The Mercy Hospital Foundation Board of Directors initiated a Mission Integration Committee, under the leadership of Sister JoCeal Young, to develop a planned approach to ensure the continuation of the Sisters of Mercy’s mission at Scripps Mercy Hospital.

The vision statement of the Mission Integration Committee is:

The unique mission and Catholic identity of Scripps Mercy Hospital will survive and flourish into the foreseeable future by addressing the SPIRITUAL, PHYSICAL and PSYCHOLOGICAL needs of patients, staff and the community served by the hospital and its ancillary services.

In celebration of the Sisters of Mercy Foundation Day on December 12, 2009, the Sisters of Mercy have shared the following stories and testimonials to give you an opportunity to become more familiar with the Sisters of Mercy and how embedded their ministry is to the mission of Scripps Mercy Hospital.

These condensed stories cover the early years of each Sister, the inspirations that led them to becoming a Sister, their memories and events that stand out as contributions to their ministry and how they experience the ministry in a special way.

If you would to read their full stories in the form of an electronic book, please contact Tj Kennon in marketing and communications at kennon.ty@scrippshealth.org. Thank you!
Our Philosophy of Health Care

We, the Sisters of Mercy, who sponsor Scripps Mercy Hospital, are committed to strengthening the mission of the Church in the world.

We Believe:

• In the healing ministry of Jesus as an essential part of our mission in contemporary society
• In the uniqueness and richness of the tradition of our Foundress, Catherine McAuley, and in the collaborative efforts of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas to strengthen Catholic health care ministry
• In the sacredness of all life, and therefore, in the dignity of the human person and the promotion of human wholeness
• In a spirit of compassion that cares for the suffering and the dying
• In the right to quality health care for each individual and our responsibility to act as advocates for the poor and those with special needs
• In the stewardship of resources for the enhancement of all life and for the common good
• In a climate of mutual support, compassion, care and justice for those serving and being served within our organization
• In collaboration with others who support Judeo-Christian values in developing a creative response to need
• In the value and principles of the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services
Sister Catherine McAuley
Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy

Born in Dublin, Ireland in September 1778 to a prosperous Catholic family, Catherine McAuley was one of three children born to Elinor Conway and James McAuley. Though her father died in 1783 when Catherine was just five years old, his compassion for the poor, especially children and families living nearby, was a lifelong example for his eldest daughter.

In 1798 Catherine was orphaned and chose to live with relatives, some of whom were non-Catholic and had little tolerance for her pious practices. In 1803 she was invited to live in the home of William and Catherine Callaghan as a companion to Mrs. Callaghan.

The Callaghans were impressed with young Catherine’s desire to serve the poor and teach young and unfortunate girls to become self-sufficient. The Callaghans were childless, and upon Mr. Callaghan’s death in 1822, Catherine inherited their fortune: about £25,000, their estate, “furniture and plate.”

In 1824, Catherine used her inheritance to lease property on Baggot Street, a fashionable neighborhood in Dublin to build a large house for religious, educational and social services for women and children. Other women, intrigued by the house and the work for which it was intended, were attracted to Catherine and began to join her preparations for the ministry she planned.

On September 24, 1827, the Feast of our Lady of Mercy, the first residents came to live in the house they called the House of Mercy in honor of the day, and two years later the chapel was dedicated. Between 1829 and 1830, after prayerful deliberation and consultation, Catherine and her associates agreed to found a new religious congregation. Though it was not her original intent, Catherine began the founding of a new religious congregation of women dedicated to serving the poor.

Catherine and two of her associates entered the Convent of the Presentation Sisters in Dublin on September 8, 1830 to begin formal preparation for founding the Sisters of Mercy. Fifteen months later the trio pronounced vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and to persevere until death in “the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy.” Thus the new community was founded on December 12, 1831.

Catherine lived only 10 years as a Sister of Mercy, but in that time she established nine additional autonomous foundations in Ireland and England, and two branch houses near Dublin. Catherine McAuley died in 1839 following an infection with pulmonary tuberculosis. In 1841 her community had grown to 150 Sisters of Mercy. Shortly thereafter, small groups of Sisters left Ireland at the invitation of bishops in Newfoundland, New Zealand, the United States, Argentina and Australia.

Her successor, Sister M. Francis Warde, one of Catherine McAuley’s original seven postulants, opened their first convent in the United States in Pittsburgh. Other convents subsequently opened in New York, San Francisco, St. Louis and Durango, Colorado respectively. It was through these last two convents – in St. Louis and Durango – that the foundress of the convent of the Sisters of Mercy in San Diego emerged.

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas now serve in North, Central and South America; the Caribbean, Guam and the Philippines with more than 4,000 sisters responding faithfully to the needs of the poor in these countries.
Born in 1852, Mother Mary Michael Cummings was the youngest of seven children whose parents immigrated to Illinois from Ireland. Influenced by her older sister, who became a Sister of Mercy in St. Louis but died shortly after her profession, Mother Mary Michael decided to follow in her sister’s footsteps. Entering the Sisters of Mercy’s convent, she embraced the vows of poverty, charity and obedience at the age of 19. She professed the additional vows of the Sisters of Mercy to care for the sick, the poor and the ignorant.

In 1882 she, along with her superior, two other Sisters and a postulant, traveled to Durango, Colorado, where they served for five years. They were then assigned to the mining town of Ouray, Colorado for eight years and were then asked to establish a mission in San Diego, which was then flourishing. In 1887, with a mass transit development, the population jumped to 35,000 from just 5,000 in 1884.

Unfortunately, the creation of a San Diego terminus of the transcontinental railroad was thwarted by financiers with major interests in San Francisco, and the city’s population fell to 16,000. Banks closed, and businesses foreclosed. San Diegans who were financially able left, and those who stayed did so only because they were too poor to leave.

It was during this time that she and Sister Mary Alphonsus were received by Bishop Mora of Los Angeles, who sent them to San Diego and gave them permission to establish a community of Sisters and “to build a hospital with their own means in or near said city.” On July 9, 1890, she and Sister Alphonsus – with a $50 gift – signed a six-month lease at Sixth and H Streets (now Market Street) in San Diego. There, over a men’s clothing store, they opened St. Joseph’s Dispensary, a five-bed hospital, and the staggeringly high numbers of patients led her to seek a larger facility. In 1891 St. Joseph’s Sanitarium, a three-story building, was established on 8th Avenue for $5,600.

During the next 13 years, the Sisters of Mercy of San Diego, under her direction, accomplished many feats. They developed a home for the elderly and acquired 1,000 acres of the McGonigle Ranch in Del Mar. The ranch, which they renamed Mount Carmel Ranch, provided dairy products and fresh vegetables for patients for the next 30 years.

In 1916 Mother Mary Michael turned the city upside down with a 12-day fundraising frenzy! Mr. Anson P. Stephens had willed six acres on Fifth Avenue and Washington Street with the stipulation that the Sisters build a new hospital to cost no less than $75,000 — and that construction would begin by November 30, 1917. Always forward thinking, Mother Mary Michael dreamed of a fireproof hospital so she set the goal at $200,000, a stretch for the time. The community responded with great enthusiasm. In the first four days the campaign raised $22,000! (Remember, it was 1917, and WWI was beginning.) By the twelfth day, the campaign raised $75,000 — enough to meet the stipulation of the bequest. Among the first major supporters were San Diego Gas & Electric, George Marston, John D. Spreckels and E.W. Scripps, Ellen Browning Scripps’ brother.

Sadly, Mother Mary Michael never saw the fireproof hospital of which she dreamed. She passed away on October 6, 1922, a year after celebrating her golden Jubilee as a Sister of Mercy. Between 1924 and 1925, the new fireproof hospital was built, and the Sisters changed the name to Mercy Hospital.

The first patient at St. Joseph’s Dispensary, Mr. James O’Connell, was a malaria victim who sought the Sisters’ care because “every other place was closed to him.” After recovering from his illness and observing the Sisters’ ministrations to other sick patients, he described the Sisters as “intelligent, kind and tender.” He became a life-long supporter of the “pure, selfless and compassionate nature” of the Sisters of Mercy.

The Mission of the Sisters of Mercy remains the same — yesterday, today and tomorrow.
Sister Rose Davis
Volunteer
Sisters of Mercy

Born in Spokane in the 1920s, Sister Rose spent her childhood in Seattle with her parents, an older sister and brother, and many cats, dogs and chickens. Her brother (Buster) and sister (Tado) were very studious, a characteristic that Sister didn’t fully appreciate, so she spent as much time as possible playing with her animals.

Though baptized Catholic and receiving the sacraments, Rose didn’t grow up as a practicing Catholic. She attended public schools and didn’t know any nuns. After college, on a road trip to San Diego with Tado, Rose was asked what she was going to do. Tado suggested she consider a convent if she could get out after a year, which might have planted a seed within Rose. The fascination of living a life centered on God took root.

Once in San Diego, Rose joined the choir at the cathedral and was welcomed by the group of devout Catholics. Her fear that such a life might become abnormally serious was dispelled by her new “clan,” who were fun to be with. Her fascination grew deeper, and one day, the group drove past Mercy Hospital. Learning of the hospital, Rose announced that she was going to return the next day and apply for a job. This encounter was her first with the Sisters of Mercy.

Sister Rose began working at the hospital and witnessed the Sisters living the life for which she’d been searching. By now she needed more time to pray and spent most of her lunch hour in the chapel, finding quiet and privacy. One day her supervisor, Sister M. Alma, approached her, thinking she had a problem that needed to be addressed. For the first time, Rose acknowledged what she’d been pondering and was advised to seek a spiritual director. In time, she visited Burlingame and met other young women with the same plans, and as her path became clearer, she discovered that she had undergone a spiritual journey as a “searcher after God.” At the age of 26, she moved to Burlingame to begin training as a postulant (candidate) with the Sisters of Mercy.

Sister Rose trained as an educator, teaching middle school students and later earned a master’s degree in history and received extensive theological training, and was assigned to teach both in the Los Angeles Archdiocese. It was now the 1960s — a vibrant and challenging time to be teaching Catholicism as Vatican II was underway — and the church and the nation were in transition. In 1968, the Sisters had a chapter comprising a group of highly qualified nuns elected to serve as a legislative body to make decisions for the congregation. This group pushed the order to move forward in their ministries according to the decisions of the Vatican Council, particularly the document on “The Church in the Modern World” with focus on reading the signs of the times. The chapter wanted to decide the role of the Sisters of Mercy at this pivotal time.

The signs of the times dictated exploration of social injustice, and Sister Rose was chosen to establish this undertaking. Her first move was to join the Conference on Religion, Race and Social Concerns in San Mateo, an interfaith, intercultural group responding to local human welfare issues, like crimes of violence and hate (church burnings), racism, poverty and other matters of church concern. Here she made inroads against injustice and served as a community organizer, educator and advocate.

In the 1970s, she returned to San Diego to take time for respite and realized one of her long-time fascinations: an interest in the language and culture of the Mexican people. She submitted a proposal to the Sisters of Mercy, requesting time to travel alone by bus through Mexico. At this time, taking a trip alone was unheard of, and to go by bus in a foreign land made the request even more startling. However, she was granted her wish, and this journey deepened her connection with Mexican people, giving her the opportunity to experience her vocation in a special and spiritual way. Upon returning, she asked to move to Tijuana to minister, and her 10-year ministry there completed her journey. Her life is a testament to the importance of that journey, spiritual and human.

Sister Rose sees the mission and values of the Sisters vibrantly alive in the hospital today, just as it was 60 years ago. She shares that it remains all about the people — with everyone contributing to making others feel welcome, valued and cared for. She believes herself to be privileged to be a part of that commitment.
Sister Mary Gallagher
Chaplain, Spiritual Care Services

Born in County Mayo, Ireland, Sister Mary Gallagher was the youngest child with six older brothers, who was raised on a small farm where the family raised all their own vegetables and livestock. She grew up surrounded by Catholics, and the church was important. At night her father would kneel and pray silently, and always thank God for another day; her mother would say the rosary with the family at night. She gained her sense of spirituality from both her parents.

At 13 she attended a boarding school run by the Sisters of Mercy, which was the first time she encountered the Sisters. During high school, she read Mercy unto Thousands: The Life Story of Mother Mary Catherine McAuley. She was impressed with Sister McAuley’s life’s work, and it was during then that she gave thought to religious life. After high school, she didn’t want to go right into the convent but to ensure it was her decision, and not one of fascination with the Sisters. So she set off to England and worked in a bank for sometime. One summer she returned to Ireland and decided to enter religious life.

In September 1962, at 20 years old, she entered the community of the Sisters of Mercy, and despite many challenges after 47 years, she remains happy with her commitment to her life as a Sister of Mercy.

While in Ireland Sister Mary trained as a teacher. She enjoyed it and felt she was very progressive in the 1960s with her holistic approach to teaching the whole person. She really enjoyed the involvement with the community as a whole, not just the convent-related affairs. These were the heady days after Vatican II when the convent gates were no longer shut at 5 p.m.

Sister went on to work with the traveling people (or “tinkers or tin smiths” as they were known). These people traveled to perform jobs others might not have time or skill to do. It was a hard life, yet they were very united and often had large families. By the time Sister got to work with them in the late 70s, their travel was confined to summer months. Sister opened a workshop for them, teaching skills in woodwork and metalwork, cookery and home economics, handcrafts, and reading, writing and math, and the program is still operating 25 years later.

In 1996 Sister took a sabbatical and traveled to the United States to visit many of her brothers. She came to San Diego in 1997 to visit some friends who ran St. Vincent’s School. She was thinking of receiving some training in another area to assist the traveling people in other ways. So she entered the chaplaincy training program offered through the Center for Urban Ministry at [then] Mercy Hospital, which involved clinical pastoral education with ministry both in the hospital and community. For her last unit she was assigned to the sixth floor at Mercy and loved it. Upon finishing, she was advised to get her certification in chaplaincy. After receiving permission to stay in San Diego, she worked with seniors in low-income housing for almost three years until a chaplaincy position opened at the hospital.

Sister believes that God uses her, as He uses all of us to do His work and blesses us in the process. On sustaining the Sisters of Mercy’s mission and values, she reflects on the history of religious life. During the 50s and 60s, there was a surge in the number of women entering religious life. She believes that God was involved in this movement, but times have changed. Perhaps if there were other choices then, people would have chosen other ways to serve God, like what is happening today.

She believes the spirit of Mercy is alive and well. She reflects upon the story of Mercy unto Thousands, and it is the spirit of Catherine McAuley that is what the Sisters of Mercy have; it is the charisma that speaks to people. Sister Catherine had a saying, “It is better to be fooled by 99 imposters than to let one genuine, deserving person leave the door without getting what they need.” Sister believes that it’s the spirit we all can continue to bring to the hospital – it does not have to be from just the Sisters. Our mission is to be there for the needy – whether they be rich or poor.

Scripps Mercy Hospital
Sister Virginia Gillis was born at Queen of Angels Hospital and raised in Los Angeles. Her father was a captain in the L.A. Police Department, and her mother was an L.A. native. With three sons, her mother was thrilled (after many prayers to Mother Mary) when she gave birth to Virginia Marie. They were a close-knit family that shared a sense of joy and humor, and music was a shared passion.

Sister was educated in Catholic schools and first thought of becoming a nun during a high school freshman retreat but put the thought aside. After another experience where she felt called by God, she was referred by one of the Sisters to a spiritual director, who asked her to take an inventory on why she wanted to be a Sister. Not fully understanding the exercise’s intent, Sister disregarded the advice and attended college instead, but her calling persisted. She describes her journey to God through the words of St. Augustine: “My heart is restless Oh Lord, and it will not rest until it rests with Thee.” She left college at 19 and entered the Sisters of Mercy convent, choosing this order because of their camaraderie and to show gratitude to Mother Mary by joining an order dedicated to her.

Sister was trained as an educator by a Sister who was an educational psychologist, and her instruction focused on how adults shape the self-esteem of children, emphasizing the importance of positive feedback. An innovative concept at the time, it influenced how she worked with her students. When assigned to seventh grade, Sister Geraldine advised her that all she needed to do was love the kids, and everything would be all right. When teaching eighth grade two years later, a colleague taught her to be flexible and have fun with her students. These experiences shaped her ability to create educational environments that encouraged and sometimes turned around the lives of many students.

After several years teaching, Sister moved into administrative roles, including director of the Teacher Education Program at the Sisters’ College in Burlingame, a coordinator of elementary education and election to the Sisters of Mercy General Counsel. These assignments came at a time of change within the Sisters of Mercy’s educational system, and she used her skills in process development and group facilitation as the Mercy order moved from a hierarchical system to a collaborative style of governance.

In 1981 Sister switched fields to teach management at St. John’s Hospital in Oxnard, California, and she pursued her doctorate in institutional management. During the next 25 years, she worked in various levels of health care management, including a corporate position within Mercy Healthcare Services, various regional positions (board of directors for [then] Mercy Hospital in San Diego) and for the Catholic Health Association. At St. Mary’s Community Center in Savannah, Georgia, Sister oversaw outreach programs to the poor. After an assessment revealed a disparity in accessing health care-related technology among African Americans, she set up a computer center at the hospital to help bridge the digital divide and later moved it to a more convenient location in the heart of the African American community. Ten years later, the center continues providing free computer classes, access to a computer lab, health videos, books and other publications, health screenings and more.

Looking back on her career, Sister Virginia recalls the journey of two employees at St. Joseph’s Hospital infected with HIV. During the early to mid 1980s, HIV medicine was evolving, and there were no structures or processes in place to adequately care for patients who progressed into AIDS. Little was known about HIV transmission, and fears of the epidemic surfaced in discriminatory ways. Sister walked the path with these two men, providing various support as their disease progressed and their physical condition deteriorated. Other similar experiences with patients facing end-of-life issues are moments that Sister values, feeling that she has been blessed to help people deal with their fears at the end of their life.

Sister Virginia has always felt a special connection to Scripps Mercy Hospital. She feels blessed to be back and to find the Mercy spirit as alive as it was years ago, saying, “It’s the people who create the culture of caring and embrace the mission of the Sisters. We are blessed to have great leadership, Tom Gammiere and Chris Van Gorder, who understand the mission and provide the guidance to make our hospital great.”
Sister Francine Jackson was about seven years old when she decided to be a nurse, although her mother didn’t think she would achieve this goal and did everything she could to get Francine married. After graduating high school, Francine briefly worked in an airplane factory until she was accepted into a three-year nursing program at St. Joseph’s Hospital in Phoenix. After two years in nursing school, she decided to become a Catholic. A priest from a nearby parish did not want Francine to be baptized until she was 21 years old, yet she was adamant about receiving her first communion that February. The priest proceeded with the baptismal, and the Sisters of Mercy at St. Joseph’s Hospital celebrated the occasion with a festive brunch for Francine and her friends.

During her training at St. Joseph’s, she met and befriended Sister Mary Zita, the supervisor of the obstetrics department. Sister Mary Zita had a profound impact on Francine as she was a great teacher, and obstetrical care was of great interest to Francine. The idea of becoming a Sister of Mercy took root for Francine, and she confided her aspiration toward the end of nursing school. Upon graduation, she worked in Bakersfield and then later in San Jose at O’Connor Hospital among the Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul. Her desire to become a Sister of Mercy remained, and she entered the convent in 1950.

Sister Francine knew it would be difficult for her mother to hear that she entered the convent, yet they corresponded regularly with Francine visiting her mother during vacation breaks and holidays. As time passed, her mother’s attitude toward her vocational calling mellowed. Shortly before her mother died, Sister Francine spent time with her providing respite care. As Sister Francine tended to her mother’s needs, her mother told Francine that she never really wanted her to enter the convent. “Yet,” her mother said, “the more that I have seen and the more that I have heard, I know that you had a calling and you answered it. And there is not anyone who could be luckier than that.” Her mother’s confirmation of Sister Francine’s calling was heartfelt and brought Sister Francine a feeling of peaceful joy. Her mother passed away shortly after the disclosure.

When Sister was sent to work at St. Joseph’s Hospital, her father called to tell her that he had cancer and did not have long to live. He came to St. Joseph’s and was very sick upon his arrival, getting progressively worse in a short period. He’d never been baptized, and Sister Francine sensed that he wanted to be. She spoke with the hospital chaplain and asked him to help her father. The priest spoke to her father, confirmed his wishes for the sacrament and asked Sister, “What shall I do?” In a warm, heartfelt and direct manner, Sister responded, “For the Love of God, Father, go ahead and baptize him!”

Sister Francine has worked in all five Mercy hospitals twice and in almost every department except surgery. Her last assignment was [then] Mercy Hospital in San Diego, where she worked for 25 years in a variety of nursing roles. One of her most significant contributions was establishing the first intensive care unit (ICU) in Mercy Hospital Oxnard, California.

Sister Francine’s story of her religious experience has been significant to others as they contemplated their spiritual path. She combined her clinical skills with her spiritual experience to bring peace to many lives, including those of her own family.

Sister Francine believes that the current organizational leaders – Chris Van Gorder, Scripps CEO, and Tom Gammiere, Scripps Mercy’s chief executive – have played a significant role in supporting the Sisters of Mercy’s mission and values. She believes we need to continue teaching new employees about the mission and values of the Sisters to sustain the spirit of caring and compassion for all.
Sister Maureen Kelly
Chaplain, San Diego Hospice

Born in Oakland, Sister Maureen Kelly was the oldest of three children. Her father was a funeral director so they lived upstairs from a mortuary. Her grandmother lived with them during the school year, and they’d visit her in Washington State during summers. For first grade, her parents went to the convent to register her, and it was then that she wanted to be a nun. When she graduated high school, she entered the Sisters of the Holy Name but left seven months later when her mother died, as she was needed to help at home.

When Vatican II happened, religious life was undergoing tremendous change. Sister felt it wasn’t a good time to consider re-entry and waited. So she worked for Bank of America for more than 25 years and attended college on a full scholarship. She pursued a master’s degree in theology and served on the board of directors for Catholic Charities in the East Bay. Upon graduation, she worked at Catholic Charities, intermittently thinking about the convent.

After the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989, she worked with the Sisters of Mercy and Lutheran Family Services, on behalf of Catholic Charities, to open a nursing home for displaced seniors. It was then that she came to know the Sisters of Mercy, becoming good friends with several of them. She then began exploring the possibilities of entering the Mercy community, and in 1995 she entered the convent as a candidate, attending the Novitiate in St. Louis and returning to the Mother House in Burlingame.

In 1998, Sister Maureen realized she enjoyed working with people during their end-of-life phase. She also knew she needed additional training so she studied in the Clinical Pastoral Education program at University of California, San Francisco Medical Center. After receiving her certification and before taking her final vows, she needed to complete her developing world experience. So she went to Jamaica to teach children, and upon returning to California, she moved to San Diego and later made her final vows.

Her life experiences prepared her as a Sister of Mercy working with people nearing the end of life. When she returned home the first time, she was the caregiver for several family members. She learned what it took to provide for the terminally ill and believes that is how she was guided to Catholic Charities and the Department of Aging and ultimately the Mercy Retirement Care Center (MRCC).

Most important to Sister Maureen are the times she’s spent with people with no family or friends. Sometimes, the only thing she can do is to be present — to sit and be with a person so they are not alone. It’s a significant act and one she treasures. She feels that hospice is not a sad place yet one filled with peace and joy. As one of two chaplains at San Diego Hospice, she celebrates life with patients. Together, the chaplains and staff make every effort to celebrate with the patient and their family what life they have. It is grace to be able to do so, and it is the Sisters of Mercy’s work — to visit the sick and bury the dead.

Sister remembers one female patient dying from cancer, who was angry and told Sister that nothing in her life had gone right. The woman didn’t have family or friends visiting so Sister would stop each day to say hello. One day Sister asked if she could sit next to her for awhile, and she said, “Yes.” So Sister sat with her for, and as she stood up to leave, the patient asked her to bend over so she could give her a kiss. The woman shared, “No one has ever been that kind to me.” The women died the next day. Sister Maureen shares that she’ll always remember this woman in a very special way.

For more than 119 years, the Sisters of Mercy have worked side by side with our partners in this health care ministry. Sister Maureen is proud of the hospital employees who, by their actions, show they understand and live the mission of Mercy. They are respectful to the patients and families who seek medical care. Our staff goes the extra mile to serve others, and the Sisters could not succeed without them. Health care has evolved, and today it requires much more technology than before, yet it is very important that we remain attentive to the human side of medicine. Together, we touch people’s lives when they are in need of healing: physically, emotionally and spiritually.
"The halls are alive with the sound of music..." only begins to capture the joy and warmth that Sister Cecile Ley’s music brings to so many people. As the youngest of seven children born in Pittsburgh, Sister Mary Eleanor Ley grew up in a loving and religious family. After her father’s death the family moved to San Diego, where her musical gifts blossomed. She was blessed with perfect pitch, absolute mastery of the piano and the ability to adapt and transpose, even humorously.

Her music teacher, one of the best in the city, had great plans for her that included going on tour and teaching with him. However, God had another plan. A year before entering the Sisters of Mercy, she was praying and heard a voice saying, “You are to go to the convent.” Family members were surprised by her decision to enter the convent in July 1955, and her music teacher and her fiancé’s father were very angry. Her first night in the convent was her first night away from home, and it was quite a shock. However she was also gifted with a wonderful sense of humor that helped her through challenging times.

For five years after her profession, she taught piano in the Mercy School of Music in Burlingame and then taught in elementary schools for 25 years. Later she began working in parish ministry and at [then] Mercy Hospital in pastoral care. These experiences were pivotal to her decision to enter the Clinical Pastoral Education Program (a master’s level training curriculum), where she prepared to be a chaplain. In the advance level of her program, she started bereavement groups, as well as a bereavement program.

In 1992, she began a chaplaincy program at Mercy home care services, bringing spiritual and emotional comfort to HIV and oncology patients and families in the home setting. The program expanded to patients with severe medical problems, their caregivers and family members. Sister Cecile was known as the “driving Sister,” similar to Mother McAuley, who was known as the “walking Sister.” Cecile would drive throughout San Diego visiting patients. If a patient was transferred, she would follow. “There is no place I won’t go – halfway houses, psychiatric units … I say I never go alone because God walks with me. That’s why I don’t have any fear.”

In 1994, she was nominated for a Home Care Service Award by the San Diego/Imperial County Regional Home Care Council for her contributions. During the Scripps/Mercy merger, she was part of a task force that addressed ways to keep and blend the best of both Scripps and Mercy’s home care programs. She received the Scripps Values in Action Award in 1999 for making a difference in the lives of others.

As chaplain of Mercy home care services, she often provided comfort and support during a patient’s death and remembers one woman who’d come to accept her death, but her husband refused to let her go. Sister Cecile talked with him and suggested he say the prayers for the dying over his wife. “Both of them were finally at peace, and she died calmly a short time later.” There was also a young mother suffering from a terminal illness who shared that she was afraid her three-year-old child wouldn’t remember her after she died. So Sister Cecile helped the woman make a video so the girl could always remember her.

Today, as associate chaplain in spiritual care services, she uses music therapy with behavioral health patients and plays the piano in the hospital lobby to delight everyone who passes by. “What keeps me going is God’s presence – knowing there is reason for my existence. Music, like Mercy, is for all, and it is a way we can pray without words.” Her gift of music has been a unifying one for many people. “I always ask God in the morning, ‘Who needs me today?’ Then I pray that God will get me where I need to be.”

Sister Cecile feels that everyone at Scripps Mercy contributes in carrying on the Sisters’ mission and values. It’s a special place of caring and compassion. The mission’s spirit is alive and well, and very present in many of the employees, who are mission-minded people. These folks are the ones who will carry forth the Mercy spirit, along with the inspiring leadership from Tom Gammiere. Sister feels very fortunate to be part of this exceptional group and plans to be around for as long as possible.
Sister Mary Leonita Metoyer was born in Shreveport, Louisiana as one of four children. Her parents were very loving, caring people who loved music and were fun to be around. They moved the family to Los Angeles when Sister was five years old, upon recommendation from their doctor, to help alleviate Sister’s asthmatic condition. Sister is an “Angeleno” at heart yet is still very proud of her Creole-Cajun Louisiana heritage.

Sister “survived” more than 16 years of Catholic school. She was taught by the Sisters of St. Joseph in elementary school and seven different communities of Sisters in secondary school. During her last two years of high school, she took business courses taught by the Sisters of Mercy. She spent a lot of time getting to know them and was happy to share time and do chores for them. During her senior year, on Career Day, she felt a call to become a Sister of Mercy, and here she is today.

Sister chose health care as her ministry, as she became familiar with the hospital business world through her education. She graduated from the University of San Francisco with a bachelor’s degree in accounting. Her first assignment was in 1956 at our [then] Mercy Hospital, where she worked in the admitting/business office with a staff of eight. As the years passed, Sister was assigned to other Mercy hospitals in California and Arizona. While working, Sister took a post-graduate course in health care administration. Over the years, she attended meetings at Mercy Hospital and always looked forward to being assigned here again, which happened in 1987.

Sister cites her education when asked about her contributions to the ministry. The Sisters of Mercy ran the school of nursing, associated with University of San Francisco (USF), an all-male school at the time. The Sisters spoke to the Jesuit priests, sharing Sister Mary Leonita’s aptitude in accounting and finance. Sister was the first woman who attended USF’s Business School, and women have been welcomed there ever since.

Back then, the professor would take attendance by calling the last names of the male students. The nuns wore the full habit and were always addressed by their first name, rarely using their formal full name. At the beginning of class one day, the professor took roll call, and when he called out Sister’s last name, “Metoyer,” there was no response. After several requests, Sister realized he was calling her name, and she acknowledged her attendance. Father said, “Sister, it is rather obvious you are here. I will not call your name anymore.”

Sister has made many contributions, yet one is in the area of hospital finance. Up until the late 1960s, all fiscal operations in the Mercy hospitals were performed manually. In the mid-60s, Sister Mary Leonita was a member of a group that transformed the manual methodologies to an electronic finance system. It was quite an undertaking, but the conversion went smoothly. The Mercy hospitals became a model site for vendors to show how efficiently the transition could be done.

Through the years, Sister has served in administration, finance, spiritual care, human resources and the Mercy Hospital Foundation. Her memories are of the people with whom she has worked. She has ministered to patients, family members, staff, physicians, visitors and vendors. When she thinks of a significant event in her ministry, she recalls an event of being on night call for administration during her early years on ministry. A family came into the emergency room with a very sick infant, and she was called when the staff felt the baby would not survive. And, he did not. Sister shared that she will always remember the family and being with them during that devastating time in their life.

Sister’s current role with the Mercy Hospital Foundation is very special to her. She is a member of a great team and is able to be to meet and greet staff members, doctors, volunteers and all others who come to Mercy. Sister believes the mission and values of the Sisters of Mercy will continue at the hospital through the presence of all staff who want to be at Scripps Mercy. The staff members make a difference by the way they perform daily tasks and the caring attitude shown to one another, to the patients and all visitors. As long as we choose and retain staff members who portray a caring attitude, the hospital will continue the mission and values of the Sisters of Mercy. Sister believes Mercy will carry on the mission for years to come – even if there is only one Sister left. And, if there is not even one Sister here, the Mercy spirit will be evident from the spirit that Sister experiences today.
Sister Sheila Murphy
Volunteer, Medical Library
Sisters of Mercy

Born in Ireland on January 28, as the second youngest of 10 children, Sister Sheila Murphy came to the United States in 1947. With eight boys and two girls, family activities ranged from gardening, to helping with the breeding of greyhounds, to raising finches and canaries and the seasonal planting and harvesting of the crops. In addition, the family loved music provided (by their mom) and dancing — especially step dancing. Occasionally the kids would listen to the elders talk about the olden days where her great grandfather Murphy would entertain the villagers with his skillful dancing and was rewarded by being hoisted onto their shoulders and paraded up and down the streets, singing with pride and joy. Sister always treasured the experience of having had her own father as her dancing teacher.

In the late 1930s, a secondary high school opened close to her home, which facilitated the education of the three youngest members of the family. However, it was not a Catholic school, though religion was on the curriculum. In spite of the absence of Sisters, Sheila nurtured her desire to become a Sister, an idea which provoked taunts from her brothers who felt it was a waste of time to shut oneself off from “normal living.” Her brothers’ bias played a key role in helping her assess future situations in which freedom was a factor.

Having a priest-brother serving as chaplain at Mercy Hospital, Bakersfield gave impetus to Sheila’s search. This time with the guidance of her mother, Sister Sheila decided to address the issue of her vocation and possibly have her sister Rita to become a nurse at one of the Mercy hospitals. Now the momentum gathered. Both girls arrived in New York, ironically on Sister Catherine McAuley’s birthday, September 29, 1947. Rita began nursing training on August 22, 1948, and Sheila entered the Novitiate in Burlingame in February 1949. Fifty years later, a Jubilee celebration was enjoyed by both, and just over a year later, Rita passed to her eternal reward.

Teaching was the ministry chosen for Sister Sheila. Her friends tease that she was able to experience all the subject matters from K–Grade 8. To this day, she recalls the captions of her lesson plans: SUBJECT, TECHNIQUE, OBJECTIVE and PROCEDURE. Teaching was challenging, inspiring and exciting — far more varied than her schooling. Her administrative experiences created many opportunities to right the wrongs of injustice and imitate the dedication and openness of Catherine McAuley.

Sister Sheila recalls one school where parishioners, who were extremely conservative on many issues, learned that some of the textbooks highlighted the work of the United Nations. Since they did not share that philosophy, they insisted that the geography books be changed. When asked if they would defray the expense, they reluctantly relented.

Sister also remembers the traditional Christmas seal program, where these stamps would be sold to families with the proceeds being sent to the missions. Never having experienced discrimination, Sister was stunned when a pupil’s mother came to the classroom emphatically stating that “Michael could not participate in the program.” A big party would follow as a reward for participation. The sad result was that the mother withdrew all three of her children from the school because it raised money for missions by using multiracial pictures on the stamps.

Sister’s gifts of facilitation, her ability to evaluate situations and offer solutions, and her sense of humor and compassion for the human spirit—all contributed in a meaningful way as she engaged with students, parents, Sisters and parishioners. Is there a connection, Sister wondered, between her fascination with drawing bridges and her desire to arbitrate and bring people to see “eye to eye” where possible?

Sister Sheila shared, “We are blessed in having a very proactive environment for constantly challenging and encouraging all who work at Scripps Mercy Hospital to continue enhancing the mission and values of the Sisters. Our administrators urge all of us to focus untiringly on what constitutes a healing milieu — conscious that the literature is rife with suggestions that a healthy work environment focuses on enhancing the health, beliefs, values and practices of providers and patients alike. Our leaders are committed to a focus of creating an exceptional work environment as a top-level priority.”
Born the oldest of three sisters at St. Joseph’s Hospital in San Francisco, Sister Krista Ramirez attended grammar school at the Holy Name Parish School and Mercy High School. Krista was among the first in her Mexican-American family born in the United States. Spanish was her primary language, and she became fluent in English by age four. Her childhood schoolmates teased her because she “looked and spoke differently” from the mostly Irish and Italian-American students. Sister recounts that she lost her Spanish accent by age eight, but her educators — the Sisters of Mercy — affirmed her bicultural heritage and her ability to speak two languages.

Sister Krista’s home setting was very emotionally charged so school was a welcome relief — a physically and psychologically safe refuge. Since junior high, Sister Krista knew she wanted to be a nurse; therefore, her college preparatory courses were focused on the sciences. Her paternal grandmother, Longina, was a curandera (energy healer) in Mexico, so “healers” were highly valued in her family.

Sister Krista fondly recalls December 10, 1964 as the day she connected with and accepted her vocational calling. Previously, she had spoken with priests and Sisters about her intentions and received counseling that led to her decision to apply to the Sisters of Mercy. After graduating high school, Krista entered the Sisters of Mercy in Burlingame.

Convent life was very different for Krista, enormously regimented with strict rules of silence and the full habit attire. She attended Russell College and began nursing school at the University of San Francisco (USF). She graduated with a bachelor of science degree in nursing and a public health nursing certificate. She was educated by the Sisters of Mercy or Mercy-sponsored educators the majority of her life.

While ministering at St. John’s Hospital in Oxnard, California and Scripps hospitals, Sister Krista’s bilingual skills and multicultural background have served the patients well. While caring for a Romanian-speaking patient at Mercy Clinic, she found that the two languages, Spanish and Romanian, were so similar that she and the patient understood each other. In 1984, Sister Krista and Sister Francesca spearheaded the Friendly Voices program at Scripps Mercy Hospital, a program to engage employees in providing Spanish translation and interpretation services between patients and providers.

Sister Krista was reminded of the difference one person can make when she was a staff nurse. She came face to face with a young nurse who floated to her unit and explained that Sister was the reason she became a nurse. She told Sister that in the early 1980s, her father had gone into a sudden, life-threatening arrhythmia. Sister was assigned to him, and she calmly and efficiently explained the situation to him while instituting the standing order protocols to treat his heart rate successfully. The young nurse explained that Sister’s professional behavior and skills kept her dad alive.

Sister Krista has also often been reminded of the dangers that can occur in an Emergency Department (ED). When Sister was on duty as the night-shift charge nurse in St. John’s ED, a psychologically challenged female patient held her at knife point behind a curtain. The emergency physician on duty overheard the conversation and safely tackled the patient, saving Sister from bodily injury. Another incident occurred while exiting an ED treatment area en route to the waiting room to update family members of a critically injured patient’s condition. Before she made it to the waiting area, one of the physicians on duty stopped her. He informed Sister that gang members were en route to “finish off” the patient and that he feared for her safety. Fortunately, the police intercepted them.

Fourteen years ago, a group of Sisters within the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas organized a group called the Women of Color with the goal of eradicating racism within the congregation. She has passionately continued her involvement within this group as a Mexican-American Sister of Mercy.

When asked about continuing the Sisters of Mercy’s mission and values, Sister Krista smiles. She believes that those who remain — our capable employees, physicians, volunteers, benefactors and Sisters or Mercy associates — will continue the mission of healing beyond our 119 years of service to the San Diego community.
Born in Santa Monica, Sister JoCeal Young had one brother and spent her youth in the Los Angeles area. She attended Catholic schools and was educated by nuns from various orders. The Sisters of Mercy had a great influence on Sister JoCeal in choosing her vocation, and she came to know and cherish them, including Sister LaSalette Trevillyan, as they taught her throughout high school. There were many young, vibrant women in the order, and the older Sisters were knowledgeable and stellar educators. They were inspiring and were committed to their vocation, and Sister JoCeal came to feel that this vocation was her calling from God.

After graduating high school in June, Sister JoCeal decided to enter the convent at 17. That July, she moved to the Mother House in Burlingame to begin training as a postulant (candidate) in the largest class to date (19 women). As a group, these outgoing, young women made themselves known to the others. Her first six months were spent adjusting to a regimented communal life, and after the initial period, she was accepted for her reception to receive her habit, a white veil and her name “Sister Marie Antoinette” (commemorating one of her most esteemed teachers, Sister Mary Anthony).

Studies in the first year were spiritually focused with emphasis on theology, scripture and prayer. Later she began studies in the arts, and teacher education followed by observing classroom instruction, and then student teaching. In five years, she received her teaching credential, took her final vows and was assigned to teach elementary school children. She was recognized as a skilled teacher and was assigned to mentor younger Sisters in training for their teaching certificate. By 30, she’d advanced into administrative roles, and during the next 20 years, she served in leadership roles in schools across California as principal and eventually associate superintendent.

Sister has contributed to educating many children, serving as a leader, teacher, coach and mentor. When working at an inner-city grammar school in Los Angeles, she advocated on behalf of poor students for acceptance into the nearby Jesuit high school, though these students’ families rarely could pay tuition. She recalls it was so rewarding to see these students succeed in universities, and in life.

A career in health care followed — and by chance. Sister JoCeal knew of [then] Mercy Hospital through years of teaching in Imperial Beach and her stays at the convent in San Diego. Again she followed her intrigue and came to Mercy Hospital through encouragement from Sister Mary Jo Anderson. Her people skills and those in administration helped land her in the position of director of volunteer services and in five years, she knew all the managers and unit operations, and how best to use the skills of volunteers in all the departments.

Her organizational and relationship-building skills fostered the establishment of a new career. When Sister LaSalette stepped down as director of mission services, Sister JoCeal applied and was promoted to the position. It was during the merger with Scripps Health. Familiar with change and transition, Sister expanded the scope of her new role to educate and engage everyone to Mercy’s mission and values as a Catholic hospital. This process again occurred for Sister JoCeal when Scripps Memorial Chula Vista and Scripps Mercy consolidated as one hospital.

Sister JoCeal enthusiastically reflects upon her work with Mercy Outreach Surgical Team (M.O.S.T.), a team of volunteer physicians, nurses, technicians and others that performs life-changing surgeries to underprivileged children and adults in Mexico. She serves as an admitting staff, often sitting with family members while they wait for surgery, reassuring them and getting to know them in a personal way. There is a lot of laughter, and at the end of the day, everyone is grateful for what is accomplished.

Sister believes the mission and values of the Sisters of Mercy continue at Scripps Mercy Hospital through the work of long-term employees and the management team, who have a good understanding of the mission and have a commitment to it. When one enters the hospital, the “spirit” that is Mercy exists, and many people continue to acknowledge its uniqueness. Sister acknowledges that everyone at Scripps Mercy Hospital has worked hard through the years to ensure the continuance of the mission and values of the Sisters of Mercy.