

Maria College Kicks Off Mercy Week Celebration with Catherine McAuley Statue Unveiling

Written by Beth Wales, Maria College Chief Communications & Marketing Officer

Maria College's 2017 Mercy Week celebration began on September 18, 2017 at 9am EST with an unveiling ceremony of a bronze sculpture in the likeness of Catherine McAuley, the first sister of Mercy, created by artist, Marie Henderson RSM.

Maria President Dr. Thomas Gamble warmly welcomed those gathered in Fitzgerald Court in Marian Hall, a historic space whose stained glass windows were once part of the Monastery of the Immaculate Conception and former residence of the cloistered Dominican Sisters. Gail Waring RSM, chair of the Maria Board of Trustees, then offered a prayer followed by the unveiling of the bronze likeness of Catherine.

A spiritual aura graced the Maria campus in Albany, New York almost as if, Catherine herself sang along to her *Suscipe* performed by vocalist and guitarist, Judy Rosebrook (music by Elaine Deasy RSM). Others joined in and lilted voices sang, "My God, I am yours for time and eternity..."

Sister Marie Henderson, who traveled almost 700 miles from her home in Detroit the day before to deliver and install the sculpture, gave the audience a glimpse into Catherine by reciting an 1879 quote by Catherine's long time friend, Frances Xavier Warde, "You never knew her (Catherine McAuley). I knew her better than I have known anyone in my life. She was a woman of God and God made her a woman of vision. She showed [us] what it means to see the world and it's people in terms of God's love; to love everyone who needs love, to care for everyone who needs care. Now her vision drives [us] on".

Sister Marie's artistry provides a three dimensional year-round reminder of Catherine. According to Sister Marie, "The bronze occupies space and makes people take notice. It brings Catherine ALIVE. I hope the presence of a sculpture or print about Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy will cause people to stop and question who this woman was, why someone thought her life special enough to inspire others and for her story to be told over and over again. In our world we need images of people who uplift us, who call us to better, who call us out to recognize the needs of others. In essence I hope the story that inspired the creation of this image of Catherine McAuley changes lives, even if just for a moment. It did mine!"

The commissioned artwork is one of many initiatives underway designed to integrate the mission at Maria College. Led by Victoria Battell RSM, Vice President of Mission, Planning and Student Affairs Dean of Students and with the Maria mission subcommittee for Mercy celebrations led by Beth Wales, Chief Communications & Marketing Officer, the unveiling of Catherine McAuley ceremony began the week's mercy story; other events followed during Mercy Week to mark the present day mission at Maria.

Sister Victoria stated, “Today Catherine’s influence has spread far and wide. Present in over 40 countries in the world, Sisters and lay men and women continue to meet the needs of those who come seeking mercy. For Catherine, mercy was practical and a mutual encounter between people. Her presence was warm, authentic, and individual to the needs of those who came to her. The door of mercy is open at Maria College, both to our students, and to each other as colleagues and friends. It is welcoming, kind, and authentic, taking into account all of our diverse needs.”

Catherine’s spirit has always been a powerful presence on the Maria campus and Sister Victoria is hopeful that the new image will continue to animate and advance the mission. She stated, “We chose an alcove in Marian Hall for the pedestal with Catherine's likeness because of the high student foot traffic. They will see Catherine as they pass through, and read her words. It is a quick and powerful reminder that Maria College is a different institution with a rich tradition and a current mission, which begins with how we are to one another.”

Two quotes were carefully selected by Sister Victoria to surround the bronze statue, “I thought it important to have Catherine’s words on the works of mercy, but in a contemporary translation to take her spirit into the present day and beyond. I also chose the quote from the poem by Mary Wickham RSM inspired by the recent Institute Chapter of the Sisters of Mercy as it is a powerful reminder that we as an education institution stand 'on the threshold of need’”.

In time, Sister Marie hopes that this image will call people to find out about Catherine McAuley and to feel encouraged that there are people they know, right on the campus of Maria College, who are brothers and sisters of Catherine. She expressed to the group, “I hope you all feel Catherine’s tender smile as you walk this campus and strive to make the world better.”

To view the September 18, 2017 Maria College ceremony program, please [click here](#).

Quotes:

‘The corporal and spiritual works of mercy, which draw us from a life of contemplation, unite us much more closely to God and render us more valuable in God’s holy service.’

- Catherine McAuley, *The Spirit of the Institute*

‘The door of Mercy rests on the threshold of need. Its single key is kindness, which is always in the lock.’

- Mary Wickham rsm, *The Door of Mercy*