Each religious institute over the years of its life weaves a story that is uniquely its own. “Weavers of the Tapestry” by Kathrine Bellamy RSM.

As I gathered with Mercy Sisters from around the world in New York City from October 13-24, 2008 to attend the Bridging the Gap conference, I felt that threads of a new story were being born.

During the opening prayer we gathered around a map of the world and were invited to say our name, our homeland and who the vulnerable people were that we were bringing with us from our country. I introduced myself as Margie Taylor from Newfoundland, Canada and I carried in my heart the vulnerable from my country, particularly the men and women who are incarcerated within our prisons. After I named my homeland, I lit a little blue tea light and placed it on the map of the world. As the sight and glow of the tea lights began to grow, I sensed what a global village we as participants were. I looked out the window at the 192 flags of the United Nations that were flying in the breeze. It was for me a realization of what Mary Waskowiak said, “The world finds a home here at the United Nations.”

The storytellers and presenters for the conference from Australia, United States, New Zealand, Holland, Philippines, Ireland, Kenya and Cambodia wove different color threads that set the stage for the growth of collaboration, networking, and challenges over the next days. They were gifted and passionate speakers who energized me with their commitment and zeal.

Through the conference I gained a deeper awareness and education in relation to the millennium goals and their connection with MIA, MGC and the Gospel. They focus on life and improving the quality of life for people. I was touched especially by the words of one speaker who hoped our hearts would be broken open since the work of mercy has to be the work of fire. That fire would lead me to challenge the United Nations to take responsibility for the goals they have named and to monitor their achievement by the year 2015.

As the days unfolded I became aware of many truths of our world- a number of which disturbed me and others which offered me hope. I was pleased to attend and participate in the United Nations days for the Eradication of Poverty which continues to be one of the greatest evils of our day. The MDG Task Force Report 2008 comments that despite the fact that the United Nations Millennium Declaration called for a more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction, this goal has yet to be achieved. However, the work of Make Poverty History and partner organizations is making a difference around the world, as people continue to take a stand against all forms of poverty and demand a change from our leaders.

I felt enriched by the talk “In the Spirit of Catherine: The Significance of Place.”
The question of what is the significance of this place MGC for us and our world today was a challenging one for me. Carol Rittner reminded us that we cannot forget our roots in Ireland. Remembrance is the secret of redemption.

Two world realities that were overwhelming to me were the number of people with HIV/AIDS, the stigma around this disease and the exploitation of women. The latter includes sexual exploitation as well as human trafficking. I was shocked to hear the staggering number of women and girls who have been raped in the context of on-going armed conflict. Many nations are beginning to face their horrific rape problem which is used as a weapon of warfare. The Sister to Sister Project in Africa is in the process of gathering women together to break the shame of silence and to have Sisters share their experiences. This has led to the development of Sisters empowering each other and developing strategies in response to this most globalized epidemic in history. The UN is making efforts to address sexual violence in conflict but as one report states, “The problem seems bigger than the resources currently devoted to it.” In order to gain further insights into the growing use of sexual violence as a weapon in warfare, I plan to become further educated on this issue through networking with Amnesty International to determine how I can help address such a situation which can no longer be tolerated. I am also attending a workshop on Human Trafficking (the fastest growing trade in the world) to become better informed about this issue and to determine ways I can play a role in addressing this problem within our province.

Presentations on partnerships, advocacy, Mercy charism and spirit, Caritas, development of interactive educational resources, empowerment, Indigenous people and ecology all added to the richness of the conference. However, they also placed a challenge before me as the MDG Gap Task Force Report 2008 states, “A shared future for all will not be possible without globally concerted action and strong partnerships.”

Since my return from the conference, I have undertaken some specific initiatives in an effort to combat illiteracy, poverty, the inequality of women and the abuse of the environment. I have joined a women’s group consisting of women who have been incarcerated and are now in the process of making a DVD related to their experiences within the prison system, services required within the system, and supports needed when a woman leave the prison.

Throughout the past years I have supported initiatives to make poverty history by attending meetings and rallies; writing letters and signing petitions; attending events to raise money for the poor, helping our centre for the homeless, and trying to raise the consciousness of leaders and people in authority to the plight of people caught in the cycle of poverty. After many of the presentations at the conference, I see the need to be more politically involved in an effort to address the root causes of this social ill. Being a member of our Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice Committee, I am presently involved in planning a conference on creation spirituality.
conference as a continuation of my care for the earth in that our Congregation has recently purchased a new site for the Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice. Such a venture holds possibility and promise for us. It will allow us space to offer more programs related to justice and ecology, to establish a garden where food can be grown for the poor, and to offer people land that they can use for the purpose of setting vegetables to provide food for themselves.

I am excited about the MIA Visioning Statement that “Just as in Catherine’s time her desire to connect those who were rich with those who were poor resulted in the building of a House of Mercy in Baggot Street, so in this time of global inter-dependence, we seek to create ways of bridging the increasing gap between the rich and the poor by using our global Mercy network.” As one speaker reminded us, “MGC has great significance for us and our world today.”

The trips we took to Mercy Centre and Mercy Haven were for me places where bridging the gap had happened. As I met people at each of these places, I heard a number of good news stories—stories of women, children, families who were searching to move from isolation, poverty and oppression to places where they could reach their full human potential.

On October 24, 2008, as the conclusion of the workshop approached, we again gathered in a circle. Each of us signed a postcard containing a picture of the group with hands united around the world. The back of the postcard stated “As I leave this place, I carry in my “broken” heart all those whose story is my story.

I feel very privileged to have attended this conference and shared in such a profound way in the stories of people’s lives. At the same time as many of the threads of these stories blend together, I feel a responsibility to what Kathy Sherman CSJ sings in her hymn “Weaving a Tapestry of Justice”:

We are living and loving, working and dreaming
Hoping, believing that all may be one.
We are threads of all colors, gifted and free
Creating for Earth a tapestry of justice...

We are changing and growing, laughing and weeping.
Seeking and searching that all may be one.
We are bridging and building, a promise are we
Creating for Earth a tapestry of justice.

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