

Mercy Associates follow founder's ideals

Although Mercy sisters are fewer and farther between these days, lay associates carry on their mission and exemplify their values.

The Mercy Associates, a nationwide group of about 3,000 women – and men, too – make a formal covenant to illustrate their commitment.

“Mercy Associates are men and women of any religious persuasion who see what we do and want to help us with it,” said Sister Annella Martin, R.S.M., the internal auditor for Mercy Medical Center.

In fact, Mercy founder Sister Catherine McAuley, who opened a house in Ireland in 1827 as a place to feed, shelter and educate women and girls, originally recruited lay women to help.

When the sisters came to Baltimore, it was again lay women, many of them wealthy daughters of railroad barons, who helped further their mission, including cleaning the hospital and stocking it with blankets.

Today Mercy Associates infuse their work and their lives with the values of the sisters.

“It’s a community association and connection with the Sisters of Mercy,” said Betty Bopst, admitting director at Mercy Medical Center and a Mercy Associate. “You’re drawn to it – you want to carry out their mission. It raises your awareness of what your activities might mean to someone. When something arises, you even wonder what Catherine would have done in this situation.”

In fact, Mercy Associates so often speak of Sister Catherine that visitors have asked to meet her.

“It’s certainly been helpful to me in my work life and personal life – you know there’s always someone there for you,” Ms. Bopst said, noting that she enjoys being part of a community with like-minded values.

About 25 Mercy Associates are active at Mercy Medical Center, with others at Stella Maris, Mercy High School and St. Joseph, Texas.

Mercy Associates enjoy tea and talks, spiritual retreats and opportunities for shared prayer. Recently the Mercy Associates held a picnic at the Villa and brought their children to enjoy spending time with the retired sisters.

"People said, 'My kids want to know what sisters are,'" Sister Annella said.

Sister Mary Harriman, vice president for risk management at Mercy Medical Center and a Mercy Associate, said "It associates me with a group of like-minded people and allows me to walk in the footsteps of the sisters with structure and support."

People do not have to be employed by Mercy to join.

"The need is for people to fill in - there's no sister doing it," Sister Annella said.

For those interested in learning more, the Mercy Associates are hosting a Tea & Talk at 4 p.m. on Nov. 8 in the Truman Seaman Center in the Weinberg Building at Mercy Medical Center. Sister Mary Waskowiak, R.S.M., president of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of America, and Sister Barbara Wheeley, R.S.M., president of the Baltimore regional community, will be speaking.