’s Mission Centre. To register, call: 416-261-7135, Ext. 215
Email: kmurtha@scarboromissions.ca*



Justice and mercy

To be merciful towards our sisters and brothers living in poverty is to work for a world where each person's dignity is respected

By Fr. Ron MacDonell, S.F.M.

The Zika virus outbreak in Brazil made headlines early this year with heartbreaking images of mothers with their newborns suffering from microcephaly. The link between the virus and the birth defects has not yet been firmly established, but this possibility motivated the Brazilian government to action. They sent out soldiers to aid local health teams in educating people on ways to prevent the increase of the mosquito, *Aedes Aegypti*, that spreads the disease. The mosquitoes breed in stagnant water accumulating in puddles, old tires, buckets, and potholed streets. The government's goal is to eradicate the disease by eliminating the mosquitoes.

A lack of social justice

It is the existence of slums, with their inadequate infrastructure, precarious or non-existent sanitation, and poor basic health and educational services, that allows the spread of the Zika virus and other diseases. The root cause is a lack of social justice—a lack of love for others. Pope Francis, in the Papal Bull on the Year of Mercy, reminds us that love “indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes, and behaviours that are shown in daily living.” (*The Face of Mercy*, #9) He urges us to open our hearts to those on the outermost fringes of society, and says, “we are compelled to heed their cry for help!” (#15) To live the quality of mercy is not only to practice personal charity but also to work for a society where there is a better distribution of goods and services. It is to create a society where slums do not exist.



Danny Gills



Urban slums are present throughout the world as a stark witness to poverty, hopelessness, and a lack of mercy. In the state of Pernambuco, Brazil, a network of civil society organizations (FERU) is working to build fair cities, with social and political inclusion. Working with the OLMP—an organization of popular movements—and others, communities are helped to get out of slums and into new government housing such as the complex above. The banner in the bottom photo reads: “Decent housing is a right for all.”

Mercy day

*A poem by Mary Wickham, Sister of Mercy from Melbourne, Australia.
Reprinted with permission.*

“ To live the quality of mercy is not only to practice personal charity but also to work for a society where there is a better distribution of goods and services. It is to create a society where slums do not exist.”

In 2010, I became sick with dengue fever while on mission in northern Brazil. For a week I suffered from fever, rash, joint pain, and general lethargy—similar symptoms to Zika and chikungunya, which are transmitted by the same type of mosquito. It took a month of rest to return to good health. Becoming sick with dengue more than once can lead to internal hemorrhaging and death. The spike of dengue outbreaks in Brazilian cities is rooted in part to the lack of political will to eradicate the disease.

Pope Francis denounces corruption in society because its “tyrannical greed shatters the plans of the weak and tramples upon the poorest of the poor.” (*The Face of Mercy*, #19) In this Year of Mercy, the Pope calls us to consider the relationship between justice and mercy. “Justice is a fundamental concept for civil society...Justice is also understood as that which is rightly due to each individual.” (#20) To be merciful towards our sisters and brothers who suffer from the Zika virus and other diseases amplified by situations of poverty is to work for a world where each person’s dig-

nity is respected.

Every Lent, the Brazilian Catholic Church offers a spiritual and educational program called the Fraternity Campaign. This year the campaign was ecumenical, with the theme “Our Common Home is our Responsibility.” All are invited to look towards our planet as our home, to care for our world, to respect both nature and humankind. Inspiration is found in the words of the prophet Amos, “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (*Amos 5.24*).

What a contrast this flowing

If we utter aloud the word mercy,
standing, each of us, by an open window
anywhere we are in the world,
then the word mercy will carry on the soundwaves
onwards and unceasing,
through the air of the wounded world.
And maybe, when it takes flight
into deed and kindness, justice and effort,
it will effect a healing, a hope and a blessing.
It may call the homeless home,
it may coax to hope the betrayed and broken,
it may ease the burdened earth.

Listen for it, the repeated word mercy, on this Mercy day,

Listen for its neighbourly dialects and global idiom.

Imagine those who, like you, are saying it aloud,
and those who need to hear it, today, the word, mercy.

One word, one deed of justice, one kind effort at a time.

Creator God, sustainer of life,
Jesus, our companion Word,
Spirit, who, like the air, inspires,
give us the simple daring this day
to say and to be Mercy.

stream of justice is to the stagnant puddles in slums where the Zika virus and other mosquito-borne diseases breed. In the Year of Mercy, we are invited to receive God’s mercy and to offer it to others by working for a kinder, more loving world where everyone’s basic needs are met and where all enjoy the dignity of being daughters and sons of God, sisters and brothers of Jesus.∞

*Fr. Ron MacDonell is a member of
Scarboro Missions’ General Council.*



The quality of mercy in Judaism

The human-Divine relationship established on Mount Sinai becomes the foundation for God's commitment to love and mercy

By Rabbi Miriam Margles

At the foot of Mount Sinai, flooded by fear and anxiety that Moses is not returning from the mountaintop, the Israelites make a golden calf. They create a god they can see and touch and worship. They create a material object—the very opposite of the unseen Divine Mystery; the opposite of the powerful and palpable Source of Justice and Liberation that brought them out of slavery and that has just created a covenant with them.

The *brit* (covenant) of Mount Sinai frames a relationship between God and the Jewish people—those standing at Sinai and all generations after them. If the Israelites listen to the voice of the Holy One and keep God's *brit*, they will be a treasured people, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (*Exodus 19.5,6*). The ethical and ritual actions of the *mitzvot* (commandments) are the Israelites' way of embodying and enacting their side of the covenant. They call out in one voice, "All that YHVH has spoken, we will do" (*Exodus 19.8*). As for God, the Divine commitment to the people is one of protection and care, profound connection, and ennobling holiness. God declares, "I will take you to be my people and I will be your God" (*Exodus 6.7*).

A relationship alive with Love

In various rabbinic and later Hasidic commentaries, the covenant of Mount Sinai is described as a wedding, emphasizing that the covenant is not only a contract based in Law but a mutual relationship alive with Love. Just 40 days later, however, the sin of the golden calf comes as the most fundamental breach

of that covenant. This breach could have been grounds for severing the relationship and ending the covenant, but instead, the commitment of the covenant becomes the foundation for Divine mercy, *rahamim*.

Initially, God wishes to wipe out the entire people. Moses returns to the mountaintop to ask for forgiveness on behalf of the Israelites. Despite God's rage, Moses awakens God's mercy. In the midst of the intimate encounter between Moses and God, Moses asks to know God's ways and to witness the Presence of the Holy One. As the Divine glory passes before him, God proclaims: **"YHVH! YHVH! God, Merciful (*Rahum*) and Gracious, Slow to anger and Abundant in Kindness and Truth, Preserver of kindness for thousands of generations, Forgiver of iniquity, willful sin, and error, and Who Cleanses"** (*Exodus 34.6-7*).

Moses calls upon God to turn precisely these qualities toward the stiff-necked and sinning people: "Pardon our iniquity and our sin and take us for Your own" (*Exodus 34.9*). With the eyes of stern and exacting judgement (the Divine attribute of *din*), God would have been right to destroy the people. Yet, Moses calls upon God to see the people through the eyes of relationship, kindness, patience, and mercy—the very expression of God's ways and Holy presence as have just been revealed.

From now on, the covenant will include both the inevitability of human



fallibility and the perpetual possibility of repair and return (*teshuvah*). The obligations of law—living lives of sacred action—remain incumbent on the people, but now God's obligations of Love and Mercy, despite human failure, despite human action rooted in fear and arrogance, are essential to the terms of the covenant.

The Hebrew word for mercy, *rahamim*, is derived from the same Hebrew root as the word for womb, *rehem*. *Rahamim* shapes the human-Divine relationship with nurturance, support, care, and compassion. Like a parent embracing a rebellious child, God's loving Mercy holds tight to the relationship no matter what. It is only in the arms of this "undeserved" embrace that a child, or the Israelites, or any human being can discover the resilience, courage, and love to repent and to grow into the responsibility of their side of the relationship. *Rahamim* preserves connection and invites transformation.

Arousing God's sense of mercy

The words that God proclaims on Mount Sinai become known in Jewish tradition as the "Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy." The rabbinic Sages of the Talmud extrapolate this singular moment of betrayal and forgiveness into a paradigm of repair, return, and reconnection. They elaborate on the unfolding scene and state: "God wrapped Himself like a prayer leader and taught Moses this order of prayer, so that whenever Israel sins they would say this order and



“ The human quality of *rahamim* (mercy) calls us to turn toward one another in the face of hurt and wrong, in the face of disappointment, betrayal, and conflict, to affirm the fundamental holiness and unassailable worth of the other and the human capacity to change.”

be forgiven” (*Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 17b*). It is a stunning image and a profound assertion. God has given us the recipe to arouse God’s own sense of mercy toward us. This is not a mechanistic incantation but rather a path of mutual return. When we are overcome by our destructive actions, numb to our harmful impact on others, and losing the clarity of goodness and justice, the appeal to God’s mercy is a recognition and reach beyond our limited human powers. Appealing to God’s mercy leads us to a source of limitless love that sees us and enables us to see ourselves not merely as we currently are but as we can become.

The liturgy of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is abundant with prayers calling upon the God of Mercy. These prayers are grounded in the trust that there is no behaviour that permanently cuts us off from the Holy One or wipes out the unassailable Divine image inherent in each and every human being, as we engage in the work of honest self-reflection, renewing commitment, realigning values, and courageous change.

The humbling and gracious experience of coming to know ourselves through the eyes of Divine mercy extends a bold and gracious imperative back to us, directing how we treat one another. Our Sages explain, “Just as God is merciful, so you should be merciful; just as God is gracious, so you should be gracious...” We shift from being the beneficiaries of mercy to being those who embody and enact it toward others. The human quality of *rahamim* calls us to turn toward one another in the face of hurt and wrong, in the face of disappointment, betrayal, and conflict, to affirm the fundamental holiness and unassailable worth of the other and the human capacity to change. We still hold a robust vision of *tzedek* (justice) and *emet* (truth)—the clarity of ethical relationship and mutual responsibility, but holding these alongside *rahamim*, we recognize that human beings rarely change when we are shamed, alienated, rejected, or flatly punished. More often, it is in the experience of being lovingly, mercifully embraced, held in compassionate and patient relationship, and having our best selves mirrored back to

us, that we strive to repair the harm we have done and to live up to our inherent goodness.

These are core principles that can guide our relationships with family, friends, and community members. These principles can also drive approaches to restorative justice and efforts that seek to transform toxic and seemingly intractable social conflicts into face-to-face encounters of mutual understanding, empathy, and transformation.∞

Rabbi Miriam Margles is an educator, artist, and activist. She has been serving as the rabbi of the Danforth Jewish Circle in Toronto since 2010 and teaches in the US and Canada. She is the co-founder of Encounter (encounterprograms.org), dedicated to strengthening the capacity of the Jewish people to be agents of change in transforming the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Her original compositions of Jewish music for prayer are sung by communities throughout North American, Israel, and Europe.



A Christian understanding of mercy

Is God's mercy really the face of the Church that people today are encountering?

By Murray Watson

Mercy is not always the first quality that comes to mind when people think of Christianity. Very often the perception is of condemnation, harsh moral judgement, and repudiation of those whose ways of life are rejected as incorrect, immoral, or incompatible with Christianity's worldview and with the Bible. Much of this has been due to the strident tone of the North American "culture wars"—polarizing battles over key moral, religious, and social issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and the place of religion in public life. It can often seem that other important Christian values can be overwhelmed by the volume and fierceness of the accompanying rhetoric. Some public expressions of Christianity can sound very mercy-less, especially to a younger generation. Is God's mercy really the face of the Church that people today are encountering? That is very much what Pope Francis addresses in his letter proclaiming the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

In line with Pope Francis's thinking, I would like to explore what I think are the three main sources of Christianity's understanding of mercy.

Three main sources

The Jewish tradition:

As we have come to re-discover in the last half-century, Jesus lived and died as a devout Jew, and it was from His own Jewish tradition that He drew much of His understanding of mercy. The Old Testament possesses a rich and nuanced vocabulary for discussing mercy, which forms the essential backdrop for the centrality of mercy in Jesus' teaching

“Real mercy exists only in practice, when people exercise it, as so many exemplary Christians have done for 2,000 years.”

and preaching. Because the Hebrew Scriptures, and Judaism itself, are written into Christianity's theological DNA, much of our Christian understanding presumes and builds upon that.

The person of Jesus:

The second component of Christian understanding of mercy is the person of Jesus—His words and His example. Jesus speaks repeatedly about mercy as an attribute of God and as a disposition that must characterize Jesus' followers. In Greek, "mercy" is expressed through two main clusters of words: those connected with the noun *eleos* (mercy), the verb *eleéo* (to show mercy), and the verb *oiktiro* (to be compassionate). One of the shortest and oldest Christian prayers, *Kyrie eleison*, "Lord, have mercy," is based on those words.

Among Jesus' Beatitudes, mercy finds pride of place: *Beati misericordes* says (in Latin), "Blessed are the merciful ones because (as the Greek literally says) *they shall be mercied*." This is biblical language for "God will show mercy to them." There is, therefore, a mysterious reciprocity to mercy, Jesus says: if we wish to receive mercy, we must

first be prepared to extend it to others (think of the line from the *Our Father*: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we have forgiven those who trespass against us").

In being merciful, we are imitating God who is the first and greatest forgiver: "Be merciful, just as your heavenly Father is merciful" (*Luke 6.36*). Jesus' teaching about mercy becomes most concrete and most poignant in parables like the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, and in Jesus' description of the Last Judgement, which emphasizes care for those on the fringes of society, for the weak, the suffering, and the vulnerable—values inscribed in the Christian tradition from its very beginnings.

Exemplary Christians:

The third source of Christian understanding of mercy is the lives of exemplary Christian figures—people who have put Jesus' teachings into practice in particularly radiant ways and who have incarnated His values. I think of Saint Lawrence, the third-century Roman deacon who, when commanded to bring the treasures of the Church to a Roman magistrate, brought dozens of the poor and needy of the city, saying that they were the Church's true treasures. I think of Dorothy Day, the passionate 20th century American convert who became one of the most outspoken Christian voices for the poor, the dispossessed, and the forgotten, and who was cited by Pope Francis during his visit to the US last year. And I think of Fr. Christian de Chergé, a French Trappist monk who was among those kidnapped and killed by Islamist extremists in Algeria in 1996. He preemptively par-

Witness to righteousness



“ We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.”

Dorothy Day 1897-1980

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On December 8, 1932, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Dorothy Day prayed in a New York bookstore with her future work. She came back to her apartment in St. Peter's Mission, a residential complex for St. Francis of Assisi, smiling her in the kitchen. Mission had been a place she had never visited for the first time. Her first mission was in an exchange with her "missionary" and the collaboration between the two led to the founding of The Catholic Worker, a mission to "bring the best of Catholicism to the poor in the most direct language of the most direct lives." Distribution began during the depths of the Depression with Day setting up Catholic Social Teaching and working at a pacifist position during the war from 1939. A convert to Catholicism, Day's devotion to the Church was neither conventional nor unorthodox. She alienated many Catholics with her condemnation of religious figures during the Spanish Civil War. Day believed that alone, people feel weak and afraid, and that strength comes through community and common action. "We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community," she said. The ideas espoused in The Catholic Worker eventually led to the founding of a House of Hospitality in the New York state.

and then a series of communal farms. By 1941, 30 independent Catholic Worker communities had been established. Grounded in the Gospel, prayer, and Catholic Social Teaching, the communities had a simple lifestyle, served the poor, and resisted war and social injustice. Day was one of the first protesters against nuclear weapons and was arrested numerous times for civil disobedience. She was arrested in the campaigns for black rights and an end to the Vietnam War. In 1973, at age 75, she was imprisoned for taking part in a hunger strike in support of the United Farm Workers. She renewed her participation in these protests as intricately related to her community-building activities. She worked at all of society's efforts to focus on the common good and on building peace, which she associated as the "best opposite of war."

Today there are 215 Catholic Worker communities and thousands of volunteers worldwide by the movement founder. "What we would like to do is change the world—make a little progress for people to have better, and better treatment as it should be. That's the only way to get better, by fighting in better conditions, by trying not uncaringly for the rights of the workers, and the poor, of the world. We can't have our justice in the world and be content that it ever winning since we march around the world."

“ I think of Dorothy Day, the passionate 20th century American convert who became one of the most outspoken Christian voices for the poor, the dispossessed, and the forgotten...”

done his murderer and expressed the hope that he and his killer would someday be reunited in heaven. These are powerful and incredibly timely figures for us to reflect on. And of course there are innumerable others as well.

Although there are many ways in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims differ, mercy is one subject that they largely speak about in unison. Pope Francis himself hopes that this Jubilee “will foster an encounter with [Judaism and Islam], and with other noble religious traditions; may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might

know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination.”

Real mercy exists only in practice, when people exercise it, as so many exemplary Christians have done for 2,000 years. If we stay merely on the level of words and ideas, we will never adequately penetrate into Christian mercy, which is very much hands-on, and very different from the caricatures of Christianity that many people have absorbed.

May this Jubilee Year of Mercy

bind us together as religious believers to build a society (and a world) that is increasingly marked by mercy—God’s mercy and ours—and in which generosity, forgiveness, compassion, and inclusion will be the hallmarks of our faith traditions and the first things people will think of when they think of us.∞

Dr. Murray Watson is a Catholic theologian, biblical scholar, and inter-faith activist who spends part of each year living and teaching in Jerusalem.



Former Scarboro lay missionary Maggie Smith, a registered nurse, lived mercy in New Amsterdam, Guyana, accompanying the elderly poor at a Hindu shelter. Another area of work that engaged her heart and mind was her time spent with residents at Guyana’s National Psychiatric Hospital. As the patients got to know Maggie, they would greet her by name and welcome her warmly.



The concept of mercy in Islam

A message of mercy for the world

By Dr. Hamid Slimi

Islam is described in the Qur'an as a message of mercy for the world. This truth can be demonstrated in its teachings whether through the Qur'an or the *Sunnah* (the way and example of the Prophet). Any person who studies Islam comes to the conclusion that God's message is a message of peace, mercy, security, prosperity, love, justice, and happiness for all of creation.

In Islam, one of the most important names of God is The Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate. Every Muslim who prays the daily Salat prayers calls God by these two names more than 68 times a day.

God revealed himself to Prophet Muhammad, *Peace be upon him* (p.b.u.h.), to teach people that the first thing humanity should know about God is that He is the Most Forgiving and the Most Merciful: "Tell My servants that I am indeed the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (*The Qur'an 15:49*) God's Mercy is beyond comprehension and is limitless: "My Mercy extends to all things..." (*Qur'an 7:156*) Humans' mercy cannot be compared to Divine Mercy: "If ye had control of the Treasures of the Mercy of my Lord, behold, ye would keep them back, for fear of spending them: for man is (ever) ungenerous!" (*Qur'an 17:100*) The entire divine message sent through Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) is meant to focus primarily on Mercy and divine Grace: "We sent thee not, but as a mercy for all creatures." (*Qur'an 21:107*)

In many chapters of the Qur'an, Allah reminds people of their blessings and possessions: "Say: 'O people! I am sent

“ In Islam, one of the most important names of God is The Most Merciful and the Most Compassionate. Every Muslim who prays the daily Salat prayers calls God by these two names more than 68 times a day.”

unto you all, as the Messenger of Allah, to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: there is no god but He (The Most merciful): it is He that gives both life and death. So believe in Allah and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, who believes in Allah and His Words: follow him that (so) you may be guided.” (*Qur'an 7:158*)

Models of Mercy

All the teachings of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) were about how to be merciful and to show others mercy. There are many stories recorded in the biographies of the Messenger of Allah (p.b.u.h.) of people who embraced Islam because they saw the behaviour of the teacher and his disciples. God showed His messenger one of the main reasons why people followed him saying, "It is part of the Mercy of Allah that you deal gently with them. Had you been severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about you: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (Allah's) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment)." (*Qur'an 3:159*)

If Muslims are ordered by God to follow our Prophet (p.b.u.h.) and to behave like him as much as we can, so we should also be kind and merciful as he was. The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) said, "Be merciful to others, Allah will be Merciful to you, and forgive, Allah will forgive you" (*Related*

by Ahmad). For those of us who follow his way, we are not a threat to anyone but a mercy.

Muslims have one Book, one God, and one pattern to follow: that is the pattern of the Prophets (Peace be upon all of them). Allah (The Almighty) says regarding following the last Messenger (p.b.u.h.): "You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah." (*Qur'an 33:21*)

If the mission of every Messenger was to bring people closer to God and to bring people closer to one another, then we as their followers must focus our work and efforts on these most noble acts. More than ever, we the people of faith should spread the message of love instead of hate, mercy instead of wrath, and work tirelessly to build bridges and not walls to lay the foundation of peace in every part of the world. Mercy is the key to human hearts and we are all in need of this quality.∞

Dr. Hamid Slimi is the Imam and resident scholar at Sayeda Khadija Centre, which he founded in 2009 in Mississauga, Ontario. He has been serving as an Imam, chaplain, educator, and consultant in Canada for more than 18 years.



The Cornwall Interfaith Partnership (CIP) steering group: Front row: Paula Wheeler (Catholic), Mostafa Elgazzar (Muslim), Bishop Marcel Damphousse (Catholic) who is now serving the Diocese of Sault Saint Marie, Barbara Helms (Muslim, and the chair of CIP), Peter Morgan (United Church), Rev. Daniel Hayward (United Church). Back row: Neil Macmillan (Bahá'í), Gary Friedman (Jewish), John Towndrow (post-denominational seeker). Not pictured are Jane Macmillan (Bahá'í), Barbara Lord (Jewish), former Scarboro lay missionary Miriam Wheeler (Catholic), and Rev. Donald Wachenschwanz of Knox-St. Paul's United Church, which provides space for CIP's regular meetings and its events. *Photo taken in 2012.*



Embracing interfaith dialogue

The Cornwall Interfaith Partnership, a model for grassroots movements



By Neil Macmillan

The Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall in Eastern Ontario has embraced local interfaith dialogue and collaboration through its role as a member of the Cornwall Interfaith Partnership (CIP). Members of CIP are “true interfaith pioneers” said Kathy Murtha, director of Scarboro’s Mission Centre. She and colleague Kate Flaherty visited Cornwall last year to give a Golden Rule workshop at a CIP-organized World Interfaith Harmony Week event at Knox–St. Paul’s United Church. Kathy called the CIP “a model for future grassroots movements.”

CIP began as an ad hoc group in 2010 in response to an appeal from the Canadian Interfaith Partnership (now known as the Canadian Interfaith Conversation) to engage federal politicians on key issues at the G8 and G20 Summit meetings then taking place in Ontario. Collaborating on issues of the

common good was so meaningful that group members decided to continue organizing similar activities that bring people together in a spirit of learning and mutual respect. The group’s name underscores its collaborative nature in working for the betterment of the community and society.

From the start, the Diocese of Alexandria-Cornwall has provided solid support by appointing a diocesan representative to sit on CIP’s steering committee. The current representative is Paula Wheeler, a religious education consultant and teacher with the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario for the past 17 years. Paula and her mother, Miriam, a former Scarboro lay missionary, share Catholic representation on the committee.

“What I really like about participating in CIP,” says Paula, “is that I am always learning something new. The

opportunity to increase my knowledge of world faiths is fascinating to me. As a lifelong learner, the conversations at the committee table and at the events we organize fuel my love of learning. I see my role as demonstrating Christian ethics of solidarity, collaboration, and compassion, and teaching the Gospel in that way, as Saint Francis did.”

Paula finds that CIP reflects the spirit of the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Other CIP members, whether from Aboriginal, Bahá'í, Christian (Protestant), Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, or non-denominational traditions, also uphold this core value of mutual respect.

John Towndrow, one of the group’s original members and a “post-denominational seeker” echoes this viewpoint. He feels that one of the keys to the group’s success is its openness “to all



Knox-St. Paul's United Church in Cornwall hosts a variety of CIP events during World Interfaith Harmony Week and throughout the year. Participants take part in animated discussion, often followed by a shared meal. Recent events included the Yom Hashoah Holocaust Remembrance Day and A Youth Perspective on Racial Discrimination.

“ I trust that this Jubilee year celebrating the mercy of God will foster an encounter with (Judaism and Islam) and with other noble religious traditions; may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination.” *(Pope Francis, The Face of Mercy, #23)*

discussion and varying viewpoints. There is no sense that members are ever judged for their beliefs.”

John adds, “The range of positions within faiths is much broader than I ever imagined. I have a much better understanding of the practices within Islam, for example. I have also been surprised to learn of the activities in religious orders and organizations like Scarborough Missions that are not always visible, such as work on issues of poverty, peace, and the environment—CIP’s three focus themes.”

Similarly, Barbara Helms, a Muslim and CIP’s current chairperson, explains: “I have learned, or perhaps I have been reminded through lived experience, of the importance of relationships. Being actively engaged with other faith members, working toward common goals and visions, has a greater impact than theoretical or academic knowledge of other perspectives and faith traditions. I have learned a lot about group process, consensus building, honouring trust, and working together.”

CIP’s apparent success and longev-

ity, Barbara believes, is a result of the personal integrity and commitment of members to common goals and the well-being of others in the group. “We have also spent time building, maintaining, and repairing trust as we go along. So the interactions are real and based on trust.”

As a Muslim in Canada in the current geopolitical climate, Barbara is particularly appreciative of CIP’s support in helping her and her community feel safer in an atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and anxiety. She says, “It was very significant for me that fellow CIP members (including members from the Catholic Church, the United Church, the Jewish community, and the Bahá’í community) offered to accompany Muslim women who were afraid to appear in public following the shooting on Parliament Hill in October 2014, and more recently after the Paris and Brussels attacks. Although we have not needed to actualize these offers, the fact that people were willing to extend themselves has meant a lot to me and to my fellow community members.”

“In addition, I also very much appreciate the fact that CIP members sponsored me and my daughter, Maryam, to attend the Parliament of World Religions in Salt Lake City, Utah, last October. This illustrates the support and respect that the group has shown me, which over time has made our cooperative leadership model work. I feel that we are bound together in a covenant of trust that informs how I live my faith and how I share with other members the collective responsibility of building a better community.”

So perhaps Kathy Murtha is right: if CIP is truly a role model of interfaith partnership and if it can thrive in a small city like Cornwall, this bodes well for the work of other interfaith initiatives near and far in Canada.∞

Neil Macmillan and his wife Jane are members of the Bahá’í faith and have been part of the core group of the Cornwall Interfaith Partnership since its beginnings.



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Oases of mercy

Scarboro Missions' new ministry accompanies parish communities as they answer Pope Francis' call to be missionary disciples

By Paige Souter

During this Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis calls us to open wide the door of our hearts to receive God's mercy and to be mercy in a broken world. The pope asks us to "see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters, who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help." (*The Face of Mercy*, #15)

Early in his pontificate, Pope Francis shared his dream of a "missionary option" that is capable of transforming everything and renewing the Church so that it becomes a more open and inclusive community. (*The Joy of the Gospel*, #27) The parish, he said, is a "community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach." (#28) He calls on parishes to "go forth" with open hearts to serve "the poor and the sick, those who are despised and overlooked." (#48)

Caring for creation

Scarboro Missions' Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Office offers a new ministry, **Caring for Creation**, to accompany parishes in their desire to be missionary. Parish communities are hungry to engage in missionary outreach and to live out their faith beyond the walls of the church. Areas of this work may include establishing a St. Vincent de Paul group, supporting a refugee family, addressing homelessness in the community, and advocating for better laws to stop human trafficking. Sharing God's healing love and mercy with a broken world through social justice ministry can transform and bring new life to a parish.

“ The parish, he said, is a ‘community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach.’ ”

The Caring for Creation ministry offers workshops, retreats, devotionals, and mini-missions that help parish communities in their understanding of Catholic Social Teaching on issues such as ecological justice, climate change, and the option for the poor, and help to develop social justice leadership. Through transformational experiences, parishioners deepen their relationship with Jesus and affirm their call to act for justice in the world.

One parish supported by this ministry is St. Martin de Porres, located in a neighbourhood designated by the City of Toronto as a community needing priority service. In the summer of 2012, a shooting in the community left two young people dead and a neighbourhood in shock. Until that point, the parish's local outreach was through its St. Vincent de Paul group. Soon after the shooting, parishioners began to reflect on how the parish could become more involved in the community.

The parish prayer group reached out to Scarboro Missions requesting a series of workshops on the social teachings of the Church. Over the course of the six week program, 100 parishioners engaged in small group discussions to discern how the parish was being called to support the community. This past fall, the parish also hosted Scarboro Missions' **Care for Our Common**

Home workshop series to deepen their understanding of Pope Francis's encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, which calls us to care for creation and for the world's vulnerable peoples.

Building communities of care

"Going forth" to build communities of care has had a transforming effect within the St. Martin de Porres parish and the community it now serves. As parishioner Ramon Carluen notes, "I was always aware of the challenges that face our world, but I chose to ignore them, resigned to the idea that they were far bigger than anything I could personally do. But I now realize that doing my part is a responsibility I must bear."

Keith d'Souza, another St. Martin de Porres parishioner, said that the Scarboro Missions workshops helped him to see that he can do something about the issues facing the planet and his neighbourhood: "I had my 'Aha' moment, that this was my calling. Social injustice is all around me—homelessness, environmental destruction, poverty—and I have the ability to turn social injustice into social justice by simply lending a hand to someone in need, one person at a time."

Since beginning their journey, the St. Martin de Porres prayer group has formed a Social Justice Committee and



Challenges facing Toronto

(Vital Signs Report 2015)

- 11.6% of seniors live in poverty
- 3,038 individuals use an emergency shelter each night
- 1,022 families use an emergency shelter each night
- 16% of children who use a food bank go hungry at least once a week
- 262 people died by suicide in 2013, four times the rate of people who died by homicide

Corporal and spiritual works of mercy

“Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples. Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.” (Pope Francis, *The Face of Mercy*, #15)

“Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise. (Luke 3.10) If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,’ and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?” (James 2.15-16)

Examples of parish ministry

- Social justice ministry and advocacy
- Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace
- Environment and climate change action
- St. Vincent de Paul
- Refugee resettlement
- Orphanage support
- Street patrol
- Soup kitchens
- Elder care
- Friends of Dismas prison outreach

has increased their presence in the community. The group has become involved in neighbourhood clean up days, which not only clean up the environment but also help to restore pride and dignity to what has been a stigmatized neighbourhood. As well, parishioners now volunteer at Friends of Dismas, a ministry of hope and friendship to ex-prisoners.

St. Martin de Porres is just one parish community. Imagine the power that could be harnessed if all 225 parishes in the Archdiocese of Toronto were active agents in living their missionary call to go out into the world with mercy and love. Imagine how this city could be transformed. Imagine how parishes could be renewed.

In this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis says that “the Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person...” Wherever the Church is present, the Pope says, God’s mercy must be evident. “In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy.” (*The Face of Mercy*, #12)∞

Paige Souter is the Education Program Coordinator for Scarborough Missions’ Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Office. The program offers workshops, retreats, devotionals, and mini-missions for parishes, schools, and others, on the social teachings of the church and particularly the encyclical, Laudato Si’, in an interactive, prayerful format. Contact Paige at: psouter@scarboromissions.ca

Laudato Si’ Week: June 12-19, 2016

During *Laudato Si’* Week, parishes and communities around the globe will celebrate the encyclical’s first anniversary through events of reflection, inspiration, and transformative action. The week is facilitated by the Global Catholic Climate Movement.

Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home calls for action on climate change, and mercy for the Earth and for vulnerable peoples impacted by a warming planet. Visit www.laudatosiweek.org/



Lord, have mercy

Young people in Guyana spend time in the presence of God to help deepen their commitment to be living signs of God's mercy and love

By Ashley Aperocho

Sometimes we are convinced that we are able to change someone, be it a friend, a spouse, or a roommate. We believe that we can help them with their gambling addiction, or change their controlling tendencies, or even get them to put away the dishes. We think that with enough time, effort, and coaxing they will eventually change. The reality is that change starts from within. We can encourage, support, and be there for them, but ultimately they are the ones to make the first step.

During this Year of Mercy, I have started an initiative called "Encounter" for youth in our parish in Guyana. It is an evening of Eucharistic adoration with praise and worship music, and with the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Encounter aims to encourage young people to spend time in the presence of God. God can change us. God is the only one who can truly transform our hearts, minds, and spirits into better versions of ourselves.

I've been overwhelmed at the response to the Encounter evenings. For many of the young participants, it is their first experience of spending time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. As well, many of them have not been to confession since making their Confirmation. My hope is that through this experience, they will encounter God's infinite love for them. I hope that this encounter will have a profound impact on their lives like the woman who was healed by touching the fringe of Jesus' cloak (*Matthew 9.20*).

May we continue to have the courage to say, "Lord, have mercy." For when we acknowledge our weakness and our need for God, that is where God will meet us. The mercy of God liberates us from fear, from judgement, from inadequacy, and lets us recognize that we are beautiful, worthy, and free to live in the confidence of God's unconditional love, sharing that love and mercy with others.

Let us continue to turn to the One who can turn our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, the One who continues to speak tenderly to us, the One who shows us the way to Love.∞

Scarboro lay missionary Ashley Aperocho is now serving her second term in mission in Guyana.

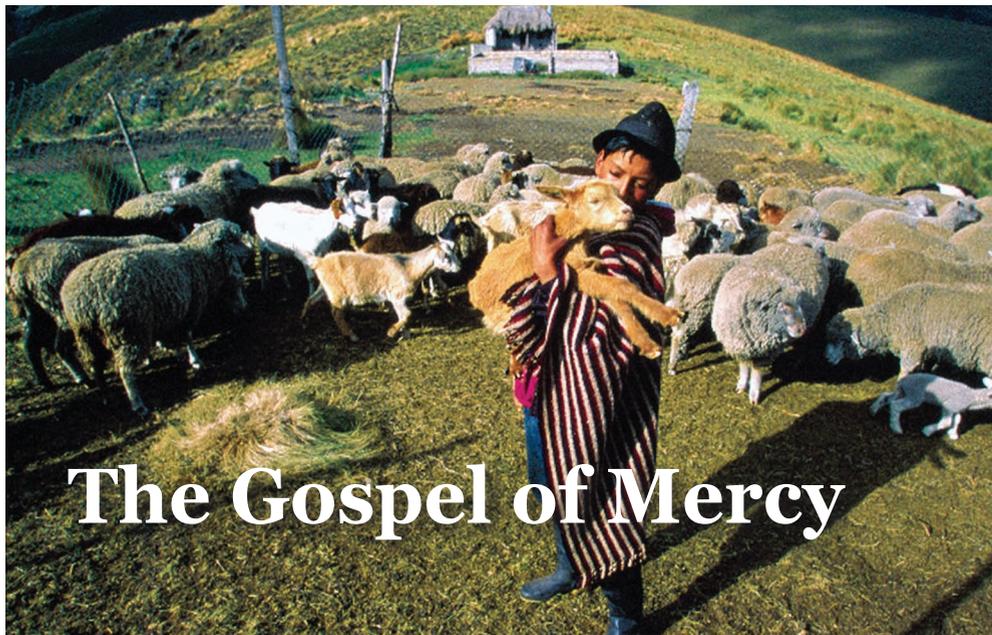


Youth at Our Lady of Fatima Church in Georgetown, Guyana, take part in an Encounter evening.

“ The mercy of God liberates us from fear, from judgement, from inadequacy, and lets us recognize that we are beautiful, worthy, and free to live in the confidence of God's unconditional love, sharing that love and mercy with others.”



By Fr. Idara Otu, M.S.P.



The Gospel of Mercy

A young shepherd on the slopes of Mount Chimborazo, Ecuador, where Scarboro missionaries served. The parable of the lost sheep is one of the parables of mercy.

For the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis chose the motto, “Merciful like the Father.” This theme is based on the teaching of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Luke (6.36): “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” It presents mercy as an action of God and a Christian imperative. The Gospel of Luke, also known as the Gospel of Mercy, is shot through with this theme of God’s boundless merciful love, and in it we find a bounty of parables that expound on mercy: the debtors and their creditors (7.41-43); the Good Samaritan (10.25-37); the rich man and the beggar, Lazarus (16.19-31); the persistent widow and the unjust judge (18.1-8); the Pharisee and the publican in the temple (18.9-14).

The parables of mercy

Chapter 15 has a trilogy of parables known as the parables of mercy. They are the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, and they embody many insights about the nature of God’s mercy. With these parables, Jesus proclaims Divine mercy to the listener and the reader, those living then and those living today.

The parable of the lost sheep narrates the story of a shepherd who lost one sheep out of a hundred. The shepherd leaves the 99 sheep in the desert to go in search of the missing sheep. When the shepherd finds the sheep, he puts it on his shoulders, returns home, and calls his friends to rejoice with him. Similarly, in the parable of the lost coin, a woman who lost a coin uses everything within her reach to search for the coin. Upon finding it, she calls her friends and neighbours together to rejoice with her.

“ In these parables...we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon.”

Pope Francis, The Face of Mercy, #9

Through the actions of the searching shepherd and woman, God’s mercy is revealed. God never tires of seeking each person and rejoices when one is found. This is also echoed in the parable of the lost son, a story of a father and two sons. When the youngest asks for his share of the inheritance, the father divides his property between his sons. The younger son gathers his share and travels to a distant country where he squanders his inheritance. Later, when almost destitute, he decides to return home. The father welcomes and celebrates his return, while the older son questions and resents his father’s response. The father’s actions bring to light God’s readiness to welcome, forgive, and celebrate every penitent with an embrace of merciful love.

Interpreting these parables, Pope Francis says: “Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy...In these parables, God is always

presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon.” (*Papal Bull, Misericordiae Vultus, The Face of Mercy, #9*)

Contemplating the parables of mercy offers an immersion into the fountain of divine mercy. Emerging, we come to admit our vulnerability to being lost, and commit to seeking and showing mercy to the lost. These parables are meant to interpret and shape our being and doing, such that mercy dwells in our hearts and shines forth in our actions. Living the parables of mercy demands being merciful, as our heavenly Father is merciful.∞

Fr. Idara Otu is a member of the Missionary Society of St. Paul of Nigeria. He is currently residing with the Scarboro Missions community in Scarborough while studying for his doctorate in theology at Regis College.

A living sign of mercy

By Marilyn Grace

“Open wide the door of my heart.” This was the title for a Scarboro Missions Lenten retreat that I attended this year. The retreat provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on the Pope’s invitation to open our hearts and minds to this Jubilee Year of Mercy.

As I began to reflect on the invitation and the call from Pope Francis, I had to ask myself: What exactly is mercy? In his book entitled, “The Name of God is Mercy”, Pope Francis references many examples of mercy in the Gospels, especially the parable of the Prodigal Son. (Luke 15:11-32) The pope’s book set me on a path towards understanding the meaning of mercy and how I am being called to live my life. Who am I in the parable of the Prodigal Son? I can certainly identify with the older brother, more than I would like to admit, but I truly wish I could be the loving Father who greets with open arms his wayward son looking for forgiveness.

The more I reflected, read, and prayed about mercy, the more I came to realize that we are called not just to celebrate a Jubilee Year of Mercy but also to live and be mercy in the world. The pope tells us that mercy is a divine gift and a lived experience. We are called to be “a living sign” of God’s love and mercy.

I thought about where I have seen the face of mercy in the world today. I remembered visiting the Holy Family Crèche Orphanage run by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Bethlehem, a city imprisoned by a wall of fear. The Sisters and lay people take in and care for Bethlehem’s abandoned children—the nameless, those who have



Marilyn Grace visits Our Lady of Fatima School for both Muslim and Christian students. Bethlehem.

no identity. Sister Marie and her staff love and care for the children and call each one by name.

I have seen the face of mercy in Our Lady of Fatima School in Bethlehem where both Muslim and Christian children are educated and cared for together. They are taught about the importance of forgiveness. My visits to the school in November 2013 and February 2016 serve as reminders to me that educators are called to be the daily face of mercy to students and to one another.

We finished our retreat day with an ancient form of prayer and meditation, inviting participants to walk the Labyrinth. We prayed and walked to the centre of the labyrinth, symbolic of our walking to the merciful heart of God. We

then exited with candles as a reminder that we are to take that divine mercy out into the world, to bring the light of mercy to the world and be the face of mercy to others.

As we closed our retreat, we asked the Creator with infinite mercy to keep the door of our hearts open to compassion and mercy. Where will I be the hands and feet of God in the world? Where am I called to be mercy for the world?∞

Marilyn Grace is a former Catholic school chaplain and teacher who works as a liturgist and meditation facilitator. She assists with some of Scarboro’s Mission Centre workshops and retreats. See back cover for an upcoming Women’s Mercy Retreat.

Mercy is

*A poem by Mary Wickham, Sister of Mercy,
from Melbourne, Australia. Reprinted with permission.*



Mercy is a woman of indeterminate age
and unremarkable appearance.
She is not fussy about the company she keeps,
and tends to be full of excuses for her friends,
having seen life from their angle.

Her heart, like her pockets, is capacious.
She has a voice rich in tender understanding
But is at her best in silence
when she sits alongside
the grief-stricken and the guilty
and their sorrow seeps into her soul.

Curiously, she sees herself reflected
in the eyes of both murderer and victim,
so sits not in judgement but companionably.
She is a subtle teacher.

She makes strong cups of tea, cup after cup.
Her hands are worn by work
but eagerly sought by the dying.

Her feet are calloused from long roads
trudged with refugee and beggar.
She is an endurer of all horrors.

Mercy has a face wrinkled by kindness
and worn by the cost of living,
but even in hovels she has been given to laughter
and awareness of simple pleasures.

She has a store of lore and wisdom
but is never heard to complain
that she's heard any story
a hundred times before,
believing each teller to be
entitled to a hearing as if to the one and only.

Mercy is a lady comfortable to be with—
the safest and soundest—
blessed in her being
with the indisputable reality
that she is true daughter,
in manner and in mind,
of the maker of the universe.

Let Mercy Flow

The Centrality of Mercy and the Bridges it Builds *A Women's Retreat*

Pope Francis reaffirms the centrality of Mercy, which dissolves borders and builds bridges. On this retreat we will explore how Mercy is a beckoning bridge:

- to a higher loving spiritual consciousness
- to transformative encounters with other religions
- to a fuller inclusion of women's experience and theology



DATE: Sat. June 25, 9:30 a.m.
to Sun. June 26, 1 p.m.

PLACE: Scarboro Missions

COST: \$120

***There will be input, reflection time, music, poetry,
prayer and gentle healing movement.***

Facilitators:

Kathy Murtha - Director of Scarboro Missions Retreat Centre, specializing in women's history and spirituality.

Kate Marshall Flaherty - Award-winning Poet, yoga, meditation and therapeutic writing instructor, facilitator.

Marilyn Grace - Former Catholic school chaplain, teacher, liturgist and meditation facilitator.

Anne Hurley - Composer, musician, choir director and facilitator.

To Register: Phone 416-261-7135

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