

## "Called to be instruments of mercy in the hand of God"

For two hundred years we have, as a Congregation, treasured our call to be 'instruments of mercy in the hand of God.' Our charism, our special gift to the Church, is needed now more than ever as we experience and see with our own eyes a world torn apart by violence, racial and religious hatred – the antithesis of mercy. And now Pope Francis, also such a witness and instrument of mercy, has dedicated this preparation year for our bi-centenary, to mercy – encouraging all Christians to actively offer reconciliation, mercy and God's love to all people of good will.

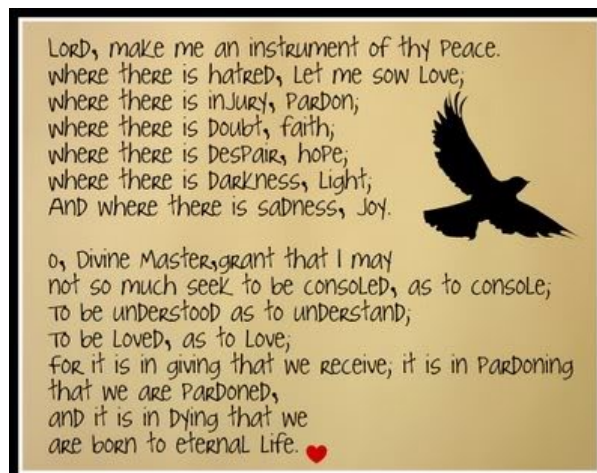
When I first entered I remember being told that God the sower had already planted the seed that is the charism in each one of us. I think it was Bernadette who said that we already had the charism and that that was what drew us as sisters or Associates. When we responded to our call, it was because we recognized the blooming of the charism flower in the Sisters we met. The seed, planted by God, was then watered, mentored and loved into life by sisters who have tilled the ground before us.

So what was it about my God seed, how had my soil been prepared, so that when I thought about entering I was drawn to be a Daughter of Mary and Joseph?

My family had very close connections with St Francis and St Clare. My grandparents lived in St Francis parish and my grandmother did supply work in St Francis Primary School where my parents both taught and my Father was deputy head. When my brother and I reached four years we went to St Francis Primary School with our parents. By the time I was eight years old our family had moved into the parish. My aunt also taught art part-time in the school. Later my father went on to become head of St Clare's school, founded from St Francis Parish as it was divided into two - St Francis and St Clare's. My aunt even designed the school badge for the new school. I was surrounded by Franciscan spirituality on every side, and it became central to the way my family operated. The prayer of St Francis, with its call to be an instrument of peace and mercy, was part of our lives, and even my parents' tombstone includes the words 'it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.'

Francis, and now his devotee Pope Francis, put before us the call to be an instrument in nurturing our universal soil, to be in creative partnership with our world and treating it with care and respect. This theme is referred to constantly in our various Chapter documents.

### Prayer of St Francis



My Franciscan spirituality was tempered by my teachers who were Sisters of Mercy - The Sisters taught me from age four to eleven and later at University and College. I remember, as a very small child, visiting our old headmistress Sr Mary Margaret in their retirement community in Whitby. She took me by the hand to see the "picture of our saint" - Margaret Mary Alacoque - she thought I had been named after her, but my parents assured me that it was because they liked the name. I was in and out of the convent for as long as I remember visiting Religious Sister friends of my family, and it was thought that I would enter with them. Religious Life was part of my growing, and the sense of dedication that the sisters portrayed did indeed say something to me about my relationship with God, and a call to respond. But then I met the DMJ's.

Deirdre Slade was on various diocesan committees with my father and often came to our house. She, in turn introduced me to Anne Jordan and the Middlesbrough community. I was also part of the first Charismatic Prayer Group formed by Mary Kevin and Fr Barry, my parish priest. I found that being called to be an instrument of mercy in the hand of God suited the seed plant in me more closely, rather than the concept of mercy on its own.

The idea of being an instrument spoke, and still speaks to me deeply. An instrument cannot do anything itself - its very nature means that it is there to be used and so it has to allow itself to be used. We can mediate on God's behalf, we are called to be partners in God's creativity. All we need is to continue to nurture our soil through prayer and reflection, so that we ever remain ready for new seeds to be sown, and old no longer fruitful ones to be discarded. Then we can be confident that we are in God's hands.

Many of our sisters are now elderly. Their lives are proof of God's fidelity, as well as theirs. God has given them to me, to us to help us understand that we live in a beautiful garden, graced by women who have tended God's seeds with love and fidelity for so many years. Even as their aging restricts their ability to minister, they teach us that mission never ends.

I was a bit shocked when I heard, as a young sister, that some of our sisters in Belgium said that they didn't need to keep reading the constitutions. They had internalised the contents, and practised every line in the way they lived and acted their lives. They knew what it meant to be an instrument of mercy. Rules and regulations meant little as they met face to face with the people of God, with those who God called them to assist on his behalf. They needed no reminder of the charism, such was their relationship with the God who calls that they lived and breathed it day in, day out.

I give thanks for my beautiful family, for my educators, and all who formed me to believe in a God who calls me to partner with him for the sake of the kingdom. I am especially grateful to my religious family whose love reminds me that I tend my garden and enrich my soil with their companionship and encouragement and example.

### **What is your story?**

What were the formative influences in your life?

When did you come to recognize that you were called to be an instrument of God's mercy?

What drew you to be a Daughter of Mary and Joseph or Associate?

Who were your mentors in religious life and as Associates?

What 'seed' from God are you consciously nurturing in your life at the moment?

What are the seeds that God seems to be planting in our Congregation in these 'end' days?

What can we do to improve the soil of our Congregation so that we can continue our partnership with our Creator God?

As we celebrate 200 years, what can we do to be instruments of mercy to each other; to those who have nurtured us and companioned us on the journey to the harvest?

**Psalm 85:10**

"Mercy and faithfulness have met, Justice and peace have embraced"

"Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other"

"Love and faithfulness have met, justice and peace have embraced".

Margaret Eason