



Nurturing Justice and Living Faith

**A week-long Spirituality Integration Resource for Justice
from the Institute Justice Team of the
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
for reflection on the inextricable connection
between faith and justice**



Introduction

Br Ryan W Roberts, OLF; Sisters of Mercy Institute Justice Team

An anecdotal experience of many is hearing the claim that justice work is optional in the life of faith, a “would be nice” addition to the “normal” practice of spirituality. But attending mass and going to confession, these are only half of the life laid out for us in baptism and claimed in confirmation. In Matthew 25, we witness a dialogue between Jesus and those whose lives demonstrate what naturally flows from surrender to the faith that lives within:

Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’

Matthew 25.37b–40, NRSVue

The Spirituality Integration Resource for Justice (SIRJ) was inspired by the recognition that, for Christians, justice work is based in the call to an ever deeper spiritual life. More than that, the spiritual life to which we are called by God is not possible without doing the work of pursuing justice. Justice and spirituality are inextricably intertwined, because becoming more Christ-like causes us to see the world as he does, a world created in beauty and life but now corrupted by sin and in need of God’s grace for healing. To see a broken world and do nothing to repair it, as James says, is to have a dead faith:

If a [sibling] is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from works, and I by my works will show you faith.

James 2.15–18, NRSVue

The Mercy Justice Team conceived this SIRJ as a resource for both faith and justice, a collection of materials for reflection to help the reader delve into the spiritual roots of justice work and to illuminate how justice work flows into and nurtures a deep faith.

The SIRJ’s structure is based on Leviticus’s description of the sabbatical years and the year of Jubilee; it will eventually comprise a week of weeks, or 49 days. Each week will guide the reader through a daily series of reflections in a variety of formats, engaging the mind and heart, the receptive and the creative. Readers will witness stories from those who have received grace in response to suffering injustice, those who have brought healing to ones who suffer injustice, and those who, like Jesus retreating to the mountaintop, took much-needed rest in response to ongoing encounters with injustice. Future installments are planned for Mercy’s other Critical Concerns.



This first week of SIRJ materials is being released as part of Mercy’s participation in LCWR’s [Another 100 Days of Prayer, Fasting, and Advocacy](#) (Español). You can click to see Mercy’s offerings for the first [100 Days](#) (Español) and the [Next 100 Days](#) (Español).

Day 1: Overview of a week for Women

Br Ryan W Roberts, OLF; Sisters of Mercy Institute Justice Team

This week of the Spirituality Integration Resource for Justice is being formed around the Critical Concern for Women. The Sisters of Mercy express their work with women in this way:

Through our schools, colleges, health-care institutions and spirituality centers, and through our legislative advocacy, we give special attention to women's education, health and spirituality.

The wellbeing of women has been central to the life of the Sisters of Mercy since the congregation's earliest days. Catherine McAuley founded the House of Mercy believing in the strength of women to help each other and the children that society did not sufficiently care for. In accepting the call to profess vows as religious women, Catherine and the first sisters took steps to establish Mercy as an enduring institute to serve the poor, sick, and uneducated. This foundation of service demonstrates that women are both in great need because of society's oppressive norms and empowered by God to envision and incarnate the world of beauty, life, and mutual care that God intends.

In the next six days, you'll encounter various ways to contemplate the work of justice by and for women:

- Visio divina, praying by sight
- A story of doing work to create justice for women
- A story of receiving mercy after experiencing injustice toward women
- A story of seeking respite from the struggle in the work of justice for women
- An examen to search deeply within regarding justice for women
- An invitation to turn contemplation into creation for women's justice

This variety of encounters is designed to stretch your perspective in ways that might be new. After each day's reflection, prayer, or creation, you might choose to talk with someone about your experience or journal a bit. ***Take note of what challenged you. What surprised you? How did the Holy Spirit make room in you for something new?***

As you prepare yourself today for the encounters the week will bring, you might ask yourself about your assumptions.

- ***What immediately comes to mind when you think of women?***
- ***Why might the Sisters of Mercy hold women in special regard as a Critical Concern?***
- ***How have you noticed or failed to notice women's reality recently? Is that different from when you were younger?***
- ***What do you hope will happen in you this week?***

Day 2: Visio Divina

Angie Howard-McParland & Br Ryan W Roberts, OLF; Sisters of Mercy Institute Justice Team

The piece on the next page, painted by Eva Lallo, RSM, is titled “Women—Givers and Protectors of Life—Lovers of Peace—One with the Universe”. You are invited to the practice of visio divina, “divine sight” or praying by seeing. A brief summary of the steps is included to guide you through your prayer. You may choose how long to engage this practice; a beginner may choose to spend 5 minutes after learning the steps, while someone with more experience may pray for 20 minutes or more. Steps are borrowed from [Kathy Keary’s guidance](#) on the Precious Blood Renewal Center’s website.

Step 1

Pick a comfortable place where you will not be disturbed or distracted. Adopt a position you can comfortably hold for the duration of your prayer, whether standing, sitting, kneeling, or some other reverent pose. Relax and center yourself, perhaps by closing your eyes for a few moments and focusing on slow, intentional breaths.

Step 2

Gaze at the entire picture. Notice the shapes, the colors, and the lighting. Notice the detail of both the foreground and background. Once you have visually canvassed the painting, note what has drawn your attention. It is God who is luring you to a treasure meant just for you.

Step 3

Meditate on the part of the picture that has drawn your attention. How is God speaking to you? Why do you think God drew your attention to this particular part? Is a message conveyed that pertains to your life today? Do you sense an invitation? Do you hear a call? Is a memory aroused? Allow these thoughts to descend to your heart. What emotion is evoked? What word describes your inner stirring as you embrace this feeling? Allow God’s communication to touch you deep within where the Spirit dwells.

Step 4

God has been speaking to you as you meditated on this artwork. It’s now time for you to respond to the divine. Allow your words to be born in the recesses of your soul. What is your response? What is your prayer? Articulate any yearnings or desires that arise. Give voice to the emotion that is whirling within.

Step 5

Words are never sufficient to express our deepest selves. Turn to silence to simply rest in communion with our Creator – the One who kissed your soul before placing it in your body – the One who loves you beyond measure. Savor the stillness. Be soothed by Love.

Visio Divina sets our interior stage for a soulful connection with our Maker where intimate communion is possible. I have discovered that Visio Divina encourages the practice of viewing all of life through a sacred lens uncovering the messages hidden within creation. All of life then becomes hallowed ground.



Women—Givers and Protectors of Life—Lovers of Peace—One with the Universe by *Eva Lallo, RSM*

Day 3: Please meet Christy, Colleen, Kris, and Charlie

Jeanne Christensen, RSM

I met my first prostituted women, victims of human trafficking, in 2004. They had survived and were transitioning successfully into recovery because one of them had started a small not-for-profit to assist them. Among those survivors there were stories of terrible violence, humiliation and suffering by each of them. One had been left for dead in a motel because she “didn’t meet expectations” – even if she had known what the expectations were. She is now a nursing assistant.

The survivor I know best is now in her 70s, directing a not-for-profit assisting exploited women. She holds a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and has the respect and cooperation of judges and the court system, of law enforcement, Homeland Security and the FBI. She is present at raids and provides safe places and services for the victims, some of whom are as young as twelve. She has been my colleague for many years, always available for assistance and advice. She never gives up and is a strong mentor for the women with whom she ministers.

I want to introduce you to one of the mentored survivors I met and have experienced their* strength, courage and resilience. Their name is Charlie. They are a victim, survivor, MSW social worker, Certified Victim & Survivor Services provider, artist & art therapist, and they work in nonprofit management. Extraordinary? Yes, but strong in their own right and mentored by an equally strong survivor. Their story is found at:

<https://polarisproject.org/survivor-gallery-Charlie-tebow/>

On page 6, you can see a photo of Charlie and some of their art.

The stories of other victim survivors are found at:

<https://polarisproject.org/?s=survivors+gallery>

Human trafficking facts and resources are found at:

<https://www.polarisproject.org>

The Alliance to End Human Trafficking (formerly the U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking) also has excellent information and resources at:

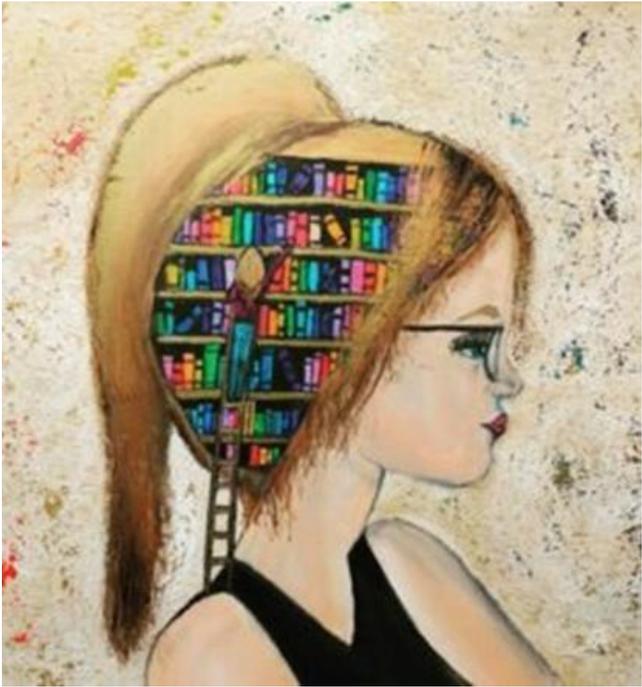
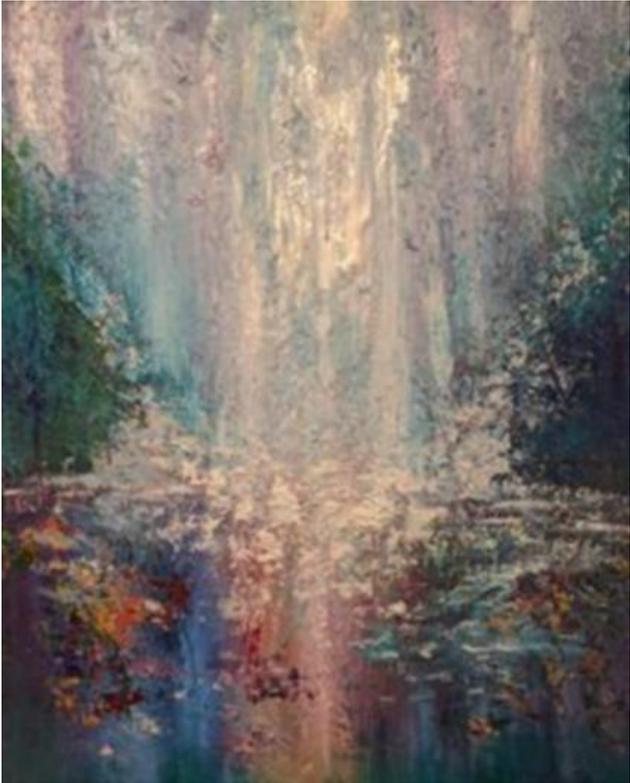
<https://alliancetoendhumantrafficking.org>

- ***What feelings stirred in you as you read about these women?***
- ***Did they challenge any of your assumptions?***
- ***Where do you think you might have encountered survivors of human trafficking in your own life?***
- ***How can we better honor and create justice for women who have had to show resilience like this?***

*Charlie was assigned female at birth but is a nonbinary person. Charlie uses them/them pronouns.

This is Charlie today and some of their art.

Look closely at the message they are giving you through their art.



Day 4: Cyntoia Brown: Mercy in response to injustice

John Charles McAllister-Ashley; Sisters of Mercy Institute Justice Team

In August of 2004, 43-year-old Johnny Allen paid 16-year-old Cyntoia Brown, a victim of sex trafficking, to perform sexual acts with him. She had been exploited at a young age and had been in and out of the juvenile court system since the age of 12. Cyntoia had been controlled by an older trafficker and was living on the streets. Johnny Allen was known for predatory behavior in his community, even flirting with teenagers at local diners. During their encounter, when things turned sour, Cyntoia shot Johnny in the back of the head. Even though she was only 16 years old, she was tried as an adult and later found guilty of first-degree murder.

The court system never took into account her trauma from sex trafficking and abuse. Her status as a minor was never considered by the justice system. Her case drew national attention as a prime example of how the legal system fails to protect vulnerable women and girls, especially women of color. These victims of sexual exploitation end up harshly punished instead of protected by a system that failed to even look at Johnny Allen as dangerous. They sentenced a minor to die in jail for defending herself.

She was sentenced to serve life in prison in a maximum security prison in Nashville, Tennessee, eligible for parole after 51 years. During her incarceration, she earned her GED and her associate's and bachelor's degrees from Lipscomb University. She was considered a model prisoner. After several high-profile celebrities caught wind of Cyntoia's case, the Tennessee Board of Parole held a hearing on her clemency petition. On January 7th, 2019, Governor Haslam commuted Cyntoia's sentence from life in prison to 15 years served plus 10 years of probation. Governor Haslam made this decision based on how complex the case was and the truth that "imposing a life sentence on a juvenile that would require her to serve at least 51 years before even being eligible for parole consideration is too harsh."

Cyntoia Brown's story is a reminder of the urgent need for compassion and understanding within our criminal justice system. As a victim of sex trafficking and abuse, she faced unimaginable hardships at such a young age. Her journey reflects resilience and the possibility of redemption. The mercy shown to her by Governor Haslam not only serves as a recognition of the injustices she endured but also focuses on the systemic failures that often prioritize punishment over protection for vulnerable individuals. By granting clemency, we can acknowledge that victims of exploitation deserve a second chance to heal and rebuild their lives rather than be condemned to a lifetime of incarceration. Cyntoia's case urges us to reevaluate our approach to justice, advocating for a system that truly serves to protect and uplift those who have suffered, particularly women of color who are disproportionately affected by these severe injustices.

- ***Did this story work out the way you expected?***
- ***Have you heard other stories like this?***
- ***Was the mercy Cyntoia received something she earned or something she deserved from the beginning?***

Day 5: Changing ministry or career when stress becomes too strong

Rose Marie Tresp, RSM; Sisters of Mercy Institute Justice Team

A young woman in Charlotte, NC (name withheld by her request) began to volunteer at a ministry for women in transition from prison to the ability to be successful in the outside world.

This ministry was so impressive to her and so meaningful and necessary that she returned to college to get a master's degree in social work. She then worked for several years at the ministry for women transitioning out of prison. This was meaningful work but also quite stressful.

After several years, she realized that the stress was getting stronger; her parents were older and requiring more of her time and attention. She realized that she needed to make a work-life change. She decided then to open a counseling office.

In her counseling office, she now sees a variety of clients needing help but would not be so involved in their day-to-day life.

Scripture tells us that Jesus took time in retreat to recover, rest, and pray. The work of justice for women can be incredibly taxing on our minds and bodies.

- ***Are you someone who lets yourself take rest when you need it?***
- ***What about extending yourself grace?***
- ***How do you listen to the signs within yourself to know when it's time to take a break?***

Day 6: Examen – What is the story of women in the world?

Rose Marie Tresp, RSM; Sisters of Mercy Institute Justice Team

Two recent books examine the questions about women that are rarely asked. *Invisible Women* by Caroline Criado Perez, published in 2019, highlights how most of recorded human history is one big data gap regarding women, wherein the lives of men have been taken to represent those of humans overall. The book, *Cassandra Speaks: When Women Are the Storytellers, the Human Story Changes* by Elizabeth Lesser, published in 2020, asks how the traditional mythical and heroic stories would change if told with women's voices. What if humankind had followed different hero myths and guiding stories, ones that value cooperation, caretaking, and compassion over vengeance and violence?

Consider the following:

1. Medical research uses male physiology as the norm. What questions should be asked about that research? Are the dosages for drugs calibrated on the larger male body? Do reports about new drugs or treatments discuss what groups of people were part of the research pool? What other questions should you ask?
2. Quick! Draw or imagine the person fulfilling the following roles in scientific research: user, person, designer, researcher. What was the gender of the person you imagined?
3. Visit a church with stained glass windows depicting saints. How many of the saints are women (not counting the Virgin Mary)?
4. What does the term "working woman" really mean? Does the term reflect the reality of women's work? What work that women do is not typically thought of in this term?
5. When at a bank, corporation, or other office that has a display of their president, vice-presidents, or managers, carefully look at this group. How many are women? How many are white or persons of color? What are the hairstyles of the women? Are these hairstyles similar to those in news programs or to women who work in the higher levels of the U.S. government? How do hairstyles reflect who is acceptable in the corporate culture?
6. What story would Eve have told about picking the fruit in the garden of Eden? What story would Cassandra of Greek mythology have told about her life ([summary by Britannica](#))? What would have been different if women had been the primary tellers of these stories?
7. What other questions about women are rarely asked?

Day 7: Tell the story of women

Sue Gallagher, RSM; Sisters of Mercy Institute Justice Team

Men and women have been created, which is to say, willed by God: in perfect equality as human persons; and in their respective beings as men and women. Being a man or woman is a reality which is good: men and women possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God. Men and women have one and the same dignity "in the image of God" and reflect the Creator's wisdom and goodness.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

March is Women's History Month. Like many of the commemorative calendar months, it exists because society needs it. This month is a requirement until the catechetical quote above is understood as truth. It is needed until the Critical Concern for Women of the Sisters of Mercy is fulfilled. We advocate for the intrinsic value of women's lives and promote equality for women in Church and society.

Numerous creative practices exist that can focus us on justice for women. Today, we contemplate two that tell a story: a film and an obituary. Both tell a story of a woman who dedicated their lives to the service of women seeking fullness in God and society. ***How do these examples inspire you? How will you tell the story of justice for women today?***

Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde

Many of us encountered Bishop Budde as President Trump was being inaugurated in January 2025. She is the spiritual leader for the congregations and Episcopal schools in the District of Columbia and four Maryland counties that compose the Episcopal Diocese of Washington.

Bishop Budde gave the Feb 7, 2026 Tippy McMichael Lecture on "[How we can be brave and have moral courage during turbulent times](#)," recorded on YouTube. Afterward, she responds to questions of mercy and forgiveness.



Sister Betty Campbell

Betty's decades' long ministry focused largely on two key concerns: work at the border with immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers; and education and empowerment programs with women. In both, she was living out two of the formally adopted Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy: solidarity with immigrants and refugees in seeking a more just and inclusive world, and attention to women's education, health, and spirituality.

Read Sister Betty's obituary on page 11.

Sister Elizabeth (Betty)'s Obituary

From the [Angelus Funeral Home website](#), San Antonio, TX

Sister of Mercy Elizabeth (Betty) Campbell, known for her lifelong insistence on and advocacy for the dignity and human rights of every person, died in San Antonio, Texas on January 18, 2026. Her death was sudden, the result of a brain hemorrhage. She was 91 years of age, a woman of faith committed as a Sister of Mercy for 70 years to the service of the poor. Day after day, she lived her chosen motto: My God and My All.

Born in Wisconsin and raised in Iowa, Sister Betty was the youngest of William and Caroline [O'Neil] Campbell's 13 children. Influenced by two brothers who were doctors, she decided to become a nurse. Betty entered the Sisters of Mercy in 1955, took her lifelong vows in 1961, and served briefly in two Mercy hospitals in the U.S. before accepting a call (1962) to missionary work in Peru.

Director of nursing and hospital administrator at Madres de la Misericordia in Sicuani, Peru, Sister Betty not only offered her professional skills and compassionate care but also listened and learned from the people she'd come to help. Theirs was a dignity and a culture that called her to new perspectives about missionary work.

It was in Peru that Sister Betty met Father Peter Hinde, a Carmelite priest from the U.S. who was also sensing new possibilities for missionary service. Attending to the wisdom of their indigenous neighbors, these two missionaries became lifetime companions and partners in what they called "reverse mission." It was a title that meant not Americans arriving to teach Indigenous people, but rather Indigenous people teaching Americans how U.S. policies and interventions were impacting their lives.

Over the years, "reverse mission" found Sister Betty and Father Peter traveling extensively throughout Latin America [Abya Yala], gathering information, and returning to the U.S. to advocate for those nations and peoples they'd visited. In 1973, their work also led to the creation of Casa Tabor, a community of persons committed to justice and compassion for the poor and oppressed. Welcoming Latin American exiles and refugees and expanding advocacy work, Casa Tabor moved from its origin in Washington, D.C. to San Antonio, TX in the mid-1980s and again in 1995 to Cd. Juarez on the Mexican border.

After Father Peter died in 2020, Sister Betty continued her decades-long ministry focused largely on two key concerns: work at the border with immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and education and empowerment programs with women. In both, she was living out two of the formally adopted Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy: solidarity with immigrants and refugees in seeking a more just and inclusive world, and attention to women's education, health, and spirituality.

Approachable, lively, prayerful, and always interested in each person she encountered, Sister Betty lived the gospel of Jesus Christ in many ways. Though well known in the communities she served, her daily life was one of simple companionship. She welcomed visitors wanting to learn about the realities at the border. She emailed widely, urging others to advocate for those suffering abuse. She painted murals and kept a litany of persons violently killed or "disappeared." And through it all she prayed – treasuring the Eucharist, cherishing the rosary, and daily gathering with others to read scripture and reflect on God's word.

Sister Betty is survived by a loving host of nieces and nephews, grand-nieces and -nephews, by her Sisters in the Mercy Community, by her companions in Casa Tabor, and by her many neighbors and friends. May she be rejoicing now in the presence of the God she so loved and served.

Day 8+: Let us begin again...

One week of reflection on the Critical Concern for Women is just the beginning. We all encounter injustice for women on a daily basis. Often, injustices are intersectional, where injustice for women overlaps with others of Mercy's Critical Concerns: Earth, immigration, nonviolence, and racism. Working for justice is the natural extension of our spirituality, and the work is source of enrichment for our relationship with God.

The Mercy Justice Team has offered these resources for your further exploration:

- [Social Justice Resource Center's hub on Gender Inequality](#)
- [United Nations Sustainable Development Goal #5: Gender Equality](#)

You can also sign up for the Mercy Justice Team's action alerts, receiving by email and/or text message up to three opportunities per week to engage with federal policymakers on building a world shaped by the values of Catholic Social Teaching and the Mercy charism.

[Click here and begin under "Sign Up for Alerts" on the right side of the web page](#)

If this resource was valuable to you, please let us know by email at justice@sistersofmercy.org. We hope to hear constructive feedback that can help us shape the development of future weeks / installments on the other Critical Concerns. Let us know how you used this resource and what stood out to you. And share it with others to further integrate our communities' relationships between spirituality and justice!

May you be a blessed blessing for others, a font of Mercy for the world.