October 16th

The dinner together on the evening before the start of the conference set the participants at ease with each other.

Day 1 (Saturday) October 17th

On the first day of the conference, Deirdre Mullan, RSM, welcomed us all with more than just a cup of tea warming ourselves with hot drinks, cakes, fruits, etc., etc., and oriented us about having a niche in the U.N. The assistance of Aine O’Conner, RSM made me feel comfortable and assured that I won’t get lost in the big city of New York.

Carol Rittner, RSM in her remarks about Mercy made me feel at home right then and there for her presentation of Catherine McAuley’s spirit and charism are the very aspiration or concern of Mercy worldwide.

The free evening that followed allowed me to venture to be on my own with the initial assistance of Aine.

Day 2 (Sunday) October 18th

It was great to be given the chance to explore New York City. The first thing I got was a Mass in St. Patrick Cathedral, known worldwide for being the hub of Catholics / the center of catholicity. This was followed by a memorable lunch at heritage place on cobbled street of old New York by the port. Then I got a view of the Statue of Liberty and a glimpse of Ground Zero. That was a day of experience in historical New York.

Day 3 (Monday) October 19th

Mercy at the UN gave me a feeling of oneness with all nations realizing that poverty is everywhere in the world, and feeling very bad about abused women and neglected children. This involvement of the Sisters of Mercy especially our presence is very much needed where the poor are. I felt the urge to intensify programs for the poor in my mission station.
The tour of the UN building was overwhelming realizing how potent the UN organization is. I feel good that our country is a member and that Mercy is represented as NGO which would mean that I, as a Mercy Sister in/from the Philippines can be heard in some way and to some extent.

The conferences on eradication of poverty are hope-filled as presentations of the youth overcoming poverty, and country representatives’ discussion on their governments’ policies for the poor are quite promising.

Day 4 (Tuesday)
October 20th

Through the presentation of Pat Hartigan, RSM on Economic Injustice, I easily identified the Philippines among the victims of economic injustice with an unsurmountable debt from the World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund) causing us to have a subsistence economy in the ladder of development of global economy. With so much corruption from those in the government, our poor are deprived of needed education, health care and sustaining livelihood. When calamities occur, our poor have no one to run to. This is the challenge we the Sisters of Mercy in the Philippines are faced with. We, in the education apostolate take this challenge by helping in the education of the poor through scholarships and grounding our school community with environmental concerns through Environment Education, Health and Livelihood Programs which are extended to the poor around us through our community services.

Pat Griffith’s (RSM) sharing of her success story about Mercy Haven encourages us to solicit help from interested volunteers to commit to mercy service.

Day 5 (Wednesday)
October 21st

A - Kevin Dance, CP from Australia with his presentation on Poverty and the Indigenous Peoples struck me to the bone. I belong to an indigenous group in the Philippines, the Higaonon tribe. But because we have been Christianized and educated, many of us have overcome to some extent the pangs of poverty. However, some indigenous groups in my country are pushed to the hinterlands to fend for themselves. Many of these people have become victims of exploitation by the rich and powerful resulting to their eviction from the land they have inherited from their ancestors. They even become victims of warfare in the crossfire between government authorities and dissidents fighting for power and wealth. Their plight is calling Mercy involvement in some way. I suppose.
B – The visit to Mercy Center in the Bronx was a real experience of bridging the gap between Mercy Policy and Mercy Practice for women in difficulty and children in need of special help. Through Mercy Center, women immigrants have overcome the difficulties of surviving in a new country and have liberated themselves to be of help to others. Children who needed special attention in some areas of development get extra help during time off from regular classes. Listening and watching them brought me back to Catherine McAuley’s first House of Mercy. One thing that quite bogged me down though, is the financing of such a beautiful project which would be a difficulty in the Philippines as we cannot get government assistance in any way.

Day 6 (Thursday)  
October 22nd

The sessions on Violence against Women . . .; Women @ the Well; and Poverty, Earth and Cosmic Implications with Carol Rittner, RSM (USA), Lynda Dearlove, RSM (UK) and Mary Kate Hagan, RSM (Ireland) respectively were eye-openers to me on the realities of the cry of the women in particular societies and its parallel connection with the cry of Mother Earth as rape being committed against woman and against Mother Earth. We need to know that brotherhood /sisterhood does not just apply among human beings but also with the rest of creation: Brother Moon, Sister Sun, Brother Grasshopper, Sisters Trees, etc. etc. We “must widen our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty; - Albert Einstein. “ Connecting the cry of the oppressed with the cry of the earth” – (Leonardo Boff) is indeed a call for the Mercy Sisters to heed.

Day 7 (Friday)  
October 23rd

The Sister to Sister Project shared by Margaret Farley, RSM and Eileen Hogan, RSM is an example to emulate as it is a Mercy Service that bridges the gap between women professing Mercy Mission and women victims of HIV/ AIDS in Africa. Listening / watching the presentation gave me goose-flesh for only then did I realize the pain other women undergo for entrusting their lives to the men they love. I admit that I am quite sheltered from childhood to womanhood because luckily women in our Philippine society are as precious gems given the jealous protection and high esteem by the men in their lives. Our problem with women in our country is more on submission to self-gratifying men who can be abusive especially among the uneducated poor.
The Sister to Sister Project may be applicable in our mission in some way and to some extent through involvement in women organizations where uneducated women are trained for livelihood skills, or family life apostolate where husband and wife are oriented towards responsible marriage and parenthood.

The sharing of Karen Schneider, RSM on extending medical care to impoverished children in Peru and other developing countries “who suffer ravages of injustice and poverty “- Camille D’Arienzo, is very heart warming. Here is a young gifted Mercy Sister enfleshing the God of Mercy by winning the hearts of young medical professionals and students to join her in her medical mission to impoverished peoples. I truly see Catherine McAuley in Karen Schneider. May Mary, the Mother of Mercy intercede for letting her tribe increase among Mercy women throughout the Globe. I personally expressed to Karen how I wish she could come to the Philippines to inspire our young medical professionals and students to render more or less similar services in whatever way our local resources can afford unless we get some aid/ assistance from first world countries.

MY ANSWER TO QUESTIONS POSED IN THE MGC
BRIDGING THE GAP……..CONFERENCE:

October 17
Who am I?
A Sister of Mercy called to manifest / represent God’s Mercy to those in need.

What I do, or have done?
I am responsible for the education of the youth coming to the school of my responsibility and accompany them towards compassionate love and integrity of creation.

What I want to get out of this experience?
Learning through listening to and associating with fellow Mercy Sisters whose concerns I can identify with.

What I think I can contribute to this experience?
Share what I am doing in the Philippines, and contribute ideas about how I feel and think of the involvement of the Sisters of Mercy in response to the cry of the poor.

I will consider this conference a success if . . . .
We can help resolve in some way and to some extent the problem of violence against women and neglect of children, and all the powerless who become victims of exploitation especially in impoverished areas.
• **Describe the faces of poverty in your country.** People with makeshift houses made of light material at risk in calamities with no help for restoration of homes, health care and facilities for education.

• **Causes of poverty:** No or low level of education so no employment or other means of livelihood. No government provision for assistance in higher education. No basic health care services and security benefits. No food stamps for unemployed head of families. No property for adequate shelter.

• **Where do you gain your insights on your country’s poverty?** National statistics show that 90% of the country’s population is below poverty line, 70% are indigent poor. We see and walk with them. We hear their cries as we are in their midst. Many of them are members of our own families.

• **What criteria would we use to determine if our involvement was needed?**
  1. In the apostolate of education where we in the Philippines are mainly involved, our criteria for determining the need for involvement are as follows:
     a) Need for basic education to prepare the youth for basic personal and family life responsibilities.
     b) Need for higher education to prepare them for employment and/or entrepreneurial skills for livelihood, and participation in community concerns.
     c) Need for orientation to a healthy interpersonal relationships with one another for harmonious living in family and community.
  2. Through our education apostolate, we involve ourselves in formal and non-formal education. Formal is attendance in graded level of education from elementary to secondary, then to tertiary (higher) level of education. Non-formal is participation in skills training for livelihood, and seminars for intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships for family life education and community undertakings.
  3. We do partnering with our lay teachers in school, the parents of our students, and community volunteers for non-formal education. We involve our elderly Sisters as companions of our lay partners for non-formal education. We are building a hospital for Mothers and Children. We can make use of it as Mercy Care Center for women and children in need. We can encourage medical professionals and health sciences students to do medical mission to the poor within our reach.

• **What is the platform from which the Global Mercy Community can have influence?** We welcome the involvement of the Global Mercy Community for an influence in our concerns as we need to think global though we act local.
I am the second Sister (the first was Sr. M. Francis Añover about 2 years ago) in our community sent to Mercy Global Concern. Our participation at MGC is widening our horizons regarding the mission of mercy. Sr. Francis’ concern was on involvement with justice and peace network. Mine is on making our education apostolate relevant with time and space, and relating with needed health care services. Our school has a college of health sciences courses particularly Nursing, Midwifery and Radiology Technology so we are building a hospital for their needed technical training and values orientation through actual exposure to clientele especially the poor. The future hospital is for mothers and children which can also be made as venue for Mercy Care to engage our young medical professionals and health sciences students in medical mission to the poor within our reach. We can also make ourselves available to MGC for global study and action as far as our meager resources allow.

- **What will you do to change the face of poverty in your corner of the world?**

We realize the need to create programs involving needed change of systemic forces to enable us to change the face of poverty in our country. We have launched in our school, The Environment Education Program, which features the following concerns:

1) Planting of trees and vegetables for sustainable organic agriculture
2) Proper disposal of degradable and non-degradable waste for clean air and safe unlogged waterways
3) Energy conservation of water and electricity through simple lifestyle
4) Responsible stewardship for Mother Earth through participative education and sustainable livelihood
5) Compassion for everyone and everything around us as family

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