

Mercy:

KINDNESS, COMPASSION AND RESPECT FOR LIFE AT MARIA COLLEGE

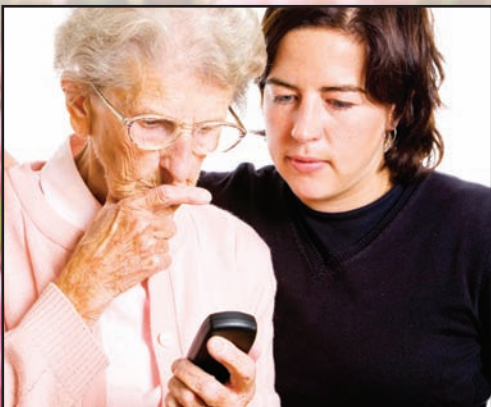
What makes Maria College special? Different? Why would a student choose Maria, over all the other schools out there? The answer is simple: mercy.

Webster defines mercy this way: Kindness in excess of what may be expected or demanded by fairness; forbearance and compassion. A disposition to forgive, pity or be kind. Kind or compassionate treatment, relief of suffering.

At the foundation of Maria College, its mission statement includes two outward signs of mercy, based on the values of The Sisters of Mercy, the order that founded and still sponsors the College today: respect for the dignity of each person and the ability to transform learned skills into caring service. According to the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, we each have an opportunity to bring mercy to the world—to

fill our lives and the lives of others with joy, peace, justice, and compassion. Every thought we have, every word we speak, every action we take—it all makes a difference.

The people—students, faculty, staff—who make Maria tick are making a difference. Let's do something as simple as taking a look at the Calendar of Events. Signs of mercy are evident everywhere on campus, including presentations for students focusing on gratitude, relaxation, aromatherapy, stress management and health care. There are times of creativity, when members of our community make artwork or food to share. Sharing resources with others, including pet shelters, Haiti earthquake victims, Toys for Tots, Catholic Charities and the American Cancer Society, is encouraged regularly, as is service to others, like the



families who stay at the Ronald McDonald House. Also, there's the campus food pantry, stocked by student donations, which served 11 families last year. And there's always the hospitality, the spirit of graciousness, which is a hallmark of a place like Maria. You're known at Maria. You're shown mercy at Maria. And likewise, you can show mercy to others.

There's the Mission Animation Team, a group of Maria faculty and staff, representing various departments, working together to keep students engaged in the Maria community. The group hosts an annual Mission Awareness Day, the goal of which is to raise consciousness of the College's core values, as well as to create a community experience.

Individual departments within the College also host events that are ultimately designed to be manifestations of mercy to those involved. The Occupational Therapy Department, for example, engaged the college community in creating a "mission core value quilt," guiding the process and designing the finished product. Bereavement Studies students helped to create a newsletter demonstrating how they utilized their Maria College training in arenas such as health care, prisons, schools, churches and synagogues, wellness centers, the field of addiction, funeral homes and in ministry to crime victims. And a nursing group has expressed interest in creating a skill-related collage, as well as in offering blood pressure screening to the college community.

Prayer services are held both as worship and to encourage those on campus, as well as to reach out to the community and the world. When the tribes of Kenya turned on one another, burning homes and murdering rivals, a service was held during which the atrocities being committed there were shared openly. A bake sale then yielded enough money for the family members of our African students to buy enough

wood for themselves and their relatives in order to build new homes. It is through this compassion that we are compelled to stand with and embrace others in their suffering, so that together, we may experience God's healing presence.

Many of the students at Maria are no strangers to hardship and economic deprivation themselves. Single parents struggling to maintain a job, raise their children and advance their education, they are hard-working and sacrificial, though generous in sharing what little they have. They are highly sensitized to human need, supporting one another emotionally and spiritually. It is for these students, as well as the entire College community, that the Campus Ministry and Counseling Offices offer psycho-spiritual care, and ultimately, mercy.

It's all about mercy, really. The kindness and compassion that propelled the Sisters of Mercy when they began the College more than 50 years ago is still very much alive on campus today. The Sisters, following the concept of the Peace Corps, even have a program wherein a person devotes a year of service to the mission of mercy in a chosen area. Living accommodations and a small stipend are offered. While the Sisters realize that this may not be feasible for most of Maria's students, they feel that if it is an option for even just one person, it is a success.

That kind of success is quickly felt by anyone who joins the community at Maria College. The ultimate successes of a relationship upheld, excellence achieved, and service freely given are what makes Maria the special place it is. The kindness and compassion and mercy are as much a part of the campus as are the classrooms and the books. And, if you ask a graduate to describe their time at Maria, more often than not, they will say that they have been changed. Though many don't or can't elaborate on that feeling, it can usually be summed up in one word: *mercy*.

"The great use of life is to spend it for something that outlasts it."

William James