Dear Friends,

We did it again! On September 8th we celebrated our 33rd Family Festival on Misericordia's Campus. God blessed us with beautiful weather and we welcomed over 15,000 visitors who were amazed with the accomplishments of our wonderful staff and 2,500 volunteers who made it another "day to remember." Everyone seemed so very pleased to be in attendance! One felt "God's love in action" from all involved. Words are inadequate to express our gratitude.

As many of you are aware, we have thousands of family members and friends who believe in our mission of providing good and quality lives for all of our 600 residents – each according to their unique potential. We are one of the few agencies that have the full continuum of care – from houses in the neighborhoods to our McAuley skilled nursing home, with 20 separate residences on Campus. Yes, we are big, but we have never sacrificed quality – and would challenge anyone to show us another way.

The validity of our model of care was reinforced for me these past two months when we had the funerals of two of the once most active members of our family, who for their final years of life needed complete medical and nursing care due to Alzheimer's disease. Their final days were difficult, especially for those of us who knew them in yesteryear. But it was consoling to know they were treated with the love and respect they deserved. They died with dignity. Each lived at Misericordia for approximately thirty years. They advanced through our community beginning with the Village, then moving to our Shannon Apartments and then to our houses in the neighborhood. They both enjoyed jobs in the community and had very happy lives but in the mystery of God's love, for the past five years their health slowly deteriorated. The only reason we were able to walk this final journey with them is because we have a full continuum of care. This gives great peace to families; and with our new Quinlan Terrace project for our aging residents, more families will enjoy this gift of peace – knowing we can be there for the most vulnerable member of their family until the final journey is over.

And yet, there are advocates in our field of service, some supported by the government, who wish Misericordia would disappear! They hold there are only two ways to serve persons with developmental disabilities: in isolated houses in neighborhoods or in home care paid for by the government. Any service that is big should be classified as unacceptable; we have even heard them refer to large services as prisons. If this is so, why do we have 400 persons on our waiting list?

After forty-four years of sharing life with God's most precious and special persons, I stand in contradiction to this national trend. I must admit, sometimes I do wonder if the advocates who so strongly oppose a home like Misericordia – and are in positions to advance this trend – have ever spent significant time living and/or working with these loving persons who deserve good lives, especially with adults who are severely disabled, who function in the cognitive range of one to three years of age.

Misericordia will open its ninth home in the neighborhood, called a CILA, in October. We find these residences very appropriate for persons who are functioning at a higher level and can enjoy this environment. But even so, our CILA residents would be isolated if they didn't have our Campus to complement their lives. Neighbors have been kind but few are actually involved in our residents' lives, though they would always be welcomed.

I would like to compare the attitude of these advocates to what is happening in our general aging population today. Many elderly folks are selling their own homes and moving to services which provide independent apartments or houses, assisted living residences, and then skilled nursing care. This gives families a tremendous sense of security. People with disabilities for a lifetime share many similarities with this population of aging persons. If it works so well for them, why is it wrong for our special and deserving citizens?

After this long letter, I want you to know we will need your help to secure our future. There have been numerous threats to eliminate all residences licensed as "ICF-DD" facilities (Intermediate Care Facility for the Developmentally Disabled). Those advocating this have never excluded agencies that provide excellent care. We have 400 adults living in 20 residences on campus licensed as ICF-DD. The only reason we have this license is because it is the only one available. What we need instead is a license for homes that provide a full continuum of quality care—from skilled nursing to homes in the neighborhood.

To accomplish this, we are going to need the support of our elected officials. It is so important that our legislators understand the quality life our children and adults enjoy. The best way for this to happen is a tour. If you would ask your legislators and elected officials to come (perhaps you would accompany them) it would be a great gift. Every elected official who ever visited was truly shocked at the negative attitude toward us by some advocates, especially those being paid by the government. The general response was that we should be a "model for the country." And families and professionals from all over the country and beyond our borders have visited us because of their dissatisfaction and fear of the trend that holds "one size fits all." As we continue with this challenge, you will be hearing more from us. We need your help at this most important time in our history.

In closing, I want to say we don't hold we are the only way to serve people with disabilities. But I will go to my grave screaming we are a very legitimate and life giving one way. All of you have helped us make the Misericordia of today a reality! It is such a gift to so many…not only our children and adults but their families as well.

Thank you for believing in us. I know we're doing God's work and the Lord, through His people, has never disappointed us.

Gratefully,

Sister Rosemary