

## Bon Secours Mercy Health

### Foundation Day Celebrations

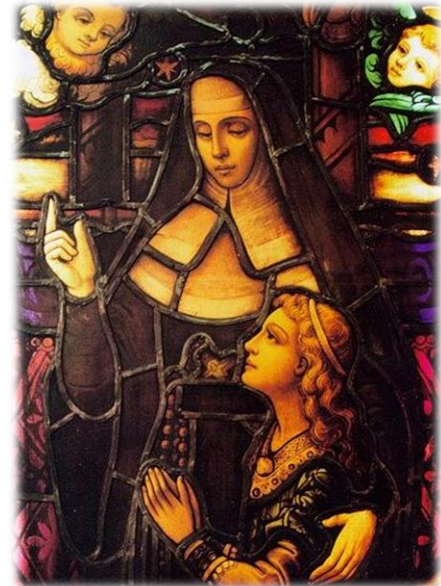
As a Catholic health ministry, we stand in a rich and compelling tradition of the many founding congregations that started our various ministries. Remembering those legacies is an important part of our ongoing dedication to our ministry. In recognition of the three congregations that provide a foundation for our ministry as Bon Secours Mercy Health, we celebrate three foundation days each year:

- **January 24: Bon Secours Day** – celebrating the date the first Sisters of Bon Secours professed their vows in St. Sulpice Church in Paris, France.
- **July 17: Humility of Mary Day** – celebrating the Feast of the Humility of Mary which is a central celebration for the Sisters of the Humility of Mary.
- **September 24: Mercy Day** – celebrating the opening of the first House of Mercy in 1827 in Dublin, Ireland by Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy.

### The Sisters of Mercy September 24, 2023

Catherine McAuley was born in 1778 into an Ireland marked by great disparities in wealth, opportunity, education, and resources. After both of her parents died before her 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, Catherine became the household manager for the Callaghan's, a wealthy Protestant and Quaker couple. By 1822, the Callaghan's, who had no children, died, leaving their Coolock estate and wealth to Catherine. At the age of 44, Catherine found herself with a fortune at her disposal. She chose to use her newfound wealth to realize her dream of establishing a house of mercy where she and other compassionate young women of Dublin could provide education and care to homeless women and destitute young children, especially girls, who were suffering and alone.

Having selected a location at the corner of Baggot and Herbert Streets in Dublin, on September 24, 1827, on the feast of Our Lady of Mercy, the house designed to serve the needs of homeless women and destitute children officially opened. The house possessed a large schoolroom where children could be educated in practical skills as well as the Catholic faith. She then turned her attention to the patients of Sir Patrick Dun Hospital. In an age when confinement was a last resort with patients often being sent there to die, Catherine nursed many through their last illness, learning first-hand the fears that beset the sick and dying. Though Catherine never set out to establish a religious order, she was encouraged by the Archbishop of Dublin to do so. On December 12, 1831, Catherine and two other women professed their vows as the first Sisters of Mercy. Catherine brought her heart to misery. By courageous concern for the welfare of the poor, the sick and the ignorant, she broke through the impossibilities of her time. She animated



many to walk with her, including others at centers of wealth, power and influence, to share in her heroic efforts.

The Sisters of Mercy were invited to the United States in 1843 by Michael O'Connor, Bishop of Pittsburgh where the Sisters would build the first Mercy Hospital in 1847. In 1892, they were able to build their first hospital in Hamilton, Ohio with subsequent hospitals built in the suburbs of Cincinnati. More hospitals would be built or purchased in the following decades along with the founding of Mercy College of Ohio, established to train nurses and other health care professionals. The ministry of the Sisters has spread across Ohio, providing care for the poor, the sick, and the dying.

On two occasions, the Sisters of Mercy courageously confronted a cholera epidemic. In 1832, a cholera epidemic struck Dublin. Catherine and her sisters responded to the threat posed by cholera, playing a significant role in alleviating the suffering of many. Catherine and her sisters nursed the sick and suffering day and night. The low death rate at Sir Patrick Dun Hospital was attributed to the unflagging care of the Sisters. After their arrival in Cincinnati in 1858 at the invitation of Archbishop Purcell, they again confronted a cholera epidemic, risking their own lives to care for the victims in their homes.

Today, many women and men work alongside the Sisters of Mercy, continuing their rich legacy, a legacy that traces its roots back to the courageous and compassionate dream of Catherine McAuley, a woman who “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.”

Excerpts from *Tender Courage* by Sister M. Johanna Regan, RSM, are included.

