

# Mercy Works

Volume 2 • Number 1

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Northeast Community • Committed to Compassionate Service



Dear Friends in Mercy:

Autumn brings a sense of new beginnings to our ministries that give expression to the works of mercy. The summer months have provided renewed energy, allowing our sisters and co-ministers to take up their work once again. Your loyal and generous support throughout the last year has been a vital element enabling Mercy to reach many people in diverse ways. For this we say *thank you*. Recipients of scholarships from all levels of education, including our newly arrived immigrants, continually express their gratitude for the opportunity to receive a Mercy education. Our sisters and co-workers also provide services to sick and elderly persons, to residential families in transitional and low-income housing, and to the hungry at houses of hospitality. These are but a few of the Northeast Community's works. You are indeed co-ministers with us! We ask you to continue to walk with us in Mercy, knowing that you are remembered with gratitude in our daily prayers.

Sincerely in Mercy,

Ellen Kurtz, RSM, President  
Mercy Northeast Community

## A Celebration of Mercy

The Sisters of Mercy in Rhode Island hosted and sponsored their fundraising event, *A Celebration of Mercy*, on May 4. In keeping with the colors and theme of the Broadway musical *Hairspray*, each table was colorfully topped with a creative centerpiece incorporating a can of hairspray.

As guests arrived, they were greeted with music played by St. Mary Academy Bay-View student violinists. Delicious hors d'oeuvres, provided by Johnson & Wales University, were presented under a tent on Johnson & Wales Gaebe Commons. Once inside, guests mingled, purchased mystery wine gift bags, and visited the wine tables where experts from Chris Gasbarro's Fine Wine & Spirits served samples of red and white wine.

Mario Hilario of NBC10 emceed the ceremony, and Verizon's president of Massachusetts and Rhode Island, Donna Cupelo, received the Governor's Award for Service to Rhode Island. Following the award presentation, Mario introduced a video, created by Advertising Ventures, which demonstrated the history of the Sisters of Mercy, offered testimonials from some of the people they serve in their ministries, and showed why it is important for donors to support them in their mission.

The event grossed \$84,836 in cash, pledges, and in-kind services. All proceeds raised from *A Celebration of Mercy* support the sisters' Ministry Fund which enables them to provide food and shelter to hungry and homeless persons, prescription assistance to the sick, counseling to the infirm and many other services to the most vulnerable in the community.

The Sisters of Mercy are most grateful to the sponsors who helped to make this event a success. Sponsors and additional photos of this year's celebration are highlighted on the back page.



Deborah Smith, left, presents Donna Cupelo with the Governor's Award for Service to Rhode Island.

## Amazing Allies: Vermont Women's Mentoring Program

*"My mentor knows me as who am today, not who I was yesterday."*

— Participant, Vermont Women's Mentoring Program

The statistics are startling: In Vermont, the number of women sent to prison has skyrocketed 700 percent in the past 8 years. Nationally, the growth of the number of women sent to prison has been rising at more than twice the rate of that of the male population for over 10 years.

Pam Greene, Mercy Connection's Program Director and Mercy Associate who oversees the Vermont Women's Mentoring Program, sheds light on this troubling trend: "The growing incidence of substance abuse and the crimes to support the habit seem to be at the heart of the matter. Two other commonalities worth noting, however, are that a large proportion of these women have been victims of sexual and/or physical abuse, and many wrestle with mental health issues."

Re-entry into the community for women leaving prison is difficult at best, and the risk of returning to prison in Vermont is as high as 50 percent. They face the enormous challenges of finding appropriate, affordable housing and employment, both key elements to reintegration. Often having "burned their bridges," the absence of a trusted friend or family member is another significant barrier to a successful transition.

To provide that support, Mercy Connections, an educational nonprofit in Burlington and a Mercy-sponsored ministry, began the Vermont Women's Mentoring Program with the state's correctional department and Vermont



Vermont Women's Mentoring Program participant Nia, right, holding her baby, Taylor, with Program Collaborator Leigh Steele, left, and Program Director Pam Greene.

Works for Women. The program trains and matches a volunteer mentor with a "mentee" about to be released from prison, and both make a year-long commitment to each other. The two stay in touch with phone calls, weekly visits and social functions offered by the program.

According to Pam Greene, the requirements to volunteer are not stringent: "We require 12 hours of training, but if you are a good listener, have an open mind and want to create a relationship with a woman returning to your community, you can help her make a fresh start." Mentors can have a profound supporting influence on individual women as they work to rebuild their lives. The objective is to help women stay focused on the goals they have set for themselves and to assist with locating the community resources they need to reach their goal. The mentees have recognized the value of this partnership. As one participant has stated poignantly, "My mentor is the only person not paid to be in my life right now."

Nia, 24, and Amanda, 31, were matched over two years ago, and remain very close. Nia, a recovering addict who now works part time as a counselor at Northern Lights, a transition house for women formerly in prison, has

said, "Amanda is my eyes when I can't see sometimes." Amanda chose to become a mentor because of her compassion "for women who have these kinds of problems." She believes that women are often victimized by circumstances beyond their control and fall into drug or alcohol abuse as a reaction to trauma. Nia, she says, "is much harder on herself than she needs to be, and more competent than she realizes. I need to remind her of this."

The Mentoring Program's results after four years are impressive. The collaboration has matched 75 pairs, and the risk of returning to prison for participants has been reduced to 27 percent. Last year, 65 percent of the women with mentors successfully transitioned into the community and only 21 percent returned to jail for any length of time.

Because of the ongoing financial support from donors like you, this "pilot program" has grown and thrived. The program is now being replicated in other counties in the state of Vermont and has become a model of successful systemic change for the corrections community.

For information about the Vermont Women's Mentoring Program, please visit the website at [www.mercyconnections.org](http://www.mercyconnections.org), or call Pam Greene at (802) 846-7164.

## A Lasting Legacy, Simplified

You believe in the work of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Northeast Community and want to ensure the quality and longevity of Mercy ministries. Why not consider a legacy gift that will contribute to your community for generations to come? The effort does not need to be expensive or time-consuming. Here are some options:

**Bequest by will or trust** — A bequest to the Sisters of Mercy in your will or trust will not affect your current financial situation and will make a lasting connection to Mercy ministries and your community. Your attorney can help to create or amend your estate plan documents.

**Beneficiary designation on asset accounts** — With the Sisters of Mercy as a full or partial beneficiary of your checking account, retirement plan, or insurance policy, you are demonstrating an enduring commitment to Mercy programs. To do this, obtain a Change of Beneficiary Form from the issuer of your current account or policy, or, when you open a new account, consider including the sisters as a beneficiary. *Even a gift of 5 percent could be significant!*

The Sisters of Mercy do not provide financial advice, but encourage you to consult with your legal/financial advisors about long-term charitable giving.

For more information, contact Trish Sweeney at (802) 865-6835 Ext.136, or [tsweeney@mercy-northeast.org](mailto:tsweeney@mercy-northeast.org).

## Self-sufficiency Grant from Ministry Fund helps keep McAuley Residence warm

The Mercy Northeast Ministry Fund awarded a \$5,000 Self-sufficiency grant for heat at the McAuley Residence in Portland, Maine, a six-unit transitional housing facility for women alone or with one or two young children. The Portland area founded this sponsored ministry after observing increasing numbers of women moving to shelters, only to face homelessness again after a 28- to 30-day stay. Inspired by the example of founder Catherine McAuley, the sisters opened Maine's first women's transitional housing program in 1988. In 19th century Dublin, Ireland, Catherine provided women in need with safe housing and training that resulted in emotional and economic independence.

McAuley Residence, which is a part of Mercy Health System of Maine and of Catholic Health East, is located in an attractive brick Victorian in the heart of Portland near Mercy Hospital. In its 19-year history, 91 women and 65 children have found hope after walking through the doors of McAuley Residence. Six women and five frisky youngsters are happy to live there now.

Women at McAuley Residence learn how to support themselves and their children. Program participation requires 35 hours of productive activity weekly. The women further their education or employability, address trauma or domestic violence issues, and learn skills for better financial management. While residents pay 30 percent of their monthly income from wages or various subsidies for rent, the program pays for utilities. As the cost of oil and electricity hit new highs, McAuley Residence must find more funding sources to address the shortfall created between resident contributions and the actual fuel costs.

Executive Director, Sister Miriam Therese Callnan, RSM explains that the building is "...cozy and very homey. But it does come at a cost. Our 'home' was built over 140 years ago. There is always something to repair or replace to make the building more livable, safe and secure for our residents and staff. The Self-sufficiency grant from the Northeast will be invaluable in helping us meet our growing fuel costs."



The next priority for McAuley Residence is to address leaks that caused part of the playroom ceiling to buckle. A minimum of \$2000 is needed for the outside roof and brick work, and inside repairs. If you would like to contribute to the McAuley Residence housing program, please contact Sister Miriam at (207) 773-5289. Meanwhile, we happily support six households.

### *Mercy* WORKS

#### COMMITTED TO COMPASSIONATE SERVICE

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## A Celebration of Mercy *continued from page 1*



### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT:

- The crowd applauds the Mercy Ministries video created by Advertising Ventures Inc.
- St. Mary Academy Bay-View student performs for guests.
- Sister Irene Nerney and guests from the Maguire Group. (The Maguire Group sponsored the event.)

### SPONSORS OF *A Celebration of Mercy*

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