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The Year of Mercy

We are now living in the Holy Year of Mercy, December 8, 2015-November 20, 2016. It is important we understand the meaning of the word MERCY, which is compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm. During this Year of Mercy we are encouraged to meet the "true needs" of others. We are invited to be "Merciful Like the Father" as we go out loving and forgiving rather than judging one another. The logo selected by Pope Francis depicting Jesus carrying another on his shoulders is a perfect image of what this call to be merciful looks like. During this Holy Year of Mercy let us come together through the closeness of the Father and lift each other up in forgiveness and love.

- Regina Garofalo - postulant, NA

*"Many question in their hearts:
why a Jubilee of Mercy today?*

*Simply because the Church, in this time of great
historical change, is called to offer more evident
signs of God's presence and closeness.*

*This is not the time to be distracted;
on the contrary, we need to be vigilant
and to reawaken in ourselves the capacity to see
what is essential. This is a time for the Church
to rediscover the meaning of the mission entrusted
to her by the Lord on the day of Easter: to be
a sign and an instrument of the Father's mercy."*

(Pope Francis, Homily for Divine Mercy Verspers)



God's Love Has No Limits

When I was reading the Bull of Pope Francis on the Indication of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, I just took a deep breath when I read: ***“Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive. I will have the joy of opening the Holy Door on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. On that day, the Holy Door will become a Door of Mercy through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instills hope.”***

The Holy Father's words echoed deeply in my mind and heart. It reminded me of women who have been suffering and have been feeling guilty because they did not forgive themselves for having an induced abortion.

As a religious I have met and worked with different groups of women in my pastoral work, and I know that it is necessary to talk about these issues all the time because it is a cause of suffering for everyone involved. But, at the moment, I do not want to take a common approach about the abortion issue, without addressing it in a larger context, because it is not simply a question of talking about it. On the contrary, it is a very painful and uneasy issue.

It means that when we speak about this issue, we have to do it with a big and merciful heart. As Pope Francis said: “Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life.” It means, also, that we need to ask God to have the courage and sensibility to see and to feel all within our hearts, because God is the source of everyone's life. This is why I believe, from the bottom of my heart, that The Holy Year of Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy will not be one more celebration for all

Christians, but it will be a great and special time that we are invited to see things with God's eyes, not like a Pharisee that puts the law above all and especially above women.

When women talk about having an abortion, often the burdens of their past seem too heavy for them to carry alone. Shame and guilt make them hide part of their lives and thus they don't live fully! This is why when we get close to them, and they trust us, we should open our hearts and our arms to embrace them, instead of judging them. Because who are we to judge our sisters and brothers?



As Pope Francis said *“It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.”*

I should also like to paraphrase the words of Pope Francis: It is the time which has come for those women to take up the joyful call to mercy, and forgive themselves, because God, of course, rejects our sins, but he will never, ever, reject the contrite heart, for God recognizes everyone for who she/he is, and offers to them a positive way to become better. God will always see the human being, and will offer his hand to everyone that wants to change his life.

We need to accept that people deserve the right to move beyond their guilt and shame, and become more confident in God's mercy, because only He can transform our past into a fruitful gift for the future with courage and hope, and make our life, all of it, into a life that can give life. So let us pray for those who have been feeling guilty because they do not have, as yet, enough confidence in God's mercy. God's love has no limits!

- S. Jusciêda Maria Araujo Menezes, BR -

Women and Children and The Jubilee of Mercy

Pope Francis has declared this year as the Jubilee of Mercy. The virtue of Mercy is widely addressed in numerous theological publications and books. The virtue of Mercy is also celebrated by poets. There are various articles in magazines, newsletters and the Catholic press which will undoubtedly increase as the Church celebrates the Jubilee of Mercy.

At the beginning of his pontificate, Saint John Paul II wrote an encyclical about God's Mercy, *Dives in Misericordia*, presenting the Creator as the Giver of charity. The Creator supports human beings in their earthly lives.

Mercy, understood as God bending over His creation, is a true experience of the healing power of Him who can do everything. The current culture often distorts the true face of mercy, replacing it with wide-ranging charitable activities which do not result from an encounter with the love of the Creator. Charity is sometimes confused with pity; while mercy is the deepest and most complete experience of love, which restores value to man wounded by sin or caught up in the different structures of evil. Pope John Paul II wrote: *"The true and proper meaning of mercy does not consist only in looking, however penetratingly and compassionately, at moral, physical or material evil: mercy is manifested in its*

true and proper aspect when it restores to value, promotes and draws good from all the forms of evil existing in the world and in man." (DM #6).

Mercy can be rendered only by one who previously was himself its recipient. Only God, the Giver of all good can be the real Giver. The world in all circumstances and times will need witnesses of that love. Over the centuries, God revealed his compassionate face through a number of men and women who throughout their lives bore witness to the healing power of love. If God has called people as transmitters of the mysteries of mercy, it means that the world needs good news about the healing power of love. Mercy brings hope to the world and gives meaning to all events. Spreading the truth of God's mercy does not necessarily require big words or huge works. It is associated with a daily attitude in the face of common situations.



Felician Sisters today, formed in the current culture, try to return to our congregational sources, among which the most important is undoubtedly the Gospel and the example of our foundress, Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska. The sisters attempt to manifest the mercy of God. By virtue of their vocation, Felician Sisters devote themselves to the service and mission

of the Church, bearing in mind that in their religious consecration there is an inexhaustible power to act for the benefit of others. “Gospel is made effective through charity which is the Church’s glory and the sign of her faithfulness to the Lord”—as we read in Vita Consecrata. (VC 82)

- SM Klaudia Gutowska, WA-

*...we will be asked ...
if we have helped to overcome
the ignorance in which millions
of people live, especially children
deprived of the necessary means
to free them from the bonds
of poverty; if we have been close
to the lonely and afflicted.*

(Pope Francis)

In the institution there are two Felician Sisters and the rest of the staff are laity. The staff consists of a psychologist, speech therapist, teacher, sports coach; and non-pedagogical personnel: administrator, driver, cooks and housekeepers.

The sisters try to give children and their parents or guardians what they lack most, a sense of security so they know that they are not alone. They receive special assistance, e.g. help with homework, meals, clothing, and also information as to agencies that can help them.

Through the work of this Center we hope “to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives.” (Pope Francis, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, 3)

- SM Jadwiga Piorun, WA -

The sisters of the Province of Warsaw realize the virtue of charity in their work at the The Sociotherapeutic Center for children from dysfunctional families. The Center is located near their provincial house in Warsaw. The children who participate in the program are taken care of by well-trained educators. The children are divided into age groups.



The Logo for the Jubilee Year

The *logo* and the *motto* together provide a fitting summary of what the Jubilee Year is all about.

The motto *Merciful Like the Father* (taken from the Gospel of Luke, 6:36) serves as an invitation to follow the merciful example of the Father who asks us not to judge or condemn but to forgive and to give love and forgiveness without measure. (cfr. Lk 6:37-38)

The logo – the work of Jesuit Father Marko I. Rupnik – presents a small *summa theologiae* of the theme of mercy. In fact, it represents an image quite important to the early Church: that of the Son having taken upon his shoulders the lost soul demonstrating that it is the love of Christ that brings to completion the mystery of his incarnation culminating in redemption. The logo has been designed in such a way so as to express the profound way in which the Good Shepherd touches the flesh of humanity and does so with a love with the power to change one's life.

One particular feature worthy of note is that while the Good Shepherd, in his great mercy, takes humanity upon himself, his eyes are



merged with those of man. Christ sees with the eyes of Adam, and Adam with the eyes of Christ. Every person discovers in Christ, the new Adam, one's own humanity and the future that lies ahead, contemplating, in his gaze, the love of the Father.

The scene is captured within the so called mandorla (the shape of an almond), a figure quite important in early and medieval iconography, for it calls to mind the two natures of Christ, divine and human. The three concentric ovals, with colors progressively lighter as we move outward, suggest the movement of Christ

who carries humanity out of the night of sin and death. Conversely, the depth of the darker color suggests the impenetrability of the love of the Father who forgives all.

The explanation of the Logo was accessed from: <http://www.iubilaeummisericordiae.va/content/gdm/en/giubileo/logo.html>

Mercy and the Environment

“The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet: ‘Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest.’”

Laudato Si #48

“In this Holy Year, we look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates. How many are the wounds borne by the flesh of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich! During this Jubilee, the Church will be called even more to heal these wounds, to assuage

them with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity and vigilant care. Let us not fall into humiliating indifference or a monotonous routine that prevents us from discovering what is new! Let us ward off destructive cynicism! Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism!”

Misericordiae Vultus

These quotes, one from the Encyclical *Laudato Si* and the second from the Bull of Indiction for the Year of Mercy, highlight our call to, “surrender to God’s



<http://www.theguardian.com>

will in compassionate service, total availability, and concern for the salvation of all people.”

The Pope, in this time of globalization and great historical change, calls us to offer more effective signs of God’s presence in our lives. Mercy is the virtue that connects us with God and with one another. This encompasses mercy for those most affected by our choices, our economically poor brothers and sisters. This Year of Mercy calls us to consider an examination of our lifestyle.

Am I hearing the cries of the earth? How?

Do I hear the cries of the poor?

Through whom do I hear the cries of the poor?

How may I show mercy to the most vulnerable in the world by what I consume or purchase? How may I show mercy to the most vulnerable by what I eat?

When have I thought only of myself? When have I been selfish? When could I have acted more for the common good of all the people I live with on this earth?

When have I been indifferent to how I use earth’s resources?

Could I describe my day as a “monotonous routine?” How could this affect the poor?

Do we as a local home, province and congregation responsibly cherish the earth? What action could we take to be a sign of God’s mercy to the earth?

Do we as a local home, province and congregation respect the human dignity of our most vulnerable sisters and brothers? What action could we take to

be a sign of God’s love and mercy to the vulnerable people throughout the world that we may never meet?

“Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.”

Laudato Si #202



Toward the end of the encyclical Pope Francis offers us a sign of hope. We are called to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge what we can do better, and to act with a God-given sense of mercy towards ourselves, our most vulnerable

sisters and brothers, and towards God’s Creation

“Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom. No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts. I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us.”

Laudato Si #205

- S. Maryann Agnes Mueller, NA -

My Personal Experience in Haiti

Traveling to Haiti has opened my eyes to some of God's people who are the poorest of the poor in this world. The children love Sister Inga and Sister Marilyn. They are like second mothers to them. The little ones also cling to those who come to help out at the ministry. I saw that all the people in Haiti need tender loving care.

The beauty of the flowers and foliage are in contrast to the rough roads and shacks, many of which have no windows, food, stove to cook on, clean water, electricity and no bathrooms. Safety laws do not seem to be in place in any vehicle or motor cycle. There is much erosion of the land. Children play in the mountains with their homemade toys.

To this day, after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the Cathedral in Jacmel still stands in ruins along with other buildings. With all that has been destroyed all around the area one does not know where to begin with the repairs.

People bathe in the narrow river where they also wash their clothes, cars, motorcycles plus this is drinking water for many. In addition, cattle, pigs, goats come to the river to quench their thirst.

I am thankful to have the opportunity to spend two weeks in Haiti this past August. It has made a profound impact on me. Our Holy Father Pope Francis tells us we must be

loving and merciful to all; I found the experience in Haiti to be an example of following this request. Peace.

- SM Angela Parkins, NA -

The time I spent in Jacmel, Haiti was a powerful experience for me. It was an awesome challenge to which we all responded with great joy. I saw how the work of the sisters is so needed in Jacmel. What touched me the most was the difficult conditions of life for the children. There seems to be no hope of a change for them in the near future.

I was moved by the desire of the children to study and learn. However, it is not easy when there is no money for tuition, uniform, shoes, books, and school supplies. The sisters are helping the children as much as they can. Every child is accepted in the

home of the sisters. Every day food is served to the children and no one is turned away. The sisters do not differentiate from those who are Catholic and those of other denominations. The sisters have rules that everyone has to follow to respect the human dignity of each person so when they share what they have the children learn to pay it forward for the good of the community. Whenever we would organize activities on a daily basis, more children would come. They fully participated with joy, giving us love.



I feel that my response from this experience is to find sponsors to help the children go to school. Many of my friends from Poland have offered to help. Every donation helps but the best way is to help a child to finish their education. I know that this is just a drop in the ocean but every drop helps to make the water flow.

Another profound experience for me was my participation in the Blessing Water Project. The fact that I was able to participate in preparing the Water Women was a grace for me. The women learned how important the use of pure water is for cooking, cleaning, hygiene, especially for the children. They learned how to use the filter and care for it so that it can be used for a long time. They also commit themselves to share clean water with at least three other families. When I watched 20 women who came for the meeting, I was thinking how wonderful the work sisters are doing. It was a strange feeling to try and teach how to use the filter by using only the few words I knew in Creole. I saw how the women listened to Madam Omanie, who was instructing the women about using clean water. The women wanted to learn how to use the filter and keep it clean so that they could share clean water with others. Something that seemed simple was difficult for some to learn. It showed me how important education is to all of us.

In Haiti it is clear that there are injustices toward women. Most of the time, it is solely the women who take care of the home and the family. For their work they receive much less than a man. Very often the children are left alone without any care because the women go to the river to wash someone's clothes to earn a small amount of money.

Haiti is a beautiful county that could bring many



tourists and this could create many jobs. However, because of the lack of initiative of people, the poverty and the devastation of the land and environment there is not much tourism. I am grateful that I was able to participate in the mission life of the Felician Sisters in Haiti. Such an experience opened my eyes and heart. In Haiti I felt at home thanks to my sisters Inga, Marilyn, Margaret, Angela and Rita. Deo Gratias!

- SM Julitta Kurek, KR -

Prayer Intentions



To pray for and to bring to our awareness the sufferings of those who are being abused through the practice of human trafficking.

1. For the Church, its leaders and all of God's people that they may be strengthened to continue in the struggle to alleviate the trafficking of women and children.
2. For all nations to work together to end human rights' abuses, especially the trafficking of women and children.
3. For those who suffer the atrocities of human trafficking, that they may find healing and new life through the grace of God and the care of others.
4. For those responsible for the trafficking of human beings, that they may be touched by God's grace to seek the path of justice and to respect the dignity of human life.
5. For those who give tirelessly of their time, talents and resources to provide information to the world about human abuses, assistance to those abused and inspiration to those seeking justice.



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Editor: S Maryann Agnes Mueller (NA)

Publication Office:
SM Agnieszka Mruga (WA)
Casa Generalizia di Suore Feliciane
Via del Casaletto, 540
00151 Roma, ITALIA

www.FelicianSisters.org

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Abbreviations

- Rome, Italy – RO
- Kraków, Poland – KR
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- Warszawa, Poland – WA
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- Embu, Kenya – KE