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For more information about Catherine McAuley
and the Sisters of Mercy visit the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of
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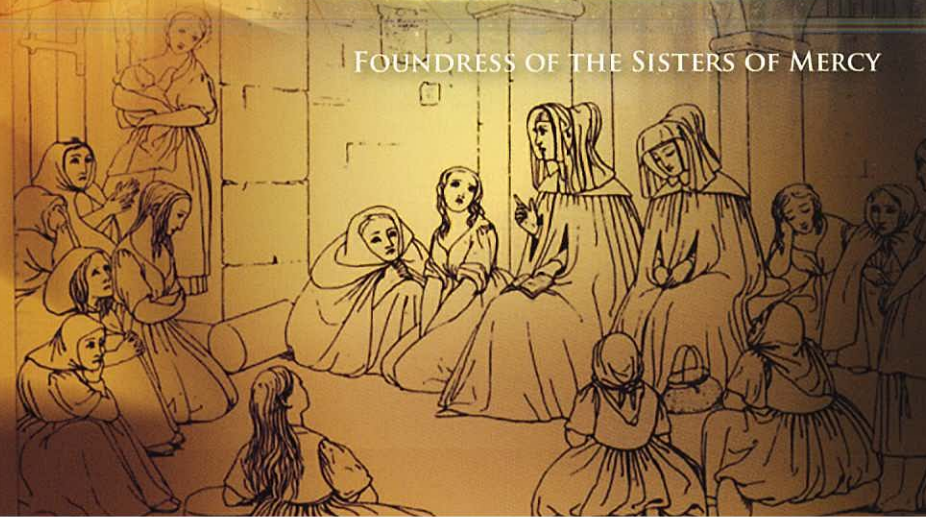
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The Life and Legacy of
**CATHERINE
MCAULEY**

1778-1841

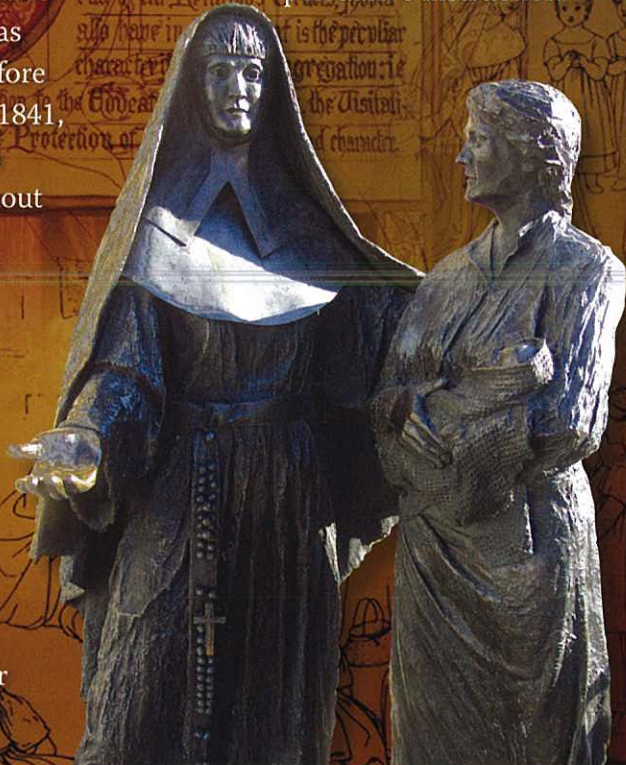
FOUNDRESS OF THE SISTERS OF MERCY



Catherine McAuley was born in Dublin in 1778. In 1824, she used her inheritance from an Irish couple she had served for twenty years to build a large House of Mercy where she and other lay women would shelter homeless women, reach out to the sick and dying, and educate poor girls. The House on Baggot Street opened in 1827. To give these efforts greater stability, Catherine and her co-workers soon decided to found a new religious congregation. On December 12, 1831, she and two others professed their vows as the first Sisters of Mercy. Before her death on November 11, 1841, Catherine founded convents and works of mercy throughout Ireland and England. Ursula Frayne led the first Mercy community to Australia, arriving in Fremantle in January 1846. In 1857 she moved on to Melbourne, founding the first Mercy community in Victoria.

Catherine's approach to education was very simple: she wished to empower poor

people and others to lead happy, mutually sustaining lives; she believed the development of girls' and women's talents is most conducive to the good of society; and she saw religious education as the centerpiece of a truly merciful education. She supported these aims not just by her words, but even more by her own good example. She was convinced that "we learn more by example than by precept," and that the testimony of a teacher's own example, manner, and values is the most persuasive instruction.



Catherine always maintained the special obligation of Sisters of Mercy to educate poor children, but she also saw the need to educate other children in tuition-paying schools. She sought to develop in all students, the well-off and the poor alike, a true commitment to the well-being of all children and of the whole human community. Here, as in her own personal life, she sought to connect wealth with poverty, needs with gifts, in ways that build up the union and charity of all God's people. She loved each student, found joy in the presence of young people, and celebrated their development. She valued "good order" in schools, but cautioned against "too many laws, for if you draw the string too tight it will break."

For Catherine, the heart of a Mercy education is the sound development of the student's religious understanding and openness to God's consolation. The opportunity to grow in personal knowledge of the Christian faith, the help of God manifest in the sacraments, and the irrevocable promises revealed in the life of Jesus Christ, was, for her, the most important gift of a Mercy school to its students. While she insisted on thorough instruction in necessary academic and work skills, Catherine's deepest educational conscience focused on the religious education of all students in her care: on strengthening the grounds of their faith, hope, and love, and nurturing their awareness of the true sources of joy and confidence. To her, occasions for such life-sustaining learning are the central service a Mercy school ought to offer to students.

