



St. Anthony's Girls' Catholic Academy

The Mercy Vision and Ethos For Education

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The Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, Catherine MacAuley was born in Dublin in 1778. She was orphaned and brought up by a philanthropic Quaker couple. Catherine used her inheritance from this couple, Mr. and Mrs. Callaghan, to open a House of Mercy in Baggott Street, Dublin, in 1827. She and other lay women would

- shelter homeless women
- reach out to the sick and dying and
- educate poor girls.

Catherine's was a practical type of Christianity which challenged the orthodoxy and establishment of the day. At the time, Catherine McAuley was working in Dublin, Roman Catholics were excluded from the professions under the Penal Laws. Such laws had varied from excluding RC's from the professions to not allowing the celebration of Mass.

The 1829 the Catholic Emancipation Act allowed Catholics to practice their faith openly for the first time in centuries. However, the bulk of the R.C. population continued to live in poverty and destitution. Today we have less material poverty and destitution but a need to challenge spiritual poverty and destitution.

Catherine saw the essential link between freedom from poverty and education. Numerous generations of young women, educated at St. Anthony's over the decades, have been through education been able to secure financially a future for their families and ensure opportunities by their involvement in education the future for those who follow. Catherine was convinced that education would lead to social transformation. It was an intuitive response to the need and promotion of gospel values. For the RC community across the city social transformation has occurred for many but there is still a need to connect with those who currently feel excluded. Catherine was at the cutting edge between gospel and culture and challenged institutional injustice in defiance of the established colonial order.

Her work empowered girls and women with skills and opportunity. Catherine always maintained the special obligation of the Sisters of

Mercy to educate poor children, but she also saw the need to educate other children in fee paying schools. Her work helped create an alternative society. The empowerment of young women still is the key.

Those who were refused entry to the established order would be central to her work in coming generations. Her work also engendered pride in one's own race and culture well over fifty years before the establishment of the Irish nation. In the RC school we continue to work with students from many and varied cultural traditions and ensure effective community cohesion.

In 1843 Sisters from Cork established a Convent of Mercy in Green Street in Sunderland at the invitation of Canon Kearney Parish Priest of St. Mary's, Sunderland. A one room school was established, known as St. Bede's. Following the 1902 Education Act, which provided for grant aided secondary education, the Sisters applied for a government grant to establish a Sixth Form and in 1904 a secondary school with a sixth form was established which became known as St. Anthony's.

In 1939 the school moved to its present site. The Sisters of Mercy provided school leadership and many sisters taught at the school for over hundred years and continue to work extensively with the school as Trustees, Governors and Chaplains.

St. Anthony's Mercy education vision and ethos is:

- Christ centred
- Faith enlightened
- Shows concern for the poor especially women and girls
- Builds communities
- Pursues excellence

The Mercy School is:

• **Christ centred**

Education informed and influenced by the teaching and example of Jesus Christ, which recognises the dignity of the human person and his command to love and care for each other. Mercy education aims to build up the self - worth and self-esteem of the student. The Mercy school community embodies caring and belonging, it should not just regard the

academic and sporting stars, but all students through truly personalised learning.

- **Faith enlightened**

Faith, culture and life are brought into dialogue and harmony in the Mercy School. Catherine Mc Auley stated,

"We fit the children for earth without unfitting them for heaven".

The Roman Catholic faith underpins the work of the Mercy school and its improvement planning for the 21st century. The catholic faith is at the heart of Mercy education programmes through all aspects of the work of the community and integral to liturgies, rituals, symbolism and prayer spaces.

- **Shows concern for the poor particularly women and children.**

In the Mercy school the aim is to work with the world wide community to eradicate suffering and its causes. Compassion is the energy that drives members of the community to search for justice for those on the margins to allow them to establish a sense of belonging. Asylum seekers, internally displaced, women trafficked, those who live in absolute poverty and those who suffer from hunger. Mercy schools should not be schools where the poor are marginalised. They should be schools where we encourage students to question the status quo, be active for social change and promote the full participation of women in the development of policy and support equality of opportunity for both without diminishing or demeaning either male or female.

- **Pursues excellence**

The Mercy school should enable every student to achieve her potential within a school committed to high quality teaching and learning and on-going review of itself. The highest standards should be available to the poorest students. • Respect should be at the heart of all relationships in the school community. The Mercy school should feature inventiveness not conformity. It should be open to new perspectives and new answers to old questions.

- **Builds communities**

The Mercy School shows a social responsibility to the world we inhabit. The school community is what makes the school catholic, a community permeated with the gospel value of love. In the community parents, staff and students share a common vision. There should be genuine opportunity

for participation and collaboration. There should be clear message of warmth and welcome. Links with the local faith communities should be firm. We find ourselves in fragmented and multi-cultural societies. People should reach out with generosity to others in the community. Many people live in a broken world. The Mercy School should try to create a world where everyone can live lives of dignity and decency with respect for life and care for the earth.

"We need communities to soften the rough edges of an abrasive world",
Rabbi Jonathan Sachs.

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Head Teacher
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