

## ***What Are We Doing and Why?***

*Mercy mercy mercy! Mercy me! Lord have mercy! ...at the mercy of... He threw himself on the mercy of the court! Judge, please have mercy! Mercy Hospital. Christ have mercy! Divine Mercy. Merciful Savior. Works of Mercy. Year of Mercy.*

These are just a few mercy-terms and phrases we commonly use and hear, both in and outside a religious context.

So, just what *is* this mercy? And how can we not just understand what it means, but experience more of it in our lives, and show more of it to others in our world so in need of mercy? Our word 'mercy' comes from English and French words that refer broadly to "a price that has been paid, in social and legal contexts, a debt settled or forgiven." In our Catholic tradition mercy means far more than just settling debts and canceling punishment, far more. In our religion it is a broad term that refers to benevolence, forgiveness, and kindness. In the Bible it means steadfast, covenant love that is dependable and faithful, always ready to make and keep promises to those in need. It also has qualities of great tenderness and gentleness, like those of a good mother toward her child. The Hebrew word for mercy means "womb love." In Latin and related languages the word for mercy means literally "a heart of misery," meaning *having a pain in your heart for the pains and misery of another, and taking pains to do something about their pain and misery.* Or more simply put, it is *compassion* whereby we feel the pains and suffering of others in a way that moves us to do whatever we can to help relieve them. In our Jewish-Christian tradition, mercy is applied first of all to God. Pope John Paul II spoke of mercy as *the greatest attribute of God, and love's second name*. As such, mercy is not just something God *does*, mercy is the essential quality or characteristic of who and what God *is*. And so, because we are created in the image and likeness of God who is merciful, and as Disciples of Christ whose message and mission is all about mercy, we too are to be merciful. To bring all of this home in a personal way, think of your own experience of mercy. What have been the most merciful experiences of your life? Who has been most merciful toward you, how and when? And, when and how have you most shown mercy to another?