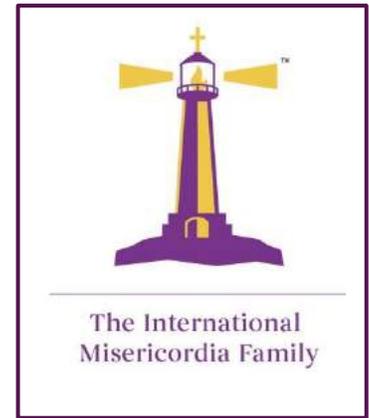


Mercy in Action in The International Misericordia Family

Applying Mercy When There Are No Rules

Gary Nolan



Every member of the International Misericordia Family (IMF) works within the confines of a mission, a mandate, and rules. But the IMF knows that Mercy cannot be defined by rules or limited to particular circumstances. There is not enough ink and paper in the world to cover every circumstance where Mercy could be shown. This is the beauty and challenge of Mercy. Let's take a situation that arose at Wolseley Family Place as an example.

Wolseley Family Place (WFP) has a defined mission—to help mothers or pregnant moms and their children in distress. No staff member could misinterpret the *raison d'être*. WFP's breakfast clubs, emergency food, a clothing depot, hot coffee, laundry, and more, target distressed mothers. But what happens when someone shows up at the door who doesn't meet the profile of a despondent mom. This is exactly what happened at WFP.

One day a *homeless man* showed up who obviously didn't meet the profile of those the WFP served. Helping in this case was not part of the mandate and extending a hand could produce serious problems. For example, would the donors be upset at a handout to someone they didn't contribute to? Would the homeless person be back with ten friends, or every day? What would happen if he harmed one of the kids or mothers? Was the staff prepared for such an impromptu visit? There were numerous, serious issues to consider.

However, the WFP staff understood the length, breadth, and width of Mercy. Dignity and respect were owed, and to be shown, to everyone who came through the door, period. Sharon Taylor of WFP describes the situation:

“One week an elderly man came through the doors and very quietly asked if he could have something to eat as he was hungry. Rather than being turned away, he was welcomed and given a seat in the drop in and a cup of coffee. As our *Healthy Together* cooking class was that day, we were able to serve him with a hot meal on a real plate with cutlery. He ate his meal quietly, taking his time. When he was finished, he said thank you and was gone. We did not ask him why he did not have money or food or blame him for his circumstances. We preserve dignity through small acts of kindness.”

Sharon summed up these situations nicely: “When there is no danger, we deal with the person first, the consequences later.” This was an example of Mercy when house rules didn't cover the situation. However, the WFP staff applied “respect and dignity to all who came through the door.” But there were deeper lessons here.

Mercy in this case happened spontaneously but not in a vacuum. Offering help without thinking about it was only possible because the staff worked in an environment where everyone understood that extending a hand to the man was acceptable. No one would oppose. There would be no reprimand because of a *faux pas*. WFP staff meetings discussed different situations and guidelines so appropriate action could be taken when the unexpected arose. Offering dignity and respect were part of the Wolseley Family Place's DNA and were not governed exclusively by rules. Anything less would not be true Mercy nor in the image of Rosalie, the foundress.

Sharon Taylor is now retired but is still part of the IMF Heritage Committee. During the interview she offered some insight into why showing Mercy for her was never far from the surface. She said that she was very conscious that if it weren't for a bit of luck, timing, and the right circumstances, she could be the one needing Mercy. Therefore, how could she refuse Mercy to others? And if we're honest with ourselves, most of us could say the same thing.

Mercy's conveying of dignity and respect are usually shown through small acts of kindness. This can be done by everyone, everyday, without asking anyone's permission or needing someone's approval.