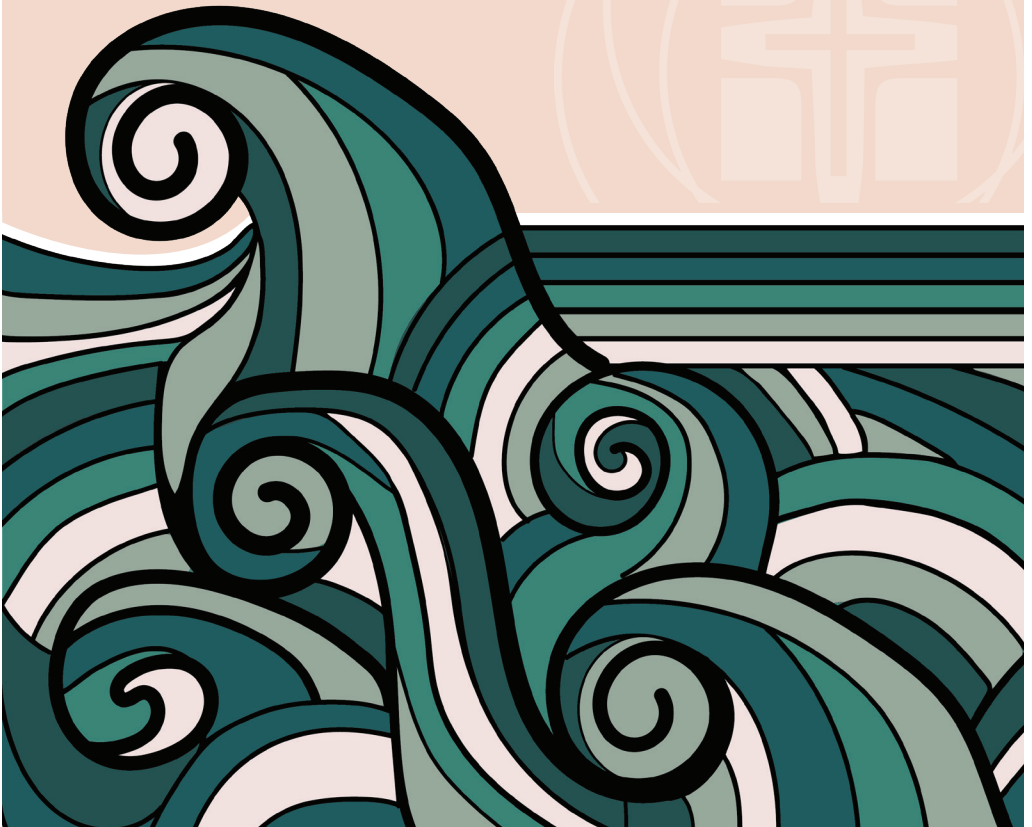


FEBRUARY - APRIL 2020

# LENTEN REFLECTION GUIDE

*from mercy volunteer corps*



# A LENTEN REFLECTION GUIDE

*ash wednesday*

As we enter into this Lenten season, we are once again called to create space so that our spirituality may flourish. With this, Mercy Volunteer Corps presents our annual Alumni Lenten Reflection Guide in hopes that it will draw you nearer to MVC's core values, to your own spiritual practices, and most especially to the greater Mercy Community.

This year, we began our compilation of prayers, thoughts, and reflections with a quote from Robert F. Kennedy. This quote, featured on the next page, is the inspiration behind this year's Mercy Volunteer Corps theme, Ripple of Hope.

It is our hope, that each of you continues to set forth ripples of hope, justice, compassion, and Mercy in our world. Know that wherever you are, you are close to another's ripple, and together our ripples of Mercy are powerful enough to truly transform the world.

May this Lenten season bring you time for quiet reflection, thoughtful curiosity, and renewed passion for living Mercy and seeking justice.

Wishing you many blessings this Lent,  
*The Staff of Mercy Volunteer Corps*

## THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27TH

"It is from numberless acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man or woman stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, they send forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those tiny ripples can build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance." -Robert F. Kennedy

## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28TH

**Meditation:** Breathe in. I am present. I am here. I am capable. Breathe out. Breathe in. I am strong. I am healthy. I am whole. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.

## SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 29TH

May the sun bring you new energy by day. May the moon softly restore you by night. May the rain wash away your worries. May the Breeze blow new strength into your being. May you walk gently through the world and know its beauty all the days of your life. -*Apache Blessing*

## FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

*mvc alumna maureen reflects*

My understanding and practice of mercy has been very limited. I've felt merciful when I forgave a friend after forgetting my birthday, or when I offered a patient smile to a cashier who gave me the wrong change; those practices of mercy are easy. What about when I'm walking down the street and see a man in rags sitting on dirty cardboard? Do I offer that same forgiveness when he takes time to ask for money? Do I lend the same kind smile? More often than not, I suddenly become very invested in something on my phone and casually walk by as if nobody was there. Where does God exist in that exchange?

Mercy isn't limited to those who are religious, or well-dressed, or sober, or clean-smelling. Mercy knows no social rules. The wonderful guests at our service sites aren't any different from the people you pass on the street; what makes them wonderful is that we've taken the time to see them, to hear what they have to say, to give them the opportunity to be wonderful. Mercy doesn't transform them into someone new; it accepts them exactly as they are. Rather, mercy has been transforming me: into a better, more patient, more loving person.

# SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

*alumna lara scott baltimore*

**MONDAY, MARCH 2ND**

“I cannot do all the good the world needs. But the world needs all the good I can do.” -Jana Stanfield

**TUESDAY, MARCH 3RD**

“Above all... love one another deeply, from the heart.” -1 Peter 1:22

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4TH**

“I would like to tell you all the little cherring things that God permits to fall in our way.” - Catherine McAuley

**THURSDAY, MARCH 5TH**

“Seek peace and pursue it.” -Proverb 34:14

**FRIDAY, MARCH 6TH**

“Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God’s kindness.” -Mother Teresa

**SATURDAY, MARCH 7TH**

“There are many things that can only be seen through eyes that have cried.”  
-Oscar Romero

Presence. Relationship. Love. These three seemingly simple words are far from simple for me. They represent a part of my life story, elements of personal and spiritual growth, and a large piece of my heart. They are words that embody my experience as a Mercy Volunteer and, over time, have become ongoing words of intention. My year of service was incredibly impactful and, even more than 15 years later, I continue to reflect on that time regularly. Nearly every time I think about the experiences I am privileged enough to have had and the people who came into my life because of MVC, I find myself back in touch with presence, relationship, and love. These are words that help express the breadth and depth of something powerful that otherwise could be seen as just a snapshot in time.

I find myself speaking almost daily about the value and importance of presence. It has become a foundational value in my work and I believe much of that stems from MVC. As a Mercy Volunteer I felt the power and positive impact of being present when others were present with me. The many moments shared with me and eventually practiced by me have made presence a central focus of my work and an ongoing goal for my life.

Relationships are powerful. During my time in Baltimore and at House of Mercy, I learned what deep, beautiful relationships look like. As a Mercy Volunteer I learned that solid relationships take openness, time and intentionality to develop and once they begin they really only continue to blossom. That one year, where community was central, helped me see that starting from a place of relationship is both important and imperative for shaping our world into the loving and just place I hope for.

When I think about love, memories of my MVC community members, my ministry colleagues, children and families at House of Mercy, neighbors, Sisters of Mercy, and support people all come to mind. Each showed love by genuinely welcoming me into their communities. Some acted like a mother when my own was not present. Others were confidants as I moved through my own discernment. Many were supports during both the challenging and wonderful times. What stands out most, however, is that many who showed me love then continue to show me love now, regularly or intermittently but always compassionately and with genuine care.

During this Lenten season, presence, relationship, and love resonate with me. I believe Jesus walked through life putting these words into action and now, through my life, I have the opportunity to practice the same. Lent is a time, similar to the New Year, to start fresh. However, rather than having a resolution or giving something up, Lent can be a beautiful time to set an intention or choose something to work towards. For me, this year, my intention is centered around these 3 words, to work each day to be present, build relationships, and show love. My goal is to have more moments like when my 4 year old recently asked me if friends can be part of our family and she simply smiled and said “ok” when my response was, “yes, some friends we love a lot are very much part of our family, like Auntie Rachel, Auntie Margy, Auntie Janet (my MVC community members).” There were no questions to ask or ideas to challenge because she knows well the important presence, special relationship, and beautiful love of these individuals in our family’s life.

## MONDAY, MARCH 9TH

“Remember, you have within you the strength, patience, and passion to change the world.” -Harriet Tubman

## TUESDAY, MARCH 10TH

“A community in which universal charity reigns is capable of surmounting all difficulties.” -Catherine McAuley

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11TH

“He heals the wounds of every shattered heart.” -Psalm 147:3

## THURSDAY, MARCH 12TH

“When eating a fruit, think of the person who planted the tree.”  
-Vietnamese Proverb

## FRIDAY, MARCH 13TH

**Meditation:** Breathe in. Feel the warmth of the sun on your face. Breathe in. Hear the sounds of nature. Breathe in. Feel the calming energy. Breath out.

## SATURDAY, MARCH 14TH

“I believe that each of us comes from the Creator, trailing wisps of glory.”  
-Maya Angelou

# THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

*current mercy volunteer mary kate reflects*

The first Station of the Cross is *Jesus is Condemned to Death*. As a Mercy Volunteer, I serve at Witness to Innocence in Philadelphia advocating against the death penalty.

It is easy to look at people on death row and view them as monsters. It is easy to just look at the horrible crimes that they were convicted for and ignore their humanity, but we, as Christians are called to so much more than this. We are called to look at someone on death row and see them as a whole person that has done both good and bad things. We are called to see their dignity and worth as human beings and children of God. We are called to look into their faces and see the face of Christ.

I was recently listening to a coworker speak about his time on death row. He shared that he watched so many of his friends be killed. Most of them were just kids. This is the heartbreaking truth that we try to ignore: the men and women on death row are people. We can turn away from it and only look at their actions that caused pain and destruction, but when we start to look closely, we see that these people who have been sentenced to death are human beings with the ability to love and to feel pain just like us.

Jesus was condemned to die just as the men and women on death row have been condemned to die and He loves them regardless of what they have or have not done. When Jesus hung on the cross, He looked at the men beside him who had been sentenced to death along with Him and He saw their humanity. He saw beyond their sins and He saw their hearts that were capable of so much more.

This kind of love is not easy when we see the pain that caused by the actions of many of the people on death row, but this pain cannot be healed through more killing. Our society must learn the value of healing and rehabilitation for everyone affected by violent crimes.

So how can we live out this call to compassionate Mercy?

We can strive to understand the full person who committed a crime before we judge their actions. We can learn about the people on death row and get to know their humanity. We can support a criminal justice system that values healing and restoration over punishment and retribution. We can stand against executions that will kill someone to show that killing is wrong. We can reject dehumanizing language that attempts to disrespect each individuals dignity and reduce them to their worst sins. We can live out the spirit of Mercy by loving unconditionally and allowing people to be more than just their mistakes.

God doesn't just call us to love others when it is easy. He asks us to look at the pain and suffering in the world and continue to love anyway.

*“Mercy is more than Charity - for it not only bestows benefits, but it receives and pardons again and again - even the ungrateful.” - Catherine McAuley*

**MONDAY, MARCH 16TH**

“Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without.” -Buddha

**TUESDAY, MARCH 17TH**

“For each petal on the shamrock, this brings a wish your way. Good health, good luck, and happiness for today and every day.” -An Irish Blessing

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18TH**

“Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.” -Simone Weil

**THURSDAY, MARCH 19TH**

“The sharpest weapon of all is a kind and gentle spirit.” -Anne Frank

**FRIDAY, MARCH 20TH**

“I will not allow my life’s light to be determined by the darkness around me.”  
-Sojourner Truth

**SATURDAY, MARCH 21ST**

“As you walk upon the Sacred Earth, treat each step as a prayer.” -Black Elk

# FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

*alumna sr denise colgan rsm*

Before I tell you what a profound grace it was to serve in Mercy Volunteer Corps, I need to tell you that by the age of eleven, I was certain of two things in life:

- 1) I would never be a teacher.
- 2) I would never be a nun.

With these two decisions made, I went blithely about my life, carefree in knowing what I didn’t have to consider, and looking around for my life’s path in other areas. I tried my hand at various sports (no), academic studies (I liked math, but it didn’t like me), and interests (I loved anything to do with reading - yes, my brother did catch me reading the phone book one day when I didn’t have anything else within reach as I ate a peanut butter sandwich at the kitchen table). Yes, I grew, and considered, and learned what appealed to me, and dreamed of conquering all kinds of occupations. In other words, I made plans.

Meanwhile...God laughed.

What does this have to do with being a Mercy Volunteer Corps member? A great deal, it turns out. Because of that year, because of a wonderful MVC community that spent time together serving others, praying, having fun, and allowing ourselves to be vulnerable with each other, I really think it allowed us to be available to the whisperings of the Spirit in our hearts. Don’t get me wrong. We had tough times, and one or two tense house meetings. Most of the time, however, we conspired to live as Mercy for each other, and all those we encountered. We laughed, we cried, we shared, we bonded. It was so poignant that we paid attention to it all. In that way, we could relax, and listen deeply; privately, and communally, to the beckoning of God, and internalize the values of that experience.

So this Lent, perhaps all of us can remember (even old-timers like me!), what a gift our time in MVC was. Perhaps we can revisit, if only for a little while, that space where we intentionally, radically, and in a most hopeful way, surrendered to God. A time when we didn’t make plans, but lived lives steeped in community and the moment. A way of being that allowed us to listen deeply to those whispers in our hearts, and we found any number of things – perhaps direction, peace, belonging, wisdom, new sight – that allow us to continue to serve the Gospel message.

I became a member of Mercy Volunteer Corps thirty-five years ago. I came back from my volunteer experience a different person. I suspect when God laughed at my plans it was a laughter filled with love, and amusement, and delight. Because God knew what I didn’t: that there was a path for me that would involve twenty-five plus years as a junior high teacher, and presently, thirty-two plus years as a Sister of Mercy. I never saw it coming. I wouldn’t have known it was there if not for my time in MVC. Do you know what?

I wouldn’t change a thing.



## MONDAY, MARCH 23RD

“Let your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.” -Nelson Mandela

## TUESDAY, MARCH 24TH

“Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.” -Mark Twain

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25TH

“Be still, and the Earth will speak to you.” -Navajo Proverb

## THURSDAY, MARCH 26TH

“The future does have a name and it is hope.” -Pope Francis

## FRIDAY, MARCH 27TH

**Meditation:** Breathe in strength of mind, body, and spirit. Exhale. Breathe in positivity. Be kind to yourself today. Exhale. Breathe in you are loved. Exhale.

## SATURDAY, MARCH 28TH

“God is always at home. It is we who have gone out for a walk.”  
-Meister Eckhart

# FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

*mvc alumna rina kenney reflects*

My favorite poem is “Spring Song” by Lucille Clifton. The first and last lines go together beautifully: “The green of Jesus is breaking the ground...and the future is possible.” I am now twice the age I was as a Mercy Volunteer at Mercy Hospice in Philadelphia. I am certainly not as “green” as I was then, and maybe more in need of reminders that a spring-like future is possible. I had a sense that year of going where Christ was leading me, specifically to work with homeless women and children. I trusted that voice calling me to be transformed, to live out what Catholic Social Teaching calls a “preferential option for poor.” I felt a strong connection to people on the margins even though I was aware of how my privilege separated me. Mercy has a way of calling one to the edge.

I often think of how my spirituality has developed since that pivotal year, how much more intimately I have encountered mercy. I had to learn to meet Christ more deeply in the edges of my own heart. I may not have the same experiences as the people I met during my service year, but I have experienced personal grief and losses that I could not have foreseen as a young volunteer. I learned to recognize and bask in the mercy of God bestowed on me. I have grappled with times when it felt distant. I have been both graced with beautiful experiences of God and faced with the limits of my own humanity.

For a long time it felt like a risk to believe in transformation. Our culture often feels surrounded by chaos, fear, violence. It can feel foolish to believe in Christ’s power. MVC’s counter-cultural call still resonates. Over the past few months through the practice of writing, I have felt a new sense of urgency which pushes me to believe in resurrection. Twenty three year old me most likely thought of the resurrection as a past event, a completed action. I see it now as ongoing. I continue to delve deeper into Christianity but also in the wisdom of other faiths and the natural world. All are one, mercy is truly beyond borders. To paraphrase Reverend Matthew Fox, the moon isn’t Lutheran, the oceans aren’t Catholic, and there are no Baptist mountains. We are in this together; our universe is infinitely vast and magically intimate at the same time.

I hope that the social questions I asked a lifetime ago are ones I still ask: how will my actions affect the poor, how are women and children treated, how do I challenge beliefs that are non-Christlike. My spirituality continues to be about connection and identity... who and what I am before God and my fellow creatures. Sometimes that spirituality is about me, sometimes about another; but it always comes back to mercy. It’s about hearing a Voice and then having both the humility and courage to speak back to It.

For a long time I identified strongly as a “former volunteer.” This has evolved a bit with age, after years of being a parent. When I was about to give birth to my daughter after several years of fertility problems, my nurse rightly sensed my fear in needing to communicate with my doctor before labor, before new life could come. I remember her bluntly telling me “you are about to become a mother...you need to learn to speak up!” We are all mothers needing to birth Christ. The same risks I encountered in becoming a mother are what taught me most about resurrection, about how to listen, to speak. I will forever be grateful to MVC for helping me to unlock, interpret, and trust that voice.

**MONDAY, MARCH 30TH**

**Meditation:** Breathe in. Sky above, earth below, peace within. Breathe out.

**TUESDAY, MARCH 31ST**

“Whenever you feel unloved, unimportant, or insecure, remember to whom you belong” -Ephesians 2:19-22

**WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1ST**

“Raise your words, not your voice. It is rain that grows flowers not thunder.”  
-Rumi

**THURSDAY, APRIL 2ND**

“God is closer to us than water is to a fish.” St. Catherine of Siena

**FRIDAY, APRIL 3RD**

“Thus we may hope to get on, taking short, careful steps, not great strides.”  
- Catherine McAuley

**SATURDAY, APRIL 4TH**

“In a world that lives like a fist, mercy is not more than waking with your hands open.” - Mark Nepo

# PALM SUNDAY

*current mercy volunteer anna reflects*

Over the past few months, I have felt incapable at times. I have felt immensely under-qualified. I have felt so ignorant of the world and lost trying to understand systems I see failing people I've come to love so quickly. I have despised injustice, my own perpetuation of it, my silence in the midst of it, and the way I feel seemingly powerless to do anything to correct it. Others have challenged me in a way I have trouble even articulating. In the midst of this, I have felt deep joy, genuinely loved, connected to God, and amazingly cared for in relationships. More than a few times, I have stood explaining reducing fractions for what seems like the seven hundredth time to my class and wondered what got me in that exact position, what made me think I was qualified for this, and what change was coming from that moment. When I arrived at my new South American home for the year back in August, there was a magnet on the refrigerator that read: “Ask yourself what makes you come alive and do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive (Howard Thurman).” For some reason, in those moments standing in front of my class, I know I'm here because I want to be alive, the only qualification I need (other than the ability to reduce fractions) is to be alive, and that if the only change is that I am one more person in the world who is alive and loving the person in front of me, that's enough.

I thought that I wanted to do a year of service to remove myself from a space that I felt I had come too accustomed to. With expectations to surround myself with a new culture, new service experience, new purpose, expectations to meet God in a different way and live in community differently, I said yes to a year of service. This year, while experiencing so much newness, the simple fact remains that people are people no matter where they are or what surrounds them. I found myself having the same response that I have always tried to have and that I hope to hold on to for the rest of my life: to simply love the person in front of me. Jesus explains quite clearly that whatever we do for the one in front of us, we do for Him. Service, I have found, is not about being the hands and feet of Jesus, but about serving Jesus through the person He has put in front of you. Being present, listening, and validating another, is how injustice begins to be corrected. I realized quickly that a year of service is not about changing an entire system, but about committing to always having another person in front of you to love, and to never say no to loving one more person.

This experience is woven with hard questions, great intentionality, and immense joy. I have learned that God is bigger than I thought He was, that He is not hard to find, and our response to Him is to overflow with His love. Your definition of community may, like mine, come to include pieces of so many other people's hearts. You may experience that hospitality means to welcome someone not only into a house or space, but a home, a place where others may lay their burdens for a while; that to be hospitable, you must let others be hospitable to you too. This experience is about so much more than a service site and daily volunteer work. Listen to the dreams that have been placed on your heart. Ask God to speak and listen to what He may say. Perhaps this is what it means for you to come and be alive.

## MONDAY, APRIL 6TH

“She lost herself in the trees, among the ever-changing leaves. She wept beneath the wild sky as stars told stories of ancient times. The flowers grew towards her light, the river caller her name at night. She could not live an ordinary life with the mysteries of the universe hidden in her eyes.” -Christy Ann Martine

## TUESDAY, APRIL 7TH

**Meditation:** Breathing in feel your lungs expanding. Breathing out feel a sense of letting go. Breathing in feel alive and awake. Breathing out release your tension. Breathing in feel a sense of fullness. Breathing out know that you are enough.

## WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8TH

“Put your hand on your heart,’ the old man said. ‘Inside you there is a power, there are ideas, thoughts that no one has thought of, there is the strength to love, purely and intensely, and to have someone love you back - there is the power to make people happy, and to make people laugh - it’s full compliments, and the power to change lives and futures. Don’t forget that power, and don’t ever give up on it.” -Atticus

# HOLY THURSDAY & GOOD FRIDAY

*The suscipe of catherine mcauley*

My God, I am yours for time and eternity.  
Teach me to cast myself entirely  
into the arms of your loving Providence  
with a lively, unlimited confidence in your compassionate, tender pity.  
Grant, O most merciful Redeemer,  
That whatever you ordain or permit may be acceptable to me.  
Take from my heart all painful anxiety;  
let nothing sadden me but sin,  
nothing delight me but the hope of coming to the possession of You  
my God and my all, in your everlasting kingdom. *Amen.*

Catherine McAuley  
*Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy*

# EASTER SUNDAY

*a final prayer*

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.

We are quite naturally impatient in everything  
to reach the end without delay.

We should like to skip the intermediate stages.

We are impatient of being on the way to something  
unknown, something new.

And yet it is the law of all progress  
that it is made by passing through

some stages of instability—

and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;

your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,  
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don’t try to force them on,

as though you could be today what time

(that is to say, grace and circumstances

acting on your own good will)

will make of you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit

gradually forming within you will be.

Give Our Lord the benefit of believing

that his hand is leading you,

and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself

in suspense and incomplete.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ  
*Excerpted from Hearts on Fire*





[www.mercyvolunteers.org](http://www.mercyvolunteers.org)