

Belize City, Belize, January 22, 2023 - Special Mass to celebrate the 140th Anniversary of the arrival of Sisters of Mercy to Belize

Sisters of Mercy in Belize can trace their root to foundress, Catherine McAuley, an Irish Catholic Laywoman born in 1778. In 1824 she and several women opened the first House of Mercy on Baggot Street in Ireland where they provided shelter for homeless women and education for women and young girls. The Archbishop of Dublin, impressed with her good works requested that she establish a religious congregation and on December 12, 1831, Catherine and two companions became the first Sisters of Mercy.

Today the Sisters of Mercy are in over 30 countries including Belize serving in a multitude of ministries and continuing in the spirit of Catherine McAuley.

From January 12-24, 2023, the Sisters of Mercy and St Catherine Academy are celebrating the 140 years Anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy to Belize. On January 21, a special Anniversary Mass was held at the Mercy Center in Belize City. It was celebrated by Fr. Tony Vega and con-celebrants Fr. Scott Guiliani, SOLT and Fr. David Kiblinger, SJ.

Sister Leonor Franco, RSM, welcomed the guests and gave a brief introduction. She said that the gathering was to pray in thanksgiving for the 140th Anniversary of the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy in Belize and to thank God for several things. First for the 5 brave souls, in their twenties, youngsters, who embarked on a steamer and crossed the Gulf of Mexico to come to an unknown land, Belize British Honduras.

It was for those who responded to the notice in the Jesuit Sacred Heart Messenger (a monthly publication founded by the Jesuits circa 1888) to come to Belize to teach as Sisters of Mercy. Ten young ladies from New York, Massachusetts, New Orleans and Kentucky in the USA, were brave enough to get on a steamer, cross the Gulf of Mexico and come to Belize from 1913 to 1930.

It was to pray in thanksgiving for 16 young ladies who left Ireland from 1915-1943 and crossed the Atlantic by boat to respond to the call to serve God in Belize as sisters of mercy. These young ladies were not sisters of Mercy when they left their shores. But in Belize they studied and were formed to be Sisters of Mercy.

And finally, the Mass was also to thank God for the 43 Belizean women who joined these brave young pioneers from the start in 1883 to the present as Sisters of Mercy. Sister Franco concluded that thanks be given to God for all the fruits of labor, and for all, who in various ways supported the ministries of the Sisters of Mercy.

A brief congratulatory message from President of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sister Patricia McDermott by visiting Julie Matthews RSM, head of CCASA who resides in Guyana.

In his homily Fr. Vega gave tribute to the sisters of Mercy who he said were true disciples of Jesus and who saw the kingdom of God unfold before them. He reflected that in Belize in the late 19th century, things must have been very rough, yet the Sisters of Mercy not only survived but flourished. He called them disciples of Mercy who did their duty to spread the word of God.

Principal, Ms. Salome Tillett thanked everyone including the Sisters of Mercy who visited from across overseas, as well as alumni and distinguished guests. She thanked all on behalf of founder Sister Catherine McAuley who she said would have been happy to be present, joining in the celebration of mercy.

A cultural presentation followed with items from students, Mestizo dancers from Orange Walk Town, an energetic musical by saxophonist Ivor Cacho, and the grand finale by SCA Steel pan Band had members of the audience dancing.