

ISSUE 23 | MAY 2019

Mercy

SISTERS OF MERCY
ST CATHARINE'S
4 LAURISTON GARDENS
EDINBURGH

COMPASSION



FRIENDSHIP



DIGNITY



ACCEPTANCE



HOPE



DEAR FRIENDS OF ST. CATHARINE'S

The words of our holy Father Pope Francis sums up perfectly the works of mercy carried out here in St. Catharine's:

"Blessed are the open hands that embrace the poor and help them: they are hands that bring hope. Blessed are the hands that reach beyond every barrier of culture, religion and nationality, and pour the balm of consolation over the wounds of humanity. Blessed are the open hands that ask nothing in exchange...they are hands that call down God's blessing upon their brothers and sisters."

Those hands are your hands and with your constant help and support we try to reach beyond the barriers to bring healing to our brothers and sisters in need.

We could not undertake these works without you our Mercy Family

For this we thank you.
Sister Aelred



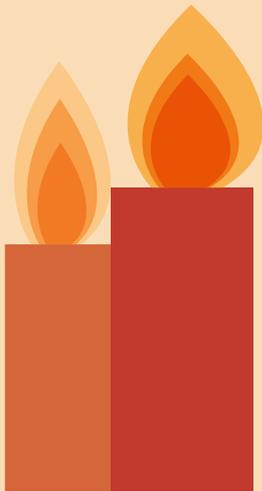


REMEMBERING THE HOMELESS WHO HAVE DIED:

A Memorial Service at St. Catharine's

What does it mean to be "known"? To be known by human friends, but also to be aware that we are personally known by God? The Sisters of Mercy in Edinburgh know each person who comes into their company. Each of us is welcomed into the family of faith. From the moment each person enters the Mercy house, he or she is identified by her/his Christian name and welcomed.

The homeless and the helpless may be there for a meal: but they are offered much more: a warm welcome and recognition, as named and cared-for human beings. And each volunteer, whether school pupil, university student, adult in work, or pensioner, becomes part of this welcoming, an experience never to be forgotten, of Christian faith lived out in action.



Homeless people on average die at a much younger age than the rest of us—men on average at 47, women at 43. The Sisters know many who have died; they feel sad for their hardships, their suffering, and their passing; but they also know that they have gone on into eternity.

Each year the Sisters hold a Service of Remembrance for the homeless who have died. It is an inspiring experience, not maudlin or sad or depressing. Each one's name is read out for instance *Dundee Dan*, or *Spike*, all 229 names this year. There is a litany of people named, read out by volunteers, many of them students, for whom remembering those who have passed-on unnoticed may be something of a new experience. A candle is lit to remember each deceased person—every candle being different in colour, height, width, and shape, just as God makes each one of us uniquely different and special in his eyes. Surrounded and covered in individual candles, each with its live flame, the altar is an amazing symbol of God's all-embracing care and warm loving concern. Each candle represents a spirit known to God and remembered with affection. As we contemplate in faith this living witness of flickering lights, we are reminded that our souls are all destined for eternity, not snuffed out with a cold corpse.

But this is of course an act of worship, laying these lives before our God. So we sing with hearts open and attuned to the meaning God may want to give to this time of remembrance.

A little instrumental group of concertina, flute and violin, with keyboard added, leads us—a witness that music-making is co-operative, that faith is a shared activity and fellowship grows and is strengthened by singing together—as the persecuted church knows so well, you cannot stop Christians singing—it is Jesus' way of making us one. We find that the songs we are singing proclaim the same messages, the flames of the candles reflected in *Lead Kindly Light*, and the heart of the sisters' project in *Pour Out Compassion and Mercy*.

“We are called, then, to draw near to the poor, to embrace them and to let them feel the warmth of love that breaks through their solitude. Their outstretched hand is also an invitation to step out of our certainties and comforts, and to acknowledge the value of poverty itself.”

Father John O'Connor, the Catholic University Chaplain, who gives the address, reminds us that the Homeless are not another race apart: they are our own brothers and sisters. More than that, but for the grace of God (and also maybe also because of our worldly good fortune) each one of us might easily have become homeless, through a multiplicity of possible causes, redundancy, marriage break-up, debt, drugs, or mental illness.

Remembering those who died, perhaps in desperate circumstances, is a reminder of the insecurity and unpredictability of life.

Life is not as simple as a good tree producing good fruit and a rotten tree bad fruit: good trees get diseases, or are poisoned, and die.

Tonight we have two brother priests with us at the service, Father Dominic, from France, playing the organ, and Father Albert, from Belgium, giving at the end an inspiring message from Pope Francis. “We are called, then, to draw near to the poor, to embrace them and to let them feel the warmth of love that breaks through their solitude. Their outstretched hand is also an invitation to step out of our certainties and comforts, and to

acknowledge the value of poverty itself.” How counter-cultural is this message! As Pope Francis points out, “Poverty challenges us.” Yes, it does; and so does our contact with the Sisters. No volunteer, no student from across the world, sharing in their service to the poor, goes away unchanged in faith or unchallenged in our attitude to the homeless and the marginalised. The Memorial Service each year is a precious part of that unforgettable experience.

Martin Dore

“Well-arranged time is the surest sign of a well arranged mind”

This saying about the passing of time carved on the Prince Albert Victor Sundial Pillar erected in commemoration of the Edinburgh International Exhibition of 1886, is now on scene at the Meadows, nearby the Homeless Project run by the Sisters of Mercy at the St Catharine’s Convent in Edinburgh.



For both of us, the “well-arranged time and mind” embraces ten weeks of service, part of our Jesuit formation. It does cover, indeed, so many aspects of our School of the Heart European Jesuit Program that it is worth writing out of this experience of being at the Convent with the guests, the volunteers and the Sisters. In that sense, we feel like followers of so many Jesuits and volunteers having crossed, at the Project, the path of men and women of conviction and heart, over the years. For this, we are grateful and feel beholden beyond words.

First, the “well arranged time” could refer to a twofold steadfast pace of the day. Each day, indeed, starts for the guests with a breakfast and finishes with an evening meal. Besides, every day starts for the Sisters, the volunteers, some guests and visitors as well, with a well-attended prayer time and the mass at noon. In addition, it ends for the volunteers with another common prayer.

These moments are milestones in our days. Besides, they’re are embodying very nicely the charism of the Sisters of Mercy, the Suscipe of their founder Catharine McAuley, and the Gospel as well. Secondly, the “well-arranged time’ also refers to the caring and safe-loving ways of proceeding at the Convent we have been carefully instructed about its, before to start serving and “going with the flow”, as said often by Sister Aelred. Going with the flow means, above all, a presence in the guests’ footsteps and pace that allows them sometimes to dare sharing about their day, their life, to ask questions or to laugh as well.

“through a number of activities gravitating around the meals, broken bodies, hearts and souls are finding ways of restoration little by little.”

Moreover, the same saying is reflecting, as well, the good spirit in the air at the Project, and the kind of structure of peace and mercy that guests, find there and can steadfastly rely on, and volunteers as well. In that line, “Well arranged mind” does reflect the way things go and are well organized by the Sisters. Besides, it sounds also like a promise for the guest and visitors as well. Actually, through a number of activities gravitating around the meals, broken bodies, hearts and souls are finding ways of restoration little by little. For instance, musical afternoons Wednesday’s vespers, and other social gatherings, take place at the Convent. Doors are also open every day to numerous sharing groups based on AA healing method. What a blessing to see, eventually, a guest asking or accepting to volunteer and to serve others, or another writing a letter to thank the Sisters and the supporters for the wholehearted and unconditional welcome non-judgemental and love experienced at the Project! Sometimes, efforts, prayers are rewarded by grace beyond expectations.

Finally, there is also a strong perception that volunteers and numerous people coming and giving time, goods or money are all driven by generosity because they all feel that such a sacred combination of Providence and love of the most unbefriend is unique, priceless and worthwhile being supported countlessly. In addition, far beyond any wisdom or mason sign on a pillar, all this life-sharing and care-giving activity echoes the presence of Christ in so many ways. In that sense, the Project is simply and truly a “surest sign”. Like a light in our heart that we will keep and carry on wherever we go now.

Fr Dominique and Albert



Goodbye from Dominique



In this convent you are the guest
To serve the meals I did my best
If I did well I am happy
For my mistakes please forgive me

I learned English in a French school
But I remained deaf to Scottish
For this disease there is no tool
I gave up and felt me childish
I know your face, sometimes your name
The discrete words you have offered
I see your smile, but it's the game
To leave my questions unanswered

What secret makes you look so sad?
What have you lived which was so bad?
In the morning, silent, I guess,
That all humans need tenderness

I am a priest, I am supposed
To pray to God and preach on him
To reveal his love undisclosed
That encourages the pilgrim

But I have learnt, living with you,
That God is present already
In the heart of the brother who
has got nothing but is steady

With this gemstone I'm leaving back
If in this world there is no track
To meet again, in another
I hope we rejoice for ever.





WHAT ST. CATHARINE'S OFFERS

**We commit ourselves to be Mercy to all
with a preferential option for the poor**

WE OFFER

Hospitality
Support
Acceptance
Peace
Friendship
We meet basic needs
Create an atmosphere of respect
Help people to become whole

SERVICES OFFERED IN 2018/19

Breakfast/Brunch
Evening Meal
Toilet facilities
Change of clothing
Help in setting up house
Guidance with job applications
Letter writing
Counselling
Help in seeking medical assistance
Transport to hospital where necessary
Help in finding accommodation
Support groups for addicts
Visits to hospitals
Visits to prison
Helping with recovery programmes
Bereavement services
Giving talks to schools churches and other groups
Trying to be a voice for the voiceless

Kirsten McKay

I'm trying to recollect that first moment when I pressed the buzzer to St. Catharine's Convent as a young 13 year old girl about to begin the 'service in the community' element of The Duke of Edinburgh Award. The trepidation I felt probably had a lot to do with my pre-determined thoughts and beliefs about the homeless, shaped in part by media stereotyping: for example, they are all alcoholics, they are all drug addicts, they are all wasters abusing the system when people are working hard day in and day out to make a living. Now, I feel quite ashamed to admit to such thoughts, and sadly there are many people who still hold these views.

Initially I served my apprenticeship, with other young volunteers, in the kitchen preparing vegetables for the next day's meals. Here I worked with students from Edinburgh University and other school pupils and experienced a wonderful camaraderie with people of my own age and older - many of whom are still friends today. After a number of years, I progressed to working in the project room clearing and setting up tables, as well as serving meals.

My experience of working in the project room has brought me in to contact with people I wouldn't have expected to meet and has helped shaped my current attitude towards the homeless. The words 'The Homeless' suggests some sort of homogeneous entity; in my experience, nothing could be further from the truth! The people I meet come from different back grounds, different countries, different cultures and each has their own reason for coming to the project: mental health issues; alcohol and drug abuse; family or relationship breakdowns; unemployment to name but a few.

It's true what they say about not judging a book by its cover - I have met some amazing people: people who've served in the army; businesspeople; talented musicians and singers and many more with their own unique life story. To say I have a huge amount of respect for each and every guest who walks through our doors is an understatement!

St Catharine's Mercy Project not only offers food, clothing and a temporary haven of safety, it also provides a spirit of love and care for people who are in most need of it. Sister Aelred and Sister Catherine's enthusiasm, dedication, perseverance and sheer hard work is not only the driving force behind the success of the project, but also an inspiration to volunteers like me.

I feel privileged to be part of this project. It has certainly helped to shape my views on society and frequently makes me ponder the saying... "There but for the Grace of God go I."

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I have met some
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**Burns Supper
Celebration**



**Ruth who organised
Classical Concert**

Appreciative audience



Musical Evening



SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OUR GENEROUS DONORS

Archbishop Leo Cushley for his support
The Consul General of Ireland
Eric and Janis Milligan
Jimmy Sinclair
Father John O'Connor O.P., the C.S.U and St. Albert's Parishioners for their generous help
The Fare Share Team for daily food deliveries
The Caledonian Ball
Allan and James for the Irish Ball
Maureen Henderson and her team for the Folk Evenings
Elizabeth Reid and her team for the Car Boot Sales
Nora Drummond in Peebles
The Churches: Catholic, Episcopalian, Church of Scotland, Methodist, Unitarian and Romanian Church
The Churches of Rosewell, Gorebridge and Bonnyrigg for all their support
Canon Hugh White and his parish of Fauldhouse
Ruth Callan and her family
Schools and other groups
Valvona and Crolla
To all of you our generous benefactors

Last but not least, to our wonderful teams of volunteer helpers and
Mercy Associates without you we could not run the project

I would like to take this opportunity to wish each of you well as we
go forward together in a spirit of service to proclaim the
Good News of the Gospel of Love to all with whom we live and work

God bless you all
Sister Aelred
Director of Homeless Project

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