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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Dean E. de la Motte, Ph.D., Vice President for Academic Affairs

The title of this volume of essays, *Mercy Illuminates*, is taken from a symposium held on the campus of Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island, on April 23, 2008, in celebration of the institution's sixtieth anniversary. Most of the texts that follow were presented that day in an earlier version. The epilogue of *Mercy Illuminates* is a paper presented by Sister Leona Misto, Vice President for Mission Integration and Planning at Salve Regina, at the Conference of Mercy Higher Education in June 2008.

The phrase we have chosen for both our symposium and this volume attempts to capture our community's efforts to foster the *illumination* of all that we do – teaching, scholarship, service to the community – with the charism of the founding Sisters of Mercy. Of course, as these essays clearly demonstrate, there is no single or easy definition of "mercy." It is our hope that this modest volume suggests just some of the richness that proceeds when faculty and staff from a range of disciplines bring their scholarship, intellect and wisdom to bear on the meaning of mercy in relation to the history, culture, religious and philosophical origins, academic work and community service of our institution.

The Mission Statement of Salve Regina University, in three short paragraphs, moves from its founding (i.e., its history and reason for being) through its primary educational purpose (i.e., the academic work it *does* with students), to its ultimate contribution to society through its students, who are encouraged to work for "a world that is harmonious, just and merciful." To some extent, *Mercy Illuminates* mirrors this tripartite division of our identity. In Section I: "The Legacy and Meaning of Mercy," philosopher Lois Eveleth reflects broadly on the concept of mercy and its translation into goals for Mercy colleges and universities in her essay, "A Legacy of Mercy." Theologian Jayme Hennessy explores the significance of changing images of Mary as Holy Queen and Mother of Mercy, from early medieval times to

the present, for "the identity and mission of the present-day Salve Regina University." It is appropriate that we begin, as a Catholic university, with the foundational disciplines of philosophy and theology, but also that both writers make explicit a tendency one sees throughout this volume, and indeed throughout the history and mission of Salve Regina University: to connect academic work to the wider world, to unite theory and practice, and to assure that learning is always, in ways both direct and indirect, connected to the greater good.

Part II: "Justice, Mercy and the State," includes considerations from three very different disciplinary approaches – the literary, the political, and the historical (though two of the essays, by Symeon Giannakos and Timothy Neary – might be called "historico-polical" rather than fitting neatly into one or the other category). However, each in its own way touches on the quality of mercy and how it relates, to use Paula Bolduc's paraphrase of Machiavelli, to "the good of the state." Her "The Cruelty of Mercy: Oxymoronic Paradoxes," is a literary discussion focused on the tension between cruelty and justice, and the paradox that true mercy must often include aspects of the cruel. Her wide-ranging discussion touches briefly on Seneca, Machiavelli and Montaigne, but its most extended consideration is of the character Portia in *The Merchant of Venice.* Symeon Giannakos, in his "Mercy and Human Security: Emerging Values in International Relations," explores the development of the concept of human security and infuses it with "the concept of mercy in an attempt to demonstrate its universal applicability." Finally, Timothy Neary, in "The Rhetoric of Mercy: Do-Gooders, Corporatists, and Warriors," traces the development of three key political movements – Progressivism, The New Deal, and The Great Society – and their impact on subsequent American history, including the present day and the presidential election of 2008.

Part III: "Mercy Illuminates: Learning Service and Service-Learning," presents two final papers, these focused on practical efforts to infuse not just the classroom, but the experience of faculty and students *outside* the classroom, with our institution's mission. The first essay is a case study presented by three members of the Business Studies and Economics Department, Judith Keenan, Arlene Nicholas and Traci Warrington, entitled "Merciful Practices of a Business Program: Looking In – Reaching Out." It recounts their efforts to integrate the University's mission into their departmental activities, from curriculum to service-learning opportunities

for students, with a particular emphasis on the latter. The department's success in this area has been remarkable. We are proud of the fact that an area of study so often connected at other institutions with careerism and individual gain is, at Salve Regina, tirelessly committed, through its requirement of business ethics but especially through its service-learning opportunities, to encouraging students to work for a world that is just, harmonious, and merciful. Our volume closes with "Mercy Spirituality, the Foundation for Compassionate Service," reflections by Sister Leona Misto, our Vice President for Mission Integration and Planning. Her essay explains how our emphasis on mercy spirituality in faculty development, curriculum, and service-learning all spring from Catherine McAuley's devotion to works of mercy, which in turn derive from the Christian tradition of "loving-kindness," incarnate in Jesus Christ and already present in the covenants of Hebrew Scripture between Yahweh and the People of Israel.

Sister Leona's essay brings the volume full circle, connecting our Catholic and Mercy origins with our ultimate reason for being, and giving practical examples of how faculty, students and administrators alike daily live the mission of Salve Regina University, and how we can all work to strengthen it.

As we celebrate the first 60 years of our institution and all that has been accomplished by the Sisters of Mercy and their colleagues, we are also mindful of the work that remains to be done, and have faith that the guiding principles of Catherine McAuley, especially in such uncertain times as these, will continue to inspire, enlighten, and *illuminate* our common purpose.