



MERCY BY THE SEA
RETREAT AND CONFERENCE CENTER



ANNUAL REPORT 2025 - 2026

A YEAR IN MERCY AND SERVICE

A WORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



SR. ANNE CURTIS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In life, there are moments and places where the boundary between the ordinary and the extraordinary seems to dissolve. Celtic tradition calls these "thin spaces"—places where we feel a deeper connection with the Divine, with one another, and with creation. This year, Mercy by the Sea embraced the theme “Thin Space, Sacred Ground” to reflect the work we do every day: tending sacred space where transformation, renewal, and community can flourish.

Over the past year, we witnessed countless examples of these sacred moments—in gatherings that restored hope, programs that opened new possibilities, and the stillness of retreats.

One retreatant wrote, “I am calmer, more centered and attuned to the Sacred...” Another shared, “The silence, the stillness, the beauty, the care all deepen my experience of God I will bring back to the world.” These moments are made possible by the dedication of our staff, volunteers, board, the Sisters of Mercy, and donors who believe deeply in our mission.

Alongside these meaningful moments, this year brought projects that strengthen our ministry and will have a lasting impact. We completed the roof project, ensuring protected spaces for all who gather here, and developed a new walking path inviting reflection and connection with the land. We were deeply encouraged by the growth of our volunteer community, bringing willing hands to every aspect of our work. Mercy by the Sea was also fortunate to welcome trainees from Sanctuary Kitchen and Connecticut Coastal Academy. The front entrance received a beautiful new look with trees and plantings, while a new night manager now provides a consistent presence for guests. Many other enhancements were made inside and out, including new lighting between Seascape and the Center. Together, these efforts help create the sacred spaces that define our community.

As we look ahead, we do so with gratitude and renewed purpose. In a world that can often feel divided and uncertain, our mission remains as vital as ever, and so does the generosity, compassion, and dedication of this community. Together, we are nurturing spaces of welcome and renewal.

This annual report tells the story of sacred moments. Behind each one is a community of supporters who invest their time, resources, and care. Thank you for walking alongside us in this mission and for helping us tend this thin space where transformation becomes possible.

THE REACH OF MERCY

2025 – 2026

800

Half- and Full-Day
Program Participants

194

Themed Retreat
Participants

342

Overnight Program
Participants

328

Directed Retreat
Participants

400

Virtual Program
Participants

60

College Collaboration
Participants

175

Recurring Offering
Participants

125

Private
Retreatants

2,299

Total Individual Participants
5% received Mercy for All Scholarship



SPIRITUALITY & RETREATS

Responding to the Hungers of the World

Amid the noise and chaos of our world today, there is a profound desire for silence and rest. The peace and solitude of a silent retreat offers space to quiet the mind and heart, allowing the still small voice of the Sacred to be heard.

continued →

Hunger for Silence

During the past year, Mercy by the Sea offered 12 opportunities for a silent Directed Retreat with a full house each time. Over the course of the year, 328 retreatants stepped into this sacred space in a spirit of silence, accompanied by 52 guest Retreat Directors. Traditionally retreats run for four to seven nights providing time to sink into the rhythm of reflection.

Recognizing the need to offer shorter, more accessible opportunities, Mercy by the Sea introduced “A Taste of Silence” Weekend Silent Retreat. Offered for the first time in January 2026, 30 retreatants took part. In response to high demand an additional retreat was added for Seascape in February. Guided by one director, eight retreatants were able to taste the grace found in the quiet, yet 20 people remained on the waitlist. In response, several weekend silent retreats are planned for the coming year.



Hunger for Spiritual Accompaniment

Mercy by the Sea carries on the rich legacy of offering spiritual direction to those seeking accompaniment in navigating the waters of life. In response to a surge of interest, a Spiritual Direction Inquiry Form was added to the website. Submitting that form starts a process of meeting with the Director of Spirituality and Retreats, Megan Shepherd, to discuss what a person is seeking and receive referrals to a network of spiritual directors. Since the launch in October 2025 there have been over sixty inquiries with a marked increase in the spring of 2026.

Hunger for Creativity

Collaboration with artist Jill Nichols led to the development of two new Themed Retreats: Tapping into Source: Painting with the Divine in November 2025 and Centering in the Summer Solstice: Painting the Divine through the Sun's Rays in June 2026. Immersed in painting as a contemplative practice, these retreats allowed all to paint intuitively around themes of gratitude, grace, light, love, strength, release, and hope. Open to all with no artistic experience required, retreatants experienced the healing freedom of creative expression.

Hunger for Resilience

In the face of adversity, resilience fosters creativity and transformation in hope. In July 2025 over 35 women gathered with Mary Pat Garvin, RSM for the Grace of Resilience Retreat exploring this gift of the Spirit providing opportunities for deepening relationships with ourselves, others, and God. Developing strategies for cultivating and strengthening resilience led retreatants to a deepening and sustaining spirituality for life.

Hunger for Hope

The rhythms of the liturgical year provide opportunities to explore the sacredness of the human condition. In Advent we wait in joyful anticipation of the coming of the child Jesus while echoing the waiting for ultimate salvation of all of creation. December's Lessons and Carols included sacred scripture, poetry, the Cosmic Advent Wreath, and music by students from Yale Institute of Sacred Music in the beauty of candlelight.

Lent began with Fr. Francis Gargani, C.Ss.R. and Janet Corso leading over 20 retreatants in contemplating The Power of the Cross: Living Lent More Fully. On Ash Wednesday, staff gathered with retreatants to receive the sign of the cross in ashes to mark the start of the Lenten season.

As Lent ended, the Triduum Retreat came to life through thoughtful celebration of the sacred liturgical days. Fr. Joe Donnelly, Sr. Colette Kane, O.P., Sr. Anne Curtis, RSM, and Megan Shepherd offered contemplative prayer and liturgy with music by Ruth Rolander and students from Yale Institute of Sacred Music. The ultimate triumph of life over death in the resurrection resonates through a world hungering for hope.

Hunger for Rest

In July, the Summer Sabbath offered 35 participants the invitation to surrender into sabbath rest. The movements of the week flowed from seeking release from what restrains, to embracing the opportunity for rest, into deepening reflection, through exploring resistance, into rekindling joy, and thus renewing the soul.



PROGRAMS

Mercy by the Sea sponsors a broad suite of programs – virtual, onsite and on-campus collaborative formats – customized to celebrate life, recognize interconnectedness and honor all of Creation. Programs are for participants of all faith denominations and/or no religious background. Offerings are designed to be as contemplative as they are experiential and to revere the uniqueness of each individual. We aim to facilitate participants' capacities to listen into and trust the still inner voice that speaks to them beyond ego, consumerism and systems of domination. Our hope is to help program participants access their deepest stirrings, creative imaginations and fledgling yearnings to birth new ways of being in the world for service to the greater good.



PROGRAM UPDATES

9*

Faith Traditions
Represented

500+

Julian Circle
Participants

70

Book Circle
Members

“A welcoming entryway into Mercy by the Sea’s ministry and community.”

Global Reach

Provided virtual programming across all U.S. time zones, plus Germany, Australia, Canada, Ireland, Wales, Japan and the United Kingdom.

Interfaith Dialogue*

Co-sponsored a three-part series with Connecticut Council for Interreligious Understanding (CCIU) featuring nine faith traditions: Baha’i, Sikhism, Jainism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Unitarian Universalism and Hinduism.

Live from Ireland

Co-sponsored two virtual programs with Deidre Ní Chinnéide and Christine Valters Paintner of Abbey of the Arts.

In Our Right Minds

Sponsored a film showing and book discussion with Dale Allen on the Sacred Feminine and the Right Brain. The book, an international bestseller, has been widely acclaimed across the U.S., Canada, and the United Arab Emirates.

Spring Sabbatical

Welcomed seven religious sisters for a self-directed seven-week program of rest, prayer, reflection and retreat participation.

International Book Launch

Hosted the launch of “The Fifth Season” by New York Times bestseller Mark Nepo — the fifth international book launch by the same author.

Short Program Pathways Series

Expanded suite of two to three-hour virtual and onsite programming offering a welcoming entryway into Mercy by the Sea’s ministry and community.



NEW PRESENTERS

During the year, close to two dozen new program facilitators were integrated into Mercy by the Sea's large and diverse presenter network. Many are of international renown.

Introduced New Facilitators to Foster Spiritual Exploration

Interfaith



Piyush Shah

To Love Your Neighbor, Know Your Neighbor with various moderators and nine panelists.

Ecospirituality



Christina Leano

Praying with Creation: Finding Healing, Connection and Purpose.

Wonder and Awe



Rt. Rev. Br. Mark D'Alessio

The Birth of Wonder and the Science of Awe.

Meditative Movement



Erin Schuster

Gentle Yoga + Sound Healing and Meditation.

RECURRING OFFERINGS

- Three Men's Groups
- The Book Circle
- Centering Prayer
- Tai Chi by the Sea
- Mary C. Daly RSM Art Gallery Artist Receptions

HOSTING

The ministry of hosting unfolds through relationships as much as it does through rooms, schedules, or numbers. Over the past year, the Hosting program welcomed 117 day groups and 61 overnight groups, holding space for approximately 2,222 day guests and 1,184 overnight guests. Behind these figures is a steady rhythm of arrival, conversation, preparation, and adjustment—each group shaping the life of the campus in its own way.

Many groups return year after year—Poetry by the Sea, New England Lace, Quilters Getaway—drawn by a familiarity that allows them to settle quickly into their work together. These longer relationships create a natural ease in planning and space use, where understanding grows over time and competing needs are held in careful balance across Seascape and the Main House.

At the heart of hosting is a posture of partnership. From first inquiry to final departure, groups and staff share responsibility for clarity and care. Questions are asked early, intentions are named, and possibilities are discerned together so that what is offered aligns with what can be held. This way of working depends on communication that is both direct and attentive, allowing each group to find its right place within the rhythm of the house.

As demand has grown, so too has the attention to timing, capacity, and coordination. Behind the scenes, staff continue to refine processes, cross-train across roles, and strengthen shared understanding so that guest experience remains steady and coherent.

“What emerges is a practice of hospitality shaped not by certainty, but by relationship—responsive, discerning, and grounded in the lived capacity of the place.”





DINING SERVICES & HOSPITALITY

7,700

meals prepared with care

99%

of guests rated their dining
experience as excellent

Hospitality begins with attentiveness.



“All of my needs were met and then some. Everything was clean and in good working condition. The grounds were well cared for and stunningly beautiful. All staff and volunteers were very friendly. I appreciated the generous offering of refreshments at any time. The food was outstanding!!”

The ministry of hospitality extends well beyond the guest rooms and meeting spaces — it is present at every table in the Catherine McAuley Dining Room. Over the past year, the culinary team prepared approximately 7,700 meals, welcoming guests with the same spirit of care and attentiveness that defines Mercy by the Sea.

Whether accommodating dietary restrictions, food allergies, or personal preferences, the kitchen works to ensure that every guest can gather at the table with ease, knowing their needs will be met with flexibility and care. This commitment reflects a broader understanding that nourishment is an integral part of the retreat experience.

Behind the scenes, the dining services team focused on stewardship and continuous improvement. Workspaces were cleaned, reorganized, and refreshed, creating a more efficient and functional environment. Ongoing equipment maintenance and operational improvements further strengthened the team’s ability to serve guests with consistency and excellence.

The chefs have fostered a culture grounded in trust, mutual respect, and shared responsibility — creating stability in a field where recruiting and retaining skilled hospitality professionals remains a challenge.

The department also benefited from the dedication of a growing corps of volunteers whose generosity extends from the kitchen to the seasonal garden. Their contributions have become an essential part of daily operations, helping to build a team that is dependable, welcoming, and deeply committed to the mission of Mercy by the Sea.

Whether visible in a thoughtfully prepared meal or in the countless details that support each day’s work, the dining team’s efforts help create a place where guests feel cared for, nourished, and at home.

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

The beauty and serenity of Mercy by the Sea are not incidental; they are sustained through steady, attentive stewardship of its buildings and grounds, where care for place becomes an expression of care for all who arrive seeking rest, reflection, and renewal. Throughout the year, the Buildings and Grounds team carried this responsibility with quiet diligence, tending the physical environment so that safety, accessibility, and beauty might exist in balance with the contemplative spirit of the shoreline campus.

The team cared not only for infrastructure, but for the deeper conditions that make hospitality possible. Significant capital improvements, supported in part by the Sisters of Mercy, strengthened both the resilience and longevity of the property. The final phase of the flat roof restoration was completed, securing key structures for years ahead.



A new fire alarm panel was installed, three fire hydrants were replaced, and exterior lighting was expanded from the Catherine McAuley Dining Room to Seascape, increasing safety and awareness as light shifts across seasons. Energy efficiency was advanced through LED conversions in Dempsey and Founders, reducing environmental impact while preserving a warm, welcoming atmosphere. A new sound system was installed in the chapel.

Accessibility remained a central commitment. New ramps near the dining room and reception areas improved ease of arrival and gathering, while refreshed parking lines and renewed pathways reduced friction and supported ease of movement across the campus. Room 21 was fully refreshed with updated fixtures, paint, and finishes, renewing a space of rest and retreat.

Much of the year’s work was quieter but no less essential. Beach access stairs were rebuilt to ensure safe passage to the shoreline, where many guests encounter stillness and perspective. The walking path and outdoor structures were maintained through all seasons, holding the landscape as both functional and inviting.

The living grounds continued to flourish through attentive care—flower beds renewed, mulch refreshed, seasonal plantings added, and the vegetable garden sustained as a quiet witness to rhythm and patience. Together, these efforts reflect a way of tending that mirrors the spirit of Mercy by the Sea itself: unhurried, attentive, and oriented toward wholeness.

"The journey invites each guest to slow down, listen deeply, and discover that God's presence is found not only at the destination, but in every step along the way."

THE REFLECTIVE WALKING PATH

An Invitation to Encounter God Through Creation

A new Reflective Walking Path now invites guests to experience the beauty of Mercy by the Sea at a slower, more contemplative pace. Winding through open fields, beneath the shade of mature trees, and along the shoreline, the path embraces the natural beauty of our sacred grounds while creating space for prayer, reflection, and renewal.

Along the route, thoughtfully placed markers guide walkers from one reflection to the next. Guests may also carry a companion booklet filled with Scripture, contemplative readings, and questions for personal reflection, allowing each person to engage the journey in a way that speaks to their own spirit.

Whether seeking peace, discernment, gratitude, or simply a quiet moment in nature, the Reflective Walking Path offers an opportunity to encounter the sacred through creation—one step at a time.



WELCOMING NEW COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS



At Mercy by the Sea, we believe that collaboration strengthens our mission. By partnering with organizations that share our commitment to contemplation, compassion, justice, and care for creation, we create opportunities for deeper connection, broaden our reach, and respond together to the spiritual and societal needs of our time.

In 2025, we partnered with the Connecticut Council for Interreligious Understanding (CCIU) to present To Love Your Neighbor, Know Your Neighbor, a three-part series that fostered meaningful dialogue and understanding among nine faith traditions.

Together with the Murphy Center for Ignatian Spirituality at Fairfield University, we offered retreats that invited participants into deeper reflection, discernment, and spiritual growth.

Our partnership with Shoreline CT Yoga & Wellness expanded opportunities for embodied spirituality through yoga, meditation, sound healing, and gentle movement, complementing Mercy by the Sea's contemplative movement offerings.

We also collaborated with the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund to present Traces: Witness & Trespass, a photographic exhibition that inspired reflection, attentive presence, and a deeper appreciation for the natural world.

Through these partnerships, we continue to welcome new communities, foster meaningful connections, and extend Mercy by the Sea's mission of healing, hospitality, and hope.

Other Collaborators / Co-Marketers



The School for the
Second Half of Life



cthumanities



MERCY VOLUNTEERS



With Deep Gratitude

Hospitality begins long before a retreat starts. It lives in every warm welcome, every thoughtfully prepared space, every garden tended, and every quiet act of kindness.

Every year, countless moments of welcome are made possible by volunteers whose generosity often goes unseen. Your dedication creates spaces of comfort, fosters connection, and brings Mercy's mission to life.

Thank you for sharing your time, your talents, and your generous spirit. Because of you, Mercy by the Sea is more than a beautiful place—it is a community where every guest feels welcomed, cared for, and renewed.



BOARD OF TRUSTEES 2025 - 2026

MICHAEL BELDEN

SR. EILEEN BOFFA, RSM

LYDIA FORGETTA-SHEFFIELD (CHAIR)

MATTHEW T. HOEY III

CAROL LYONS

SR. PAT MCDERMOTT, RSM

RABBI STACY OFFNER

DENISE PAGE

JAN PERRUCCIO

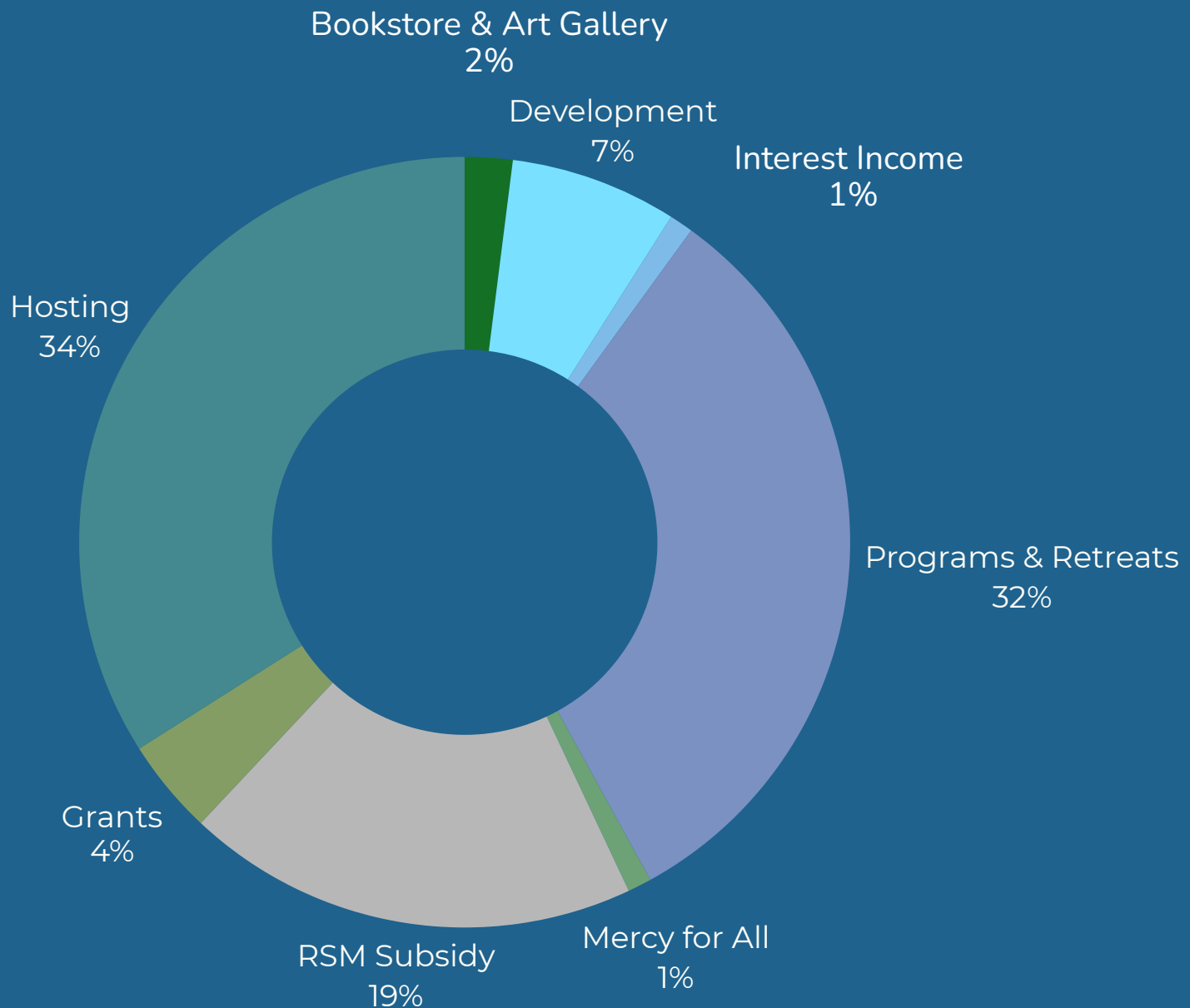
FRAN RABINOWITZ (VICE-CHAIR)

DANIEL TAYLOR-STYPA

HENRY SULLIVAN

FISCAL YEAR 2025 - 2026

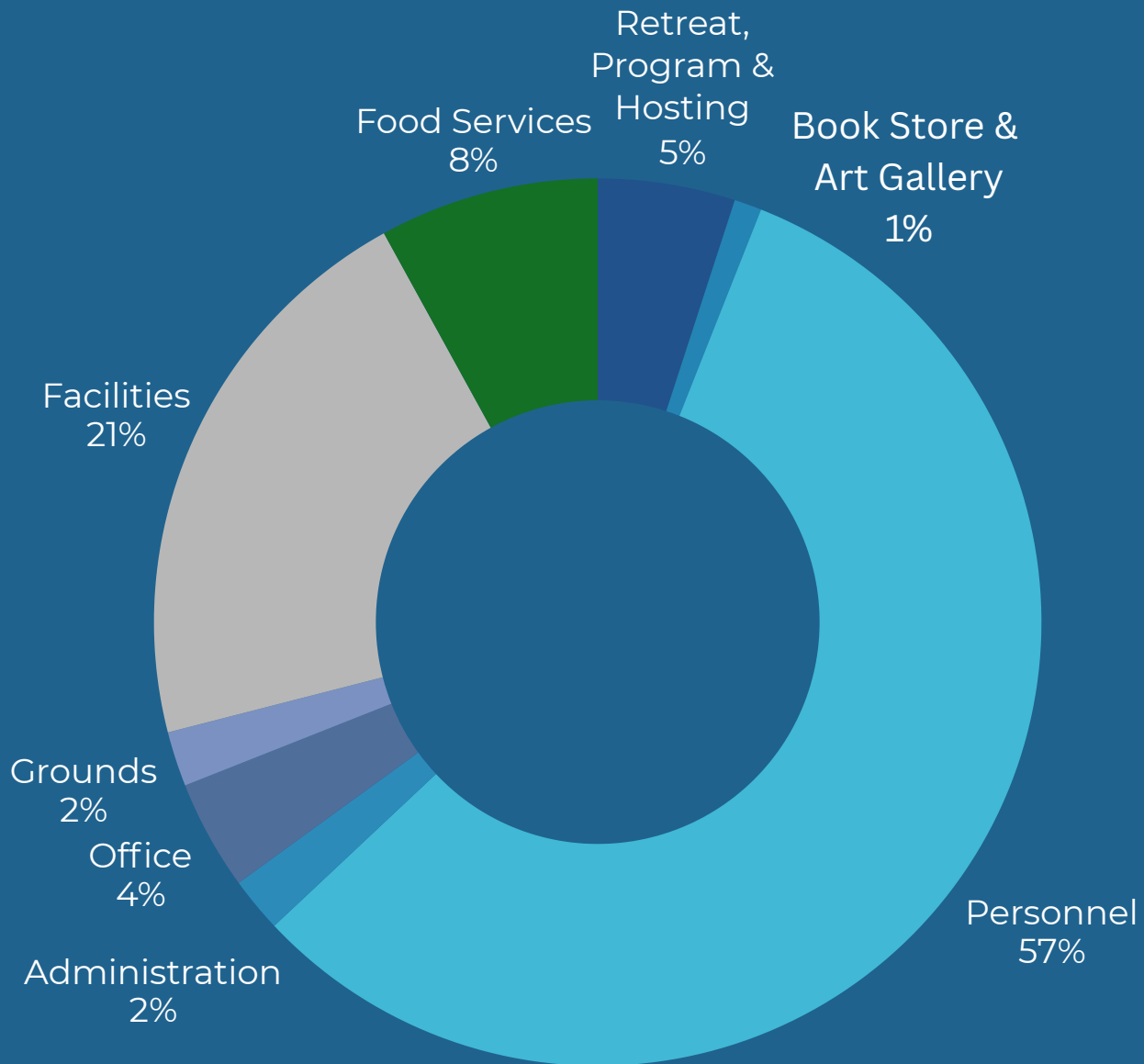
Revenue*



Unaudited*

FISCAL YEAR 2025 - 2026

Expenses*



Thin Space, Sacred Ground Annual Campaign

396 Mercy donors have generously given \$130,488,
exceeding our goal of \$120,000!

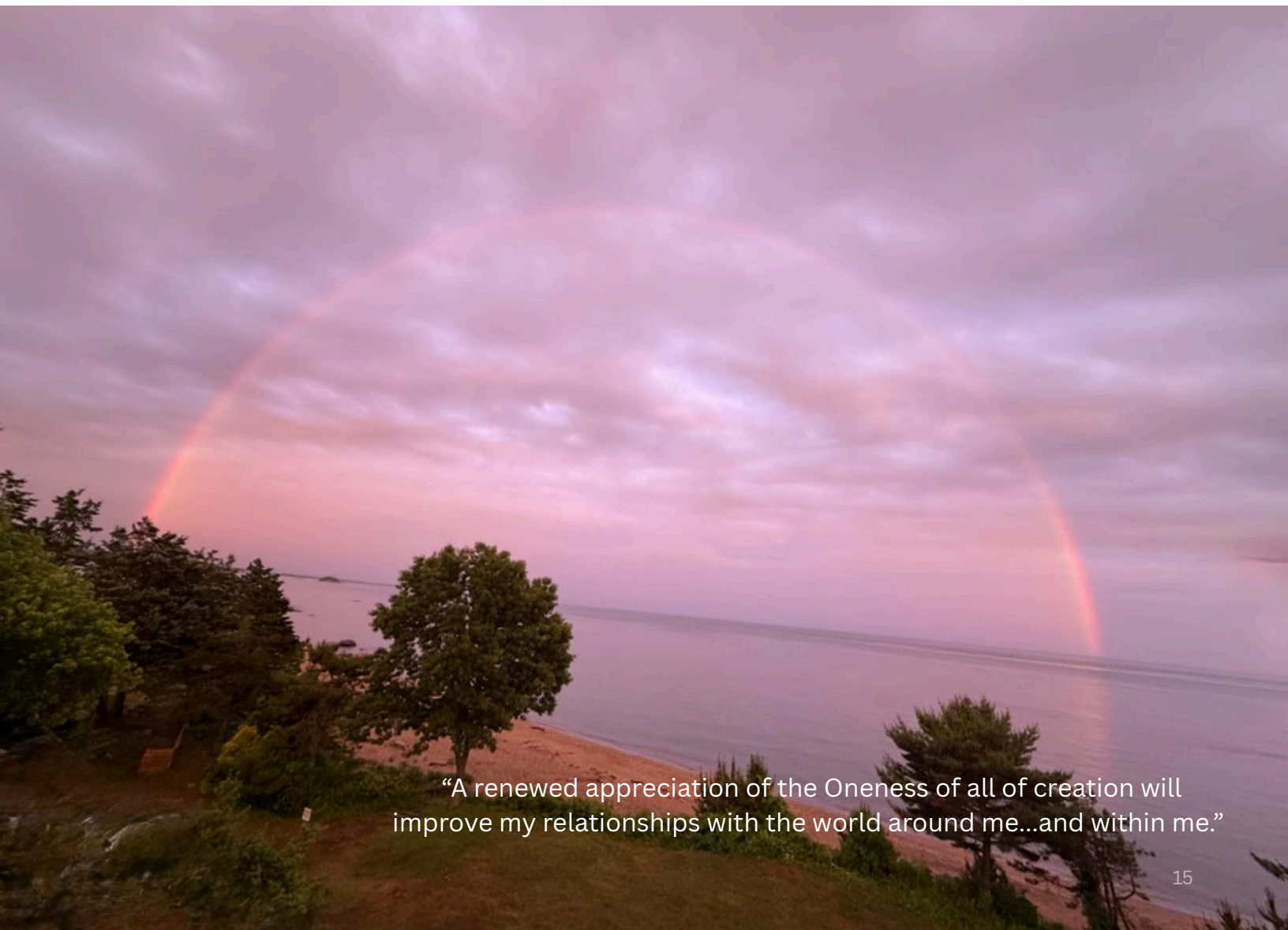


Mercy by the Sea is a thin space, where heaven brushes earth and the soul awakens. In silence, in healing, in nature, countless lives have encountered the Sacred here.

THANK YOU

Every gift to Mercy by the Sea is an expression of hope, hospitality, and compassion. Your generosity helps sustain a sacred place where people from all walks of life can find peace, deepen their spirit, and reconnect with what matters most. Because of you, doors remain open, quiet spaces are cared for, and a welcoming community continues to flourish along the shore. Your support extends the mission of Mercy, making renewal, reflection, and meaningful connection possible for all who come here.

Thank you for walking with us and for helping Mercy by the Sea remain a place of welcome, healing, and grace.



“A renewed appreciation of the Oneness of all of creation will improve my relationships with the world around me...and within me.”