



MERCY VOLUNTEER CORPS  
2018 - 2019  
VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK



## **Mercy Volunteer Corps Handbook 2018-2019**

### **Mercy Volunteer Corps**

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### **About this Handbook**

This handbook is intended to provide MVC participants and sponsoring service sites with an overview of Mercy Volunteer Corps. The policies set forth in this handbook cannot address every circumstance that may arise during the course of a volunteer or service site's participation with Mercy Volunteer Corps. Questions regarding specific circumstances should be directed to a Community Coordinator.

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## Mission Statement

In partnership with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, lay women and men of Mercy Volunteer Corps (MVC) enter into relationship with people who are economically poor and marginalized. In a spirit of mutuality, volunteers cultivate mercy and justice in the world by embracing compassionate service, social justice, spirituality and a simple lifestyle in community.

## About Us Statement

Mercy Volunteer Corps promotes social change by placing and supporting volunteers for one year of service with people who are poor and marginalized in the U.S. and South America. Mercy Volunteers work in education, healthcare, and social services while living together in a community and growing spiritually.

## Vision Statement

Rooted in the spirit of the Scriptures and Catherine McAuley and challenged by the needs of a hurting world, Mercy Volunteer Corps, committed to achieving a more merciful and just world, invites women and men to join with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas to:

- expand the boundaries of service to poor, sick, and uneducated persons within and beyond the U.S.;
- encourage multicultural diversity within the Mercy Volunteer Corps community and among the people served;
- participate in building community with poor persons and the other ministers of service at the service sites;
- embrace the growth inherent in the conversion process of acting in solidarity with economically poor or marginalized people;
- integrate the learned values of service, community, and prayer into their life experience; and
- develop new relationships with the Mercy community throughout and beyond their service year(s).

“This year has opened my eyes to many of the injustices in our country, but it has also helped me realize the ways that I can fight injustice. Through compassion, care, and by treating every person with human dignity, we can each make the world a more merciful place.”

-Kalene Weber, Baltimore



## Theology of Mission

Called and missioned by God, the Mercy Volunteer Corps staff, board members, and volunteers commit to the values of compassionate service, a simple lifestyle in community, and spiritual growth. The mission of Mercy Volunteer Corps is rooted in the Christian tradition and inspired by Catherine McAuley's commitment to following Jesus through compassionate service. In partnership with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Mercy Volunteer Corps is dedicated to connecting lay women and men with people who are economically poor or marginalized. Committed to this mission of mercy,

we seek to respond as a community to the tremendous disparities of wealth and power in our world.

We seek to model service that is characterized by accompaniment, mutuality, and respect. We strive to respect the life and dignity of each person with whom we live, serve, and pray, ever conscious of God's presence in all of creation. In our service, community, and prayer, we reach out in love and mercy and learn to receive love and mercy from others. Opening ourselves to God's transforming grace, we hope to be instruments of peace and agents of change in the world.

# ABOUT MVC

## **Profile of Mercy Volunteer Corps**

Volunteers extend the spirit of mercy as modeled by Jesus, Catherine McAuley, and the Sisters of Mercy. To expand and support the compassionate service of the Sisters of Mercy to those who are poor, sick, and uneducated, volunteers work with people who are economically poor or marginalized, live simply in community, and commit to personal and communal spiritual growth. Motivation to serve, flexibility, and a sense of humor are essential characteristics of an appropriate applicant.

Applicants must be 21 years or older, a high school graduate, able to work 40 hours per week at the assigned service site, able to live in an intentional community and share spirituality, and able to commit to living on a small stipend provided for personal and communal expenses. A person should have college or work experience as well as service experience before a person submits an application. Mercy Volunteer Corps invites applicants from all faith traditions who can live and serve within the spirit of the Catholic tradition.

Volunteers are placed in service sites compatible with their gifts and the needs of the site. They serve generously among people who are economically poor or marginalized as social service workers, teachers and tutors, health care workers, and more.

Volunteers live in community and share household responsibilities with other Mercy Volunteers. In community, volunteers share spirituality and prayer, reflecting their unique awareness of God in daily life.

Through Mercy Volunteer Corps, nearly 1200 women and men have served economically poor or marginalized people across the United States and South America since 1978.

## *MVC Core Volunteer Values*

Mercy Volunteers make a one-year commitment to all of the components of the Mercy Volunteer Corps program. This commitment is expressed through the interconnected values of compassionate service, social justice, community, simplicity, and spirituality. Volunteers commit to the program, their coworkers and clients at their service site, their community members, and their local support team.

### **Compassionate Service & Social Justice**

Mercy Volunteer Corps provides volunteers an experience to serve with and be present to those who are economically poor and marginalized. Mercy Volunteers join the entire Mercy Community including Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Associates, Companions in Mercy, and ministry partners in their commitment to achieve a more merciful and just world. Volunteers work in a full-time capacity at various social service agencies, health care facilities, and schools. MVC and the service sites call the volunteers to service characterized by mutuality, respect, and compassion. Rather than “giving to and doing for,” service with MVC is about the mutual empowerment of volunteers and clients, both giving and receiving, and advocating with instead of for the people they encounter daily in their service.

Volunteers witness the daily struggles of those who are poor and marginalized. Their own experiences and those of their community members challenge volunteers to consider the multiple systems contributing to the oppression and poverty their clients and students face each day. Together, we seek to respond with faith and creative actions to help bring justice and in turn peace to the global community.

Volunteers commit to:

- working in a spirit of solidarity and empowerment with people who are poor or marginalized; and
- striving to be merciful and just in their own attitudes, language, and actions to keep their work credible.

“Sometimes I have this moment where I’m like ‘Who’s helping who here?’ They surprise me every day, and they teach me probably much more than I could teach them.”

-Maureen Paley, Sacramento

### **Spiritual Growth**

Mercy Volunteers commit to personal and spiritual growth during their year. Volunteers examine and integrate their faith with their experiences of service and in the context of a community dedicated to a simple, sustainable lifestyle. A year with Mercy Volunteer Corps offers volunteers the opportunity to examine and integrate their faith with their experiences with and among economically poor or marginalized persons and in the context of a simple community lifestyle.

Volunteers witness the daily struggles of those who are poor and marginalized. Mercy Volunteer Corps draws its charism and spirituality from the Sisters of Mercy and their foundress Catherine McAuley. The Sisters of Mercy live an apostolic commitment of service to the Church and the world. They are called, in particular, to serve those who are poor, sick, and uneducated, especially women and children. As a lay ministry of the Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Volunteer Corps calls volunteers to serve with them within this charism.

Mercy Volunteer Corps welcomes people of all faiths. Therefore, part of sharing spirituality is an openness to and respect for differences in faith. This sharing can offer ways to pray together with those differences.

Volunteers commit to:

- striving toward spiritual growth, consistently spending time in personal reflection and prayer;
- participating fully in and planning weekly community times of spiritual sharing, reflection, and prayer;
- sharing their own gifts and cherishing the gifts of others; and
- participating actively in Mercy Volunteer Corps retreats by attending and being engaged in the planned activities and present to the community of volunteers, staff, and local support teams.

## Simple Lifestyle in Community

Mercy Volunteers live together in community and commit to creating and supporting a community characterized by mutual respect and encouragement of one another. Mercy Volunteer Corps challenges all volunteers to find a common framework for sharing faith and making choices promoting a more merciful and just world with their community.

Volunteers are challenged to form honest and open relationships. This challenge calls volunteers to confront tensions respectfully and address and celebrate differences among them. Learnings around communication and interdependence are often carried into a volunteer's relationships, jobs, and life experiences beyond their Mercy Volunteer Corps year.

Volunteers live on a minimal personal, community, and transportation stipend. Volunteers combine their community stipends to purchase food and household items and their transportation stipends to cover transit passes or gas (depending on location). As part of their commitment to community, volunteers must come to a consensus about the use of these communal funds. The volunteer's personal stipend is for personal use. While the necessities are provided, volunteers must make conscious choices about their spending and use of resources. Careful consideration should also be given to bringing or leaving behind material possessions or conveniences during the term of service. Mercy Volunteers are challenged to limit their use of conveniences. Volunteers commit to living on their stipend and not supplementing it unnecessarily with personal savings or money from friends, family members, or other sources.

The simple, community lifestyle allows volunteers to

focus on people rather than possessions, to be more aware of the daily realities of those who are economically poor and marginalized, and to engage in sustainable and earth-friendly practices. The commitment to a simple lifestyle calls volunteers to examine personal and community purchases and choices around food, recycling, household items, social activities, appliance usage, utility usage, and so on.

Volunteers commit to:

- living on their monthly personal, community and transportation stipend;
- taking part in community activities, including two community meals each week, weekly prayer and spiritual sharing, community business meetings, and informal social times;
- seeking to live a life focused on persons and relationships rather than objects and acquisitions;
- challenging one another and remaining open to challenges from others in discerning the concrete aspects of their communal lifestyle;
- examining their role and the implications of their choices and actions within their broader neighborhood community, the environment, and the global community;
- bringing openness and honesty to their community and a willingness to share their lives, experiences, and spirituality with community members;
- upholding the guest policy outlined on page 11 of this handbook and any additional guidelines provided by the local support team; and
- participating in community and individual meetings with their local support team and MVC staff.



### Fun Fact: Expansion

Did you know that Mercy Volunteer Corps continues to expand even today? Mercy Volunteer Corps continues to look for new opportunities to partner with service sites across the U.S. and South America who are working with people who are on the margins of our society. In the last three years we have opened volunteer communities in three different cities: San Francisco, California; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Cincinnati, Ohio.



## MVC Main Office

The main office is located on the campus of Gwynedd Mercy University: 1325 Sumneytown Pike, P. O. Box 901, Gwynedd Valley, PA 19437-0901. In addition to the main office, four remote offices are located across the country. Staff and contact information can be found on the inside front cover of this Handbook.

## History of MVC

Mercy Volunteer Corps was founded in 1978 by the Sisters of Mercy Merion regional community in Pennsylvania as a lay ministry, grounded in the charism of Catherine McAuley, to address the needs of the economically poor and marginalized throughout the United States.

In 1993, MVC was incorporated under the sponsorship of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, thus establishing it as a ministerial arm of the Sisters of Mercy. In 2000, the first international volunteers were commissioned to serve in Guyana, which continues as a site for volunteers. Since its beginning, MVC has placed nearly 1200 women and men in more than 150 different service sites in 23 states, South America, and Central America. In the 2016-2017 volunteer year alone, 44 Mercy Volunteers, contributed 70,000 hours of service at 33 service sites in 7 states and Guyana, South America.

## About the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

Mercy Volunteer Corps is a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. MVC seeks to act in accordance with the priorities of the Sisters of Mercy, their Mercy Associates, Companions in Mercy and ministry partners set forth in its Sixth Institute Chapter in June 2017. From this gathering, the following recommitment was written:

*The Sixth Institute Chapter has come to believe that the God of Mercy, Wisdom and Mystery is calling us, as Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, an international and intercultural community, to deepen our relationship with God and one another, and to intensify our work in communion with others who seek a more just and inclusive world. We recognize a yearning for oneness in all of creation, in all peoples and within our Institute. Our suffering world calls us to speak and act with integrity and clear intention.*

*Relationship:* we hear a call to strengthen our relationships with one another through

- reverence for our international and intercultural community;
- greater availability to one another;

- healing of personal and communal wounds;
- contemplative dialogue;
- integration of contemplation and action;
- a simple lifestyle;
- governance that calls forth the voice and engagement of each member.

*Critical Concerns:* we hear a demand to embrace anew our Critical Concerns through the lens of nonviolence

- to grow in our personal practice of nonviolence and peacemaking, actively collaborate with communities and organizations that foster peace and nonviolence and work to change violent systems and structures;
- to work zealously toward the sustainability of all life by caring for Earth's ecosystems, addressing global climate change, advocating for the fundamental right to clean water and committing ourselves to an integral "ecological conversion";
- to continue our commitment to eliminate personal, communal and institutional racism while working to dismantle structures, policies and processes that oppress
- to advocate for the intrinsic value of women's lives and to promote equality of women in Church and society;
- to act in solidarity with migrants, immigrants, refugees and victims of human trafficking, seeking with them a more just and inclusive world.

*Calls to Respond:* we hear the cry of our suffering world. The impoverishment of peoples, the devastation of Earth, and oppressive social norms and systems call us in this moment to act

- to become better educated and to participate in engaged dialogue on gender identity and sexual orientation;
- to continue to assure that financial decisions are consistent with our mission and our needs;
- to intensify efforts to align our investments with our values and, especially now, to pursue education and action against practices of extractive industries that are destroying people, communities and Earth.

In order to respond to the urgent needs of our day, this Sixth Institute Chapter commits us to a renewed exploration and fuller expression of our communal documents. We welcome all to join us in a "revolution of tenderness." In Catherine McAuley's spirit of union and charity we voice the call of Jesus, "that all may be one."

# VOLUNTEER POLICIES

## **Policies and Principles of Mercy Volunteer Corps**

All Mercy Volunteers and sponsoring service sites shall agree to abide by the policies and principles of the Sisters of Mercy and MVC. These policies are intended to complement, and be read in conjunction with, any policies governing volunteers adopted by the sponsoring service site.

## **Equal Opportunity/Nondiscrimination Policy**

In order to provide equal volunteer opportunities to all individuals, there shall be no discrimination based on age, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, marital status, veteran status, or any other category protected by local, state or federal laws. In addition, to ensure full equality of opportunity in all operations and activities of MVC, every person who volunteers with MVC shall be selected under fair procedures that provide equitable opportunities to all people.

If a volunteer has questions or concerns about any type of discrimination, she or he should bring these issues to the attention of the site supervisor or Community Coordinator. Volunteers can raise concerns without fear of reprisal. Volunteers or service sites found to be engaging in any type of discrimination will be released from participation in Mercy Volunteer Corps.

## Work Standards and Ethics

All Mercy Volunteers are expected to maintain high standards of cooperation, attendance, efficiency and responsibility in fulfilling their volunteer obligations to Mercy Volunteer Corps.

Every volunteer is responsible for both the integrity and the consequences of her or his own actions. Each and every volunteer, when engaging in an activity concerning MVC, must follow the highest standard of honesty, integrity and fairness. Volunteers are expected to perform the job duties required by their volunteer position and to perform any additional services required by their supervising sites as long as the duties do not interfere with the MVC programmatic goals.

No volunteer may undertake any activity while engaging in MVC business that is, or gives the appearance of being improper, illegal, or immoral or that could in any way harm or embarrass MVC. Volunteers are expected to comport themselves with the spirit of MVC's mission statement and core values, as determined by MVC in its sole discretion.

## Anti-Harassment

MVC is committed to an environment and climate in which relationships are characterized by dignity, respect, courtesy, and equitable treatment. It is the policy of the organization to place volunteers in an environment free from all forms of unlawful or unwelcome harassment, including implied or expressed forms of sexual harassment.

MVC expressly prohibits any form of harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, citizenship, ancestry, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state, or local law.

Any volunteer who feels that she or he has been subjected to harassment of any type, whether by another volunteer, an agent or employee of the sponsoring service site, or any agent of MVC, should promptly report the incident to her or his Community Coordinator and/or site supervisor. If the volunteer is uncomfortable reporting harassment to her or his Community Coordinator, or if the volunteer is dissatisfied with the resolution of the issue, she or he should submit a written complaint to the

MVC Executive Director, 1325 Sunneytown Pike, P.O. Box 901, Gwynedd Valley, PA 19437-0901. MVC will conduct any necessary investigation and, depending on the findings, take appropriate action.

## Criminal Background Checks

Mercy Volunteer Corps performs a national criminal background check and sex offender registry check for each person that commits to serving with the program. With written authorization from the volunteer, results are shared with the volunteer's service site as well as the local support team.

## Drugs and Alcohol Policy

MVC strictly prohibits the possession, use, manufacturing, or distribution of illegal drugs during any portion of the volunteer's commitment to MVC.

Likewise, although the consumption of alcohol is not prohibited during a volunteer's term of service with MVC, volunteers are prohibited from consuming or being under the influence of alcohol while engaged in MVC work-related volunteer activities. In those areas (e.g., reservations) where alcohol is not legal, Mercy Volunteers are expected to adhere to the local laws. Volunteers who violate the MVC policy will be subject to disciplinary action.

Volunteers also assume responsibility for their own behavior while consuming alcohol outside of their MVC-related activities and must understand that being under the influence of alcohol in no way lessens their accountability to the MVC community. MVC will not excuse acts of misconduct committed by volunteers whose judgment is impaired due to substance abuse.

## Student Loans

Volunteers are strongly encouraged to contact their loan holder(s) prior to their term of service to determine the best option for them in managing their loans. Among the options, the volunteer may be eligible for income-based repayment, deferment, or forbearance. The volunteer is responsible for determining the eligibility of her or his student loans, for obtaining and completing the relevant paperwork and signatures, for submitting the forms to the appropriate office for processing, and for making any loan payments.



## Volunteer Health Emergencies

MVC is committed to promoting the safety and well-being of all volunteers and volunteer communities. The MVC staff should be apprised of emergency situations (e.g. medical emergencies, hazardous site environments and/or community residences, natural disasters, criminal acts, sexual harassment). The risk management plan received during Orientation should be followed in the case of an emergency.

The specifics of all emergency plans are to be discussed and reviewed in detail by Mercy Volunteers and the MVC local support team during the local orientation. Any additional relevant information or changes are to be communicated to the MVC Community Coordinator.

### *On-site Emergencies*

- Obtain emergency medical care ASAP (first aid, immediate medical attention, etc.)
- Proceed to appropriate medical facility.
- Contact the local support team for guidance and consultation.
- Once the injured is stabilized, the local support team will contact the Community Coordinator and apprise them of the situation as soon as possible.
- After the emergency is assessed, the local support team will encourage the volunteer to contact her or his Emergency Contact Person designated on the Emergency Medical Form. If the volunteer is not capable of contacting the designated person, the Coordinator will contact the Emergency Contact Person if permission has been granted on the form.

Emergency medical forms are kept in the volunteer residence, with the local support team, and at the MVC main office. Mercy Volunteers are encouraged to share the contact information of their community members and local support team with their emergency contact person.



Mercy Volunteer





## **Personal Property**

It is important to note that all items of personal property are the responsibility of the volunteer. In accordance with the commitment to a simple lifestyle in community, Mercy Volunteers are asked to carefully consider the personal property they bring with them during their term of service, particularly valuable and/or convenience items. MVC encourages volunteers to bring only essential items during their term of service and discourages them from bringing items that are irreplaceable or of significant value (whether monetary or sentimental).

Neither Mercy Volunteer Corps, the Sisters of Mercy, the service sites, or the owners of the volunteer housing assume responsibility for the replacement of a volunteer's personal property should it be damaged, stolen, or destroyed. Any U.S. volunteer with concerns about her or his personal property should consider protecting the property with renter's insurance.

## **Pets**

Pets or animals of any kind are not permitted in a Mercy Volunteer Corps community.

## **Guest Policy**

Family and friends are welcome at MVC residences. Because the integrity and comfort of the community as a whole is always a priority, all community members must engage in conversation about the visitor's stay prior to arrival. Visitors should stay no more than one week. Any visitor that infringes upon the privacy or integrity of the community, will be asked to leave the residence.

In order to protect the privacy and comfort of all community members, the cohesion of the community, the reputation and integrity of the Mercy Volunteer Corps organization, the Sisters of Mercy and service sites in the communities where volunteers live and serve, guests (except spouses) are required to use guest rooms.



Volunteers and guests are prohibited from engaging in sexual activity in the MVC residence or in any place connected with a volunteer's commitment to MVC.

### **Commitment to Simplicity in Use of Free Time**

Since the volunteers' commitment to their service sites is full-time and they also commit to a simple lifestyle in community and spiritual/personal growth, they are prohibited from taking part-time paid work or enrolling in college level courses for credit. Volunteers may participate in recreational activities, community sponsored programs, non-credit classes, church ministries, or other outside activities that will provide personal and/or spiritual enhancement as long as the time, relationships, and expenses involved in such activities do not interfere with the volunteer's priority toward her or his commitment to the tenets of MVC.

### **Balance in Lifestyle and Relationships**

The commitment to a term of service as a Mercy

Volunteer demands a great deal of an individual's time, energy, and focus. In the midst of the commitment to compassionate service, a simple lifestyle in community, and spiritual/personal growth, volunteers are invited and challenged to be attentive to their choices and balance in their daily life, activities, and commitments. Outside activities, personal obligations, and significant relationships demand time, energy, and spirit. The MVC staff is committed to walking with volunteers throughout their term of service and to challenging them to a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

“My experience with MVC has allowed me to engage with many different perspectives and backgrounds. It has been a joy to follow in the steps of Catherine McAuley and to take full part in our Gospel call to serve the most vulnerable.”

-Claudia Brock, New York City

# ORIENTATION, RETREATS, ← and → LOCAL SUPPORT

## **Orientation, Retreats, and Local Support**

Mercy Volunteer Corps offers the following opportunities to volunteers as introduction to and integration of their term of service: Orientation, Mid-Year Retreats, Transition Retreat, and monthly support meetings. Full attendance and participation in these programs is required of the volunteers as part of their commitment to Mercy Volunteer Corps.

## Orientation

Orientation for all volunteers will be held from August 7 through 12 for the 2018-2019 service year. Orientation introduces volunteers to the Mercy Volunteer Corps commitment to compassionate service, social justice, a simple lifestyle in community, and spiritual/personal growth as well as to the charism of the Sisters of Mercy and Mercy Volunteer Corps. During the week, volunteers have the opportunity to meet one another, the Mercy Volunteer Corps staff, and members of the extended MVC community. Each day includes structured time for presentations, activities, and small group discussions as well as free time for reflection, socializing, and outdoor activities.

U.S. volunteers provide their transportation to Orientation. Travel from Orientation to the site is the responsibility of the service site. International volunteers provide their transportation to and from Orientation. MVC provides transportation to and from Guyana.

## Mid-Year Retreats

During the year, Community Coordinators and local support teams collaborate in planning regional retreats for the volunteers. Volunteers can expect to attend at least two Mid-Year Retreats between Orientation and the Transition Retreat. These retreats are held to help build and sustain the individual communities, to provide volunteers with an opportunity to reflect on and share their experiences and to support volunteers toward continued growth.

## Transition Retreat

Mercy Volunteer Corps provides an annual Transition Retreat for U.S. volunteers and for International volunteers. The retreat allows the volunteers to reflect on, process, and share their experiences as they begin to integrate them into steps and choices for their future. In stepping into their role as MVC alumni, the volunteers are encouraged to continue to live lives rooted in the spirit of mercy.

## Local Support

A local team welcomes the Mercy Volunteers and supports them in their personal and communal growth. They meet monthly with the volunteers to companion them on their journey of the year. The team is comprised of MVC alumni, Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Associates, and/or Companions in Mercy.

“I have had the privilege of being surrounded by sites, Sisters of Mercy, Mercy Associates, and Mercy Volunteer Corps alumni who are not only pushing the ideals of mercy and justice to drive social change but they are acting; they are taking a hold of the wheel and directing society (at different levels) to be our brother’s and sister’s keepers.”

-Daniella Kawamba, Detroit



## Vacation

MVC requires sponsoring service sites to grant volunteers 10 workdays for vacation during the year. At some service sites, vacation days may be dictated by formal seasonal/holiday breaks. Sponsoring service sites must provide Mercy Volunteers with the same number of holidays and sick days, bereavement leave, and other compensatory time allotted to the site's full-time employees.

## MVC-Related Time Off

Volunteers are allowed additional time off to travel to and attend MVC Mid-Year and Transition Retreats. On occasion U.S. volunteers may be invited to represent MVC at events that promote and sustain the MVC program. A volunteer should consult her or his site supervisor to request release from work. The decision is left to the discretion of the site supervisor.

## Renewal of Service

A volunteer who is interested in renewing her or his service for another year should contact their MVC Community Coordinator by January 15.



## Release From Service

### MVC-Initiated Release from Service

MVC retains the right, in its sole discretion, to ask a volunteer to leave the program if she or he fails to uphold the program's policies and the commitment to MVC's mission statement and core values.

### Volunteer-Initiated Termination of Service

A volunteer's decision to end her or his commitment prior to the end date has far-reaching impact to include not only the volunteer, but the clients and staff at the service site, the volunteer community, finances supporting the community (such as rent and communal stipend), and the MVC program. MVC encourages a volunteer who considers leaving MVC to first talk to her or his Community Coordinator to discuss ways of improving the experience. In the event that a volunteer initiates an early termination of service, the volunteer is responsible for a two-week notice, the cost of travel home, and a subsequent month's share of rent and utilities. An international volunteer who leaves Mercy Volunteer Corps early for any reason forfeits the readjustment allowance and the financial provisions related to the Re-Entry Retreat.

### Service Site-Initiated Release from Service

If a volunteer is released from service by her or his service site, but the volunteer has fulfilled her or his commitment to MVC's mission statement, core values, and the other applicable components of the program, the service site must provide the volunteer and MVC with two-weeks notice. Under these circumstances, MVC will attempt to secure a different service site placement for the volunteer in the same general locale. If a service site intends to release a volunteer from service for misconduct, or for failing to fulfill her or his commitment to MVC's mission statement, core values, or other applicable components of the program, the sponsoring site should notify MVC, so that MVC can investigate and take appropriate action accordingly.

## Fun Fact: Social Justice Advocacy

The photo above features New York City volunteers at the Climate March with the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. Mercy Volunteers are often invited to and participate in Social Justice Advocacy across the United States and South America. Mercy Volunteers frequently attend the Climate March and March for Women's rights in NYC, Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, DC, Anti-Racism and Multiculturalism Training in multiple U.S. cities, and many more!

# U.S. PLACEMENT

## **Housing**

Mercy Volunteers live together in community. Most communities consist of 4-5 individuals.

Housing is simple and furnished. There is adequate bedroom and community living space for the volunteers. Most often volunteer residences are located near or among the people with whom the volunteers work.

The sponsoring service site pays the cost of rent, water, electricity, gas, and internet service. Volunteers pay their own individual long distance phone charges or mobile phone plans.

If the volunteer housing sustains damage caused by the volunteer(s) and/or their visitors during the course of the service year, the cost of necessary repairs will be the responsibility of the responsible volunteer(s).

## On-Site Transportation

Transportation to and from work and all travel related to basic individual and community needs (e.g., grocery shopping, doctor visits, occasional outings in the local area) will be provided by the sponsoring service site. In areas where public transportation is easily accessible, a bus/train/subway pass is purchased. In other locations, a vehicle is provided by the Sisters of Mercy or by the service site. As part of the local orientation, the volunteers will receive written guidelines for the use of the vehicle by the provider.

Most often volunteers do not bring their own personal vehicle to their new location. Volunteers need to speak to their Community Coordinator or local support team if they wish to bring their personal vehicle. The request will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

***Please be advised that Mercy Volunteers are not permitted to transport clients in their personal vehicle or a vehicle provided by the Sisters of Mercy.***

## Community Fund

A volunteer receives \$110/month from her or his service site for food and household expenses, which is combined with stipends from their community members, creating a common fund to pay for food and other household expenses. Money remaining in the community fund at the end of each month may be used for community purposes (e.g., birthdays, outings) or for unexpected household expenses.

Ideally, volunteers should end the year with no more or no less money than they began. In the event that a community has excess funds at the end of the service year, the funds will be distributed equally among the community members.

## Personal Stipend

The sponsoring service site pays a volunteer a personal stipend of \$100/month. The personal stipend is for personal use. Volunteers are paid monthly, or according to the site's payroll schedule. The only exception is that the volunteer's first check for the full monthly payment is given to the volunteers upon arrival from Orientation. The site's method of paying the volunteer is determined during her or his first week of work.

## Medical Insurance

The sponsoring service site provides a volunteer's medical insurance. The service site can offer to cover the volunteer on its medical insurance plan or the

plan offered by Catholic Volunteer Network (CVN). Coverage begins on the first day of Orientation and extends to July 31. The volunteer may elect to remain on her or his parent's plan. The parent will be reimbursed the volunteer's portion of the monthly premium, up to the cost of the site's plan. The volunteer must provide documentation of the monthly premium and the number of persons covered on the plan to the Community Coordinator in order to receive reimbursement. The site may require the volunteer to be covered on its plan or the CVN plan, in which case, the parent will not be reimbursed. Under no circumstances is a volunteer to be serving at a site without medical insurance.

Volunteers are responsible for their own eye and dental care expenses.

***Deductible:*** The sponsoring site is responsible for any deductible required by the medical insurance policy, up to the cost of the site's plan if the volunteer is covered by her or his parent's plan.

***Copays:*** The volunteer is responsible for co-payments of up to \$25/month (total for doctor visits, new prescriptions initiated during her or his term of service, and emergency room visits). The sponsoring site is responsible for covering co-payments surpassing \$25 in a given month for required medical care.

***Pre-Existing Conditions:*** If a volunteer suffers from a pre-existing medical condition, the volunteer is responsible for the cost of the doctor visits, services and prescription(s) associated with that condition to the extent that they are not covered by the medical insurance.



## Medical Emergency Fund

The sponsoring service site earmarks \$100 per year, per volunteer, to be used in the event of a medical emergency. Emergency money is not allocated to the volunteer unless there is a medical emergency. Medical emergencies include emergency dental treatment, emergency eye treatment, or a mental health emergency. The volunteer should contact her or his Community Coordinator to gain approval for the allocation of the emergency money. If approved, the Community Coordinator will contact the service site to request the release of the money to the volunteer.

## Taxes

Each service site is responsible for determining its tax liability. The withholding of federal, state, or local taxes must never result in a decrease of the food stipend (\$110/month) or personal stipend (\$100/month). The volunteer should receive the total amount of \$210/month after taxes. All tax liability incurred from the volunteer stipend during the volunteer's term of service is the responsibility of the sponsoring service site. Each volunteer is responsible for any other personal tax liability (e.g., taxes owed on wages earned prior to and/or following the completion of the term of service, Social Security or pension payments, or investment income).

## Extending the Circle

Mercy Volunteers are invited to extend the circle of Mercy Volunteer Corps to their family and friends through fundraising efforts. This fundraising allows family and friends to partner with their volunteer in her or his experience and assists Mercy Volunteer Corps in providing a quality program that makes the service possible. Each U.S. volunteer is encouraged to raise \$500 in support of programmatic expenses. Volunteers will be provided with resources for fundraising.

## Relocation

At the end of the term of service, the sponsoring service site is responsible for the volunteer's transportation expenses from the service site to her or his home. Airfare is recommended for great distances (flights are restricted to the continental U.S.). If the volunteer chooses not to relocate to her or his home at the end of the term of service, it is left to the discretion of the service site as to the monetary allowance for the relocation fee.



# INTERNATIONAL PLACEMENT

## *Living Expenses*

### **Housing**

Mercy Volunteers live together in community. The average community consists of four volunteers. Housing is simple and furnished. There is adequate bedroom and community living space for the volunteers. Most often Mercy Volunteer residences are located near or among the people with whom the volunteers work.

Mercy Volunteer Corps and/or sponsoring service sites pay for the monthly cost of rent, utilities and local phone service. In a spirit of solidarity with the local community, volunteers are not permitted to maintain an international phone or data plan.

If the volunteer housing sustains damage caused by the volunteer(s) and/ or their visitors during the course of the service year, the cost of necessary repairs will be the responsibility of the responsible volunteer(s).

### **On-Site Transportation**

Transportation to and from work and all travel related to basic individual and community needs (e.g., grocery shopping, doctor visits) is provided by Mercy Volunteer Corps and/or the sponsoring site. Volunteers most often use public buses to travel.

### **Community Fund**

Mercy Volunteer Corps and/or the sponsoring sites provide each volunteer a stipend of \$125 US/month for food and household expenses, which is combined with stipends from their community members, creating a common fund to pay for food and other household expenses. Money remaining in the community fund at the end of each month may be used for community purposes (e.g., birthdays, outings) or for unexpected household expenses. Ideally, volunteers should end the commitment with no more or no less money than they began. In the event that the community has excess funds at the end of the service year, the additional money can be used to supplement a community closing event or activity.

### **Personal Stipend**

Mercy Volunteer Corps and/or the sponsoring site pay each volunteer a personal stipend with the spending equivalent of approximately \$60 US/month. Volunteers are paid monthly.

## ***Fundraising and Solidarity Policies***

### **Taxes**

Each volunteer is responsible for any personal U.S. tax liability (e.g., taxes owed on wages earned prior to and/or following the completion of the term of service, Social Security or pension payments, or investment income). Each volunteer assumes full responsibility for filing any required U.S. tax documents before, during, and following her/his term of service.

### **Medical Insurance and Related Expenses**

MVC assumes responsibility for the volunteer's medical insurance coverage from their day of departure to their international site through the completion of the service period. Mercy Volunteer Corps seeks coverage that is specifically designed for U.S. citizens living abroad. It provides extensive emergency medical coverage. It is not intended for routine primary care, and MVC does not provide for routine preventative care during the term of service. Volunteers are required to complete all preventative care needs at their expense prior to departure. It is critical that volunteers familiarize themselves with the provisions, policies, and procedures of their insurance policy. The specific policies and procedures, particularly in the event of an emergency or emergency evacuation, must be followed to ensure coverage from the insurance company. Mercy Volunteer Corps assumes responsibility for the deductible required by the medical insurance policy. If a volunteer requires regular and/or extensive medical care that unexpectedly causes heavy financial or emotional strain on the volunteer, the local Support Team and the MVC Community Coordinator should be further consulted.

If a volunteer suffers from a pre-existing medical condition that is not covered by the offered medical insurance plan, the volunteer is responsible for the cost of the medical services and prescription(s) associated with that condition.

If a volunteer chooses to remain on her/his previous insurance plan, she or he must discuss the financial and medical coverage implications with the MVC Community Coordinator prior to a final commitment to placement.

### **Emergency Fund**

The Mercy Volunteer Corps program retains a fund for emergency expenses that may arise. Examples of emergency expenses to be incurred by Mercy Volunteer Corps include: emergency health care treatment that is not covered through the international insurance policy, non-medical emergency evacuation, or emergency trip home due to a life-threatening illness or death of an immediate family member (i.e., parent, sibling, or child of the volunteer). Any questions about the nature of a volunteer emergency should be directed to the MVC Community Coordinator.

### **Extending the Circle**

Mercy Volunteers are invited to extend the circle of Mercy Volunteer Corps to their family and friends through fundraising efforts. This fundraising allows family and friends to partner with their volunteer in her or his experience and assists Mercy Volunteer Corps in providing a quality program that makes the service possible. International volunteers commit to fundraising \$1,500 for each year of service toward the programmatic costs which support the volunteer's expenses in mission. Prior to departure for service, the volunteer must have demonstrated a good faith effort toward their fundraising goal. Volunteers are provided with resources for fundraising.

### **Commitment to Not Travel Home**

Anyone discerning international service as a Mercy Volunteer must consider MVC's commitment to not travel home in their decision. MVC maintains this policy for the reasons stated below.

- The MVC commitment to compassionate service and a simple lifestyle in community calls volunteers to live in a spirit of solidarity with the local community. Travel abroad is an unimaginable luxury for many people with whom Mercy Volunteers are living and serving. In a spirit of simplicity and solidarity with the local community, Mercy Volunteers are asked to commit to not travel home during their term of service.
- The process of acculturation and immersion to a new culture is challenging for any individual serving internationally. Regular contact with and/or a visit to one's home culture can disrupt this critical process in the MVC experience.
- A choice to utilize funds beyond one's stipend could disrupt the cohesion of the local MVC community particularly when only volunteers with substantial personal or family funds could consider this choice while other volunteers may not have such resources.

MVC is clear about the reasons for and benefits of this policy and commitment. However, the staff also recognizes that situations can arise which lead a volunteer to consider a trip home. In such a case, MVC desires and commits to dialoguing openly with the volunteer about the situation and the volunteer's options. In such situations MVC expects the volunteer to thoughtfully and prayerfully discern their options and engage the MVC Community Coordinator for conversation.

## **Travel to Surrounding Countries**

In the same spirit of solidarity, volunteers commit to not travel to nearby countries during the term of service. If a volunteer wishes to travel to surrounding countries it should be done upon completion of the term of service before returning to the U.S.

## **Visitors**

Though volunteers commit to not travel home, friends and family are most welcome to visit. Visits are a great opportunity to welcome family and friends to the service experience and provide a context for visitors to gain a deeper understanding of the volunteer's life along with the culture and daily realities of the local community. We ask that visitors plan trips no sooner than January in order to allow time for the volunteer to adjust to the local culture and lifestyle.

## **Dating and Personal Relationships**

A Mercy Volunteer is sent on mission by Mercy Volunteer Corps to an entire community of people. This is the fundamental relationship for the volunteer and all other personal relationships must be considered in terms of their effect on it. Strong friendships with the community often develop naturally in international mission. When balanced with the primary MVC commitment, these friendships can be a significant source of strength and learning for the volunteer and enhance a Mercy Volunteer's ability to live out Mercy Volunteer Corps' mission. MVC encourages developing such relationships. Furthermore, a Mercy Volunteer's inability or unwillingness to be open to mutuality in relationships with one person or group of persons can also adversely affect MVC's mission.

Mercy Volunteer Corps does, however, expect that volunteers will not enter into dating relationships during their term of service as such relationships often interfere with the volunteer's ability to choose a balanced and healthy lifestyle and maintain their commitment to the tenets of MVC. A dating relationship may be considered a serious conflict of interest to Mercy Volunteer Corps' relationship with the local community in the country of service as well.

## ***Preparation and Re-Entry***

### **Commitment to Discernment**

Choosing to serve internationally for one or two years is a tremendous commitment and generous gift. Recognizing the importance of making the best possible match between the individual, the volunteer program, and the sites of service, Mercy Volunteer Corps desires to partner with individuals who value and commit to an intentional process of discernment. This mutual discernment is characterized by a commitment from both the applicant and MVC to ongoing prayerful reflection throughout the application and screening processes on whether the applicant and MVC will be well-matched (e.g., in terms of needs, values,

and readiness for international placement). This spirit of mutual discernment continues in the placement process and throughout a volunteer's term of service as questions and needs arise.

### **Discernment Weekend**

In addition to the commitment to mutual discernment, there are formal steps in the discernment process. The process begins with conversation with MVC staff and completion of MVC's application. The initial screening of the application includes a video call or phone interview. Appropriate applicants then attend one of two Discernment Weekends held in March. Applicants provide their own transportation to and from the weekend. The Discernment Weekend offers a reflective environment where candidates gather to learn more about the program and share with others who are discerning a call to cross-cultural service. Candidates participate in a face-to-face interview with program staff during this time as well. Following the completion of the Discernment Weekend, MVC extends or declines acceptance to candidates.

### **Cross-Cultural Training**

MVC is committed to quality and thorough cross-cultural preparation for international volunteers, to ensure a rewarding experience for the volunteer, the local community, the service sites, and MVC. Mercy Volunteers placed internationally attend a preparation program for cross-cultural service, mission, and living held in late July. MVC provides for the travel and program costs for this training.

### **Continuing Education and Preparation**

During the discernment and cross-cultural programs and the MVC Orientation, candidates are provided with resources and materials on the culture(s) and service sites to which they may be missioned. Candidates are expected to engage in this process by seeking out resources and information to enhance their learning about the country/culture as well.

### **Immunizations**

MVC will provide a list of required immunizations. Volunteers are responsible for the costs of all immunizations.

### **Re-Entry Allowance and Retreat**

Mercy Volunteer Corps provides each volunteer serving internationally a re-entry allowance of \$500 at the end of each completed year of service.

Mercy Volunteer Corps sends returned volunteers to a re-entry workshop for all international volunteers who have completed their term of service. MVC assumes responsibility for the travel and program costs. This workshop is typically offered about 3 months after the date of re-entry. The workshop provides a prayerful retreat setting where volunteers have the opportunity to share and process their experiences in mission and their life transition since their return to their dominant culture.

# MERCY VOLUNTEER CORPS

# APPENDIX A

## *Mercy Volunteer Corps Application Process*

**STEP 1:** Submit a Request for Application. Following your submission, you will be directed to our application webpage.

**STEP 2:** Review the materials and complete the online application. The application includes an application form, written responses, resume, transcripts, three reference forms and medical forms. The online application does not need to be completed in one sitting and can be saved and continued at a later time. If you would like our main office to mail you an application, please call 215.641.5535.

- Those seeking international placement should submit the medical forms with their application materials.
- Those seeking U.S. placement should submit the medical forms following acceptance into the program.

**STEP 3:** Submit your completed application. The priority deadline is January 18 for both International and U.S. placement. The final deadline for international placement is March 1. The final deadline for U.S. placement is May 24.

**STEP 4:** When your application materials are received by MVC, you will receive an email confirmation. MVC will begin to process your application. Once we have received your application, it takes about 6 weeks to move through the entire process.

**STEP 5:** Once the initial screening phase is completed, a MVC representative will contact you for a personal interview. The interview lasts 1-2 hours and is conducted in-person or via video call.

- For those seeking international placement: If it is recommended that you move forward, you attend a Discernment Weekend.

**STEP 6:** You will receive an official letter, extending or declining acceptance into Mercy Volunteer Corps. You should receive this letter no later than 2 weeks following the Discernment Weekend (for international placements) or your personal interview (for U.S. placements).

**STEP 7:** Upon receiving a letter of acceptance, you should contact the MVC staff member designated in the letter to discuss service site placement.

- For those seeking U.S. placement: Your application will be sent to an agreed upon service site. A site representative will contact you for a phone or video call interview. Following the interview, you and the site representative will contact MVC to notify whether it is a good fit. Calls to MVC need to be made no more than 48 hours following the interview. If it is a fit, you are placed. If the site is not a good fit for either party, further conversation will ensue and another site will be chosen.

# APPENDIX B

## *Information for Service Sites*

### **Contributions of a U.S. Service Site**

The following list represents an overview of the financial responsibilities of a service site. The specific service site obligations described herein, and throughout the Volunteer Handbook, are set forth in greater detail in the MVC Service Agreement.

Sponsoring service sites are responsible for an administrative assessment fee of \$1,200.00 per volunteer, payable to Mercy Volunteer Corps, by September 1; Sites also assume the responsibility of paying for the volunteer's basic expenses including;

- housing, including rent and utilities
- work-related and necessary transportation
- food and personal stipends
- health insurance
- medical emergency fund allowance
- transportation from Orientation to the service site
- transportation expenses to return home at the end of the year

The food and personal stipends are fixed amounts while the remaining expenses vary depending upon the local costs of housing, utilities, health insurance, and other fluctuating expenses. Generally it costs a site \$13,000-\$16,000 to sponsor a volunteer for a year depending upon the location, housing costs, and number of volunteers in the local MVC community.

### **Site Selection Process**

Mercy Volunteer Corps chooses a service site based on several factors:

- the resonance of its mission with the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and the MVC Theology of Mission;
- the formative experience, support, and supervision the site can offer a volunteer;
- its commitment to advocacy and systemic change; and
- the financial and personnel needs of the service site.

When placing volunteers, MVC gives priority to sites that:

- are located in an area where a cluster of sites and volunteer placement opportunities will allow for a community of at least four persons;
- are connected with the Sisters of Mercy (by direct sponsorship or by the presence of a Sister of Mercy,

Mercy Associate or Companion in Mercy)\*;

- provide direct service and/or advocacy to people who are economically poor or marginalized;
- possess minimal financial and personnel resources to meet their need(s); and
- demonstrate that the volunteer's role in the site does not deprive a local person from being hired into a salaried position.

\*While Mercy Volunteer Corps gives priority to sites connected to the Sisters of Mercy, MVC extends to sites not specifically identified with the Sisters of Mercy when possible. Proximity to a Mercy connection (i.e., Sister of Mercy, Mercy Associate, Companion in Mercy, co-minister, or MVC alum) within the geographic area of a site is preferred for site feasibility and the ongoing development of volunteers.

### **Service Site Application Process**

#### *New Site Requests*

To apply, new sites should:

- contact Mercy Volunteer Corps as soon as possible for a site application;
- review the most recent Mercy Volunteer Corps Handbook; and
- submit the completed application and include brochures, press clips, and other materials that will help Mercy Volunteer Corps to know the organization better

Upon review of the site application, Mercy Volunteer Corps will arrange a site visit from a member of the MVC staff if the site is deemed a potential good fit for the program.

#### *Active Sites*

Active sites in the U.S. must apply for renewal each year. Site applications will be e-mailed to each active site in early November. All applications must be received by the Community Coordinator by *December 15* to be considered for the following service year.

### **Contributions of an International Service Site**

Mercy Volunteer Corps recognizes the severe financial limitations of many international service sites. MVC desires to partner with sites engaged in the works of mercy who cannot assume the expenses of supporting a Mercy Volunteer. Therefore the contribution of the site will be determined on a case by case basis. MVC does ask that the sites make some contribution toward financial support of the volunteer if possible (e.g. a monthly financial commitment or an in-kind contribution such as a daily meal at the site).

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