



From Dream to Reality – Mary Reynolds rsm

Introduction

Welcome to everyone on this Mercy Day as we gather to mark the Silver Jubilee of the opening of Mercy International Centre. Welcome especially to those who are joining us on the web.

The Dream

When the Centre opened 25 years ago, the dream for the Centre was that it would:

- *Preserve* our Heritage
- *Continue* the rich tradition of Mercy hospitality
- *Link* all branches of Mercy worldwide and promote global identity
- *Birth* a future where we can be globally interconnected
- *Create* opportunities for multi-cultural forums in which the action/reflection model is used.
- *Connect* Sisters in indigenous cultures with their roots in Catherine McAuley.

Has the dream been realised you may ask?

Even the most enthusiastic dreamers of 1994 could hardly imagine how abundantly that dream has been realised!

Mentioning just a few developments is cause for celebration and gratitude:

- Close to 10,000 people now visit Mercy International Centre annually for programmes, tours and visits
- Over 6000 Sisters, 5000 Associates and nearly half a million partners-in-Ministry are interconnected as members of the Mercy global family.
- The Mercyworld.org website and the weekly *Mercy eNews* that develops and nourishes Mercy identity continue to attract growing numbers of visitors and subscribers.

- The recent Mercy International Reflection Process attracted groups from all around the world that engaged in action/reflection forums to listen contemplatively to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor today.
- The Under 60s Sisters, many from indigenous cultures, meet regularly via digital means to pray and share together on what being a daughter of Catherine McAuley means to them today.

Shapers of the Dream

One cannot begin talking about Mercy International Centre without honouring the two women who dared to dream of the potential of the founding house of Mercy. Sr. Mary Trainer and Sebastian Cashen set out, just like Catherine, by putting their trust in Divine Providence. They set out to restore a deteriorating building and to generously offer this treasured place as home to the Mercy family.

Prior to the opening of MIC, the Mercy Leaders of the Congregations and Institutes around the world envisioned a future for the House and contributed financially to its reconstruction. Several Sisters became involved in committees to attend to the practical reconstruction, to facilitate a discernment on its future mission and ministry and to plan for the governance and staffing of the centre.

Thanks to the courageous, contagious commitment of all these Sisters, many were animated to embrace the vision and the ambitious programme that was emerging.

Since 1994, people have come from around the world to advance the mission and the ministry:

- Over 100 people took up roles in the Governance of MIA as Members and Directors and as members of the Board of Management of MIA
- Approximately 80 people worked on the Leadership Teams of MIA
- Almost 300 women and men gave their service as Volunteers
- Scores of people were involved in committees

In addition, a number of people were engaged as paid employees or as provider of services.

Thanks to all those who shaped and continue to shape the dream.

Significant Moments

The journey has been dotted with many significant moments. It would fill a book to record them all so I will confine myself to a few. Several international conferences were held in the early days: Mercy Archives Conferences; Mercy International Justice Conferences; Mercy Leadership Teams Conferences and an International Formation Directors' workshop. Then new groups were established – the Mercy International Communications Group MIACOM that resulted in the creation of the website and the publication of a weekly e-newsletter; The Mercy International Justice network (MIJN) and the Mercy Global Concern (MGC) that facilitated an MIA presence at the UN, the Mercy International Archives Committee and a subgroup of this commission – the Mercy International Research Committee (MIRC) – which also held an international Conference. All of these helped to build up a global identity and interconnection, as well as mutual support and sharing of expertise.

A very significant moment was the commissioning of Sr. Mary Sullivan to prepare an authorised biography of Catherine McAuley and a year later the meeting of world Mercy congregational representatives for her canonisation cause.

Of course all of this was made possible by generous leadership and creative visioning. For many years, the Leaders of the Congregations and Institutes oversaw the work. And a Director and Team managed MIC. Then in 2006, an MIA visioning process was begun to refine the vision for a new time. Following this a Board of Directors was established, distinct from the Leaders and an Executive Director was recruited, followed by the appointment of assistant directors of Heritage & Spirituality and of Administration & Finance.

This gave a further impetus to the work. Building on the many great projects that had developed since 1994, the challenge now was to integrate all in the service of the vision. A strategic plan to do this and to carry forward the vision was created. A new library was established to enhance the heritage resources of MIC; the Mercy world website was re-developed; a feasibility study was conducted on Global Action that identified 3 priority issues: Eco Justice & Sustainable Development; Anti-trafficking of women & Children and emergency response to Global Disasters. Following this a Global Action Assistant Director was appointed and a Mercy Global Network established. New programmes were introduced at MIC.

20th Anniversary

That brought us up to 2014 when we celebrated 20 years of MIA - a great moment of rejoicing and thanksgiving.

This celebration particularly underlined for us the spirit of unity that had developed over the two previous decades among our Sisters, Associates and partners-in-Ministry. It especially emphasised for us that we had reached a level of technological communication that made interconnection of the Mercy family a very positive and enriching reality.

The challenge then was to build on that new awareness.

The following year, 2015, we built on the energy of the previous year by making the theme of the Year of Consecrated Life i.e. *Wake Up the World*, our major focus. Each month had a particular emphasis and followed a 4 -week cycle - Reading, Study, Sharing and Prayer.

Hardly had that year concluded when we had the great joy in 2016 of celebrating the Year of Mercy. We opened the door of Mercy in Baggot Street and Doors of Mercy opened around the world. We celebrated, through the Stations of Mercy, how the Mercy Family today gives expression to the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy and we made a pilgrimage as a Mercy family to Rome to join in the special Mercy celebrations there. We began the Mercy International Reflection Process, discerning together 'the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor' in our world.

In 2017, we concluded the Mercy International Reflection Process and published the review of this worldwide reflection process by Sisters of Mercy and partners-in-Mercy. We identified Displacement of Peoples and Degradation of Earth as the major cries to which we felt called to respond.

Last year, 2018, Ireland was honoured to host the World Meeting of Families in Dublin, and to welcome Pope Francis. MIA saw this as a graced opportunity to reflect on and celebrate family, be that our family of origin, our Mercy family, our global family. A central part of the year's focus was envisioning what a Mercy Global Presence might mean for us as a world-wide Mercy family.

Programmes

While these were some of the significant moments, a constant throughout the 25 years has been the development of programmes. At the beginning, when MIC started offering programmes, it was mainly Sisters who availed of these programmes. Wonderful programmes like *Come Home to Catherine*, *Walking and Praying in Catherine's Dublin* and Intercultural programmes for young religious proved very popular. Over the years the programmes have expanded to cater for our partners- in-Ministry and for Young Mercy Leaders. We continue to cater for Sisters and have added *Wellsprings* – a month's renewal programme and programmes for younger members around their Final Profession time.

The programmes for our lay partners are formational programmes in Mercy ethos. Our desire is that our lay partners in ministry and the young people of the next generation will be effective carriers of Mercy into the future. Every year about 100 youth leaders gather from around the world to reflect on the challenge of being Mercy leaders today. Tours of the house are also very popular as are celebrations of our special Mercy feasts. More than 80% of these who now come to the Centre are lay women, men, and young people.

Our Global Action programme over the years has been to keep alive the founding intention of Catherine to meet the needs of poor people and the poor earth and also to address the systemic causes. The needs are endless and we have had to focus on a selected number of issues. We took a leaf from Catherine's book, so firstly we focussed on women & children. We became involved in such issues as the trafficking of women and children, gender violence and the plight of the girl child. We now have to consider all the people who have been displaced from their homes by war, famine and natural disasters

The second area of our Mercy tradition from which we drew inspiration was concern for the provision of sustainable livelihoods. We have directed our attention to issues like climate change, environmental exploitation and degradation and the provision of clean water and sanitation, especially for people who are poor. Their livelihoods are the most threatened by these issues. They suffer disproportionately from the health risks caused by inadequate or dirty water and polluted air.

Our presence at the UN has greatly enhanced this work.

Our presence there brings the Mercy spirit to the one forum in the world where all nations have the potential to act as equals. It provides a forum to advocate on behalf of displaced persons and exploited earth and work with other international bodies. It gives us the opportunity to raise awareness of critical issues and to work collaboratively to challenge all to make a real difference. It is one way of continuing what Catherine did in connecting people, the rich with the poor, the healthy to the sick, the educated and skilled to the uninstructed, the influential to those of no consequence, the powerful to the weak.

New Initiatives

The latest new initiative, recently launched has been the Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship – a programme aimed at developing women’s skills and capabilities so that they can more effectively carry on the work of Mercy and Justice. Over the course of the next twelve months, ten very diverse young women will be challenged to think critically about the global reality of our world through the lenses of Mercy, Leadership, and Justice. The programme seeks to build upon the capacities of women and provide them with effective tools to be agents of change in their own communities and in the greater society. They will build relationships with other Mercy leaders and form a united network, advocating for justice in their own communities.

Another initiative has been the Mercy International Reflection process.

As you know, this worldwide reflection process was initiated during the Year of Mercy for Sisters of Mercy and partners-in-Mercy to discern together globally a shared response to the 'cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor' in our world today.

Hundreds of groups and at least five thousand Sisters of Mercy and partners-in-Mercy participated in the Reflection Process. Out of the sacred listening and contemplative dialogue in which the groups engaged came a number of critical issues which can be gathered into two, often intersecting, theme areas: (i) displacement of persons, and (ii) degradation of Earth. In reflecting on this, we referred to it as ‘what has been discovered’ but we were aware that something else happened in this process that we referred to as ‘What has been revealed’ and we went on to name this as Mercy Global Presence.

The very engagement in the Mercy International Reflection Process gave glimpses of what an international Mercy Global Presence would look like: it would be an organic entity and a countercultural sign in a globalised world which has made more extreme the displacement of persons and degradation of earth. One area of focus relating to Mercy Global Presence was the recommendation that there was a need for new language, new images and new theology in enhancing our understanding and strengthening our response to the cry of Earth and the cry of the Poor. We have identified one way to address this recommendation by creating an eighteen-month global exploration of Mercy Global Presence involving Sisters of Mercy and partners-in-Mercy worldwide. The programme will launch on September 29th.

This idea of Mercy Global Presence and the planned process is closely connected to the Vision and future plans for Mercy International.

We launched our new Vision early this year, stating that we seek to gather the inspiration and energies of the Sisters of Mercy, our associates, colleagues and partners worldwide toward the creation of a Mercy Global Presence. Our 5-year Strategic plan, based on this vision sets out the ways in which, through all the activities of Mercy International Association, we will strive for the globalisation of compassion and the recognition of God's mercy as present and active in our world. Our belief is that this vision keeps alive the founding spirit of Catherine among people of the world most in need of God's compassion and Mercy.

Upgrades to the Centre

Since 1994, the goal has been to preserve, conserve and protect the house built by Catherine and the artefacts it contains, which are of historical and inspirational significance and which afford opportunity for ongoing Mercy mission. Over and above the regular maintenance, there have been continuous developments to enhance the physical, spiritual, and intellectual resources of the centre. In 2007 the Doyle room was upgraded to honour Mary Anne Doyle, the woman of whom Catherine said: *it began with two, Sr. Doyle and I*'. The glass doors at the main entrance were installed to convey that this is a house of welcome and hospitality and the reception space was enlarged to cater for all who come ; the International Room was upgraded to tell the story of that room over the years – the first classroom where Catherine and the early Sisters would have educated the young children ; the community room where the Sisters

gathered on the evening of Catherine's death to share the good cup of tea that she had urged them to share together; the place where many decisions were made to respond to calls to go to the places of need at home and abroad; the memory space that marks the coming back of Sisters to Baggot St in 1994 carrying water from the places to which Mercy had gone; the place where Catherine's story is now re-told almost on a daily basis through the medium of the beautiful drama documentary: *In God Alone*. We have just received the good news that the film has been nominated for 3 mid America Emmy awards and we look forward to the announcement of the winners on October 5th.

A new **Library** was installed in what is believed to have been Catherine's office. It now houses some of the writings of the early Sisters and Annals keepers, a collection of religious books popular in Catherine's day and a modern section containing publications produced by Sisters of Mercy or books written about the Sisters of Mercy and their ministries.

The **accommodation** for guests has also been comfortably updated and the dining room fittingly upgraded to offer hospitality and the good cup of tea that we all treasure. St. Patrick's wing has been remodelled to provide **5 office spaces** and a night superintendent's apartment – all with a garden view.

The **redesigning of the Sacred Garden** with its dedicated spaces for learning, remembering, reflecting and connecting has been a labour of love in marking the Silver Jubilee and the beautiful Gael O'Leary sculpture of Catherine is an invitation to spend some time here and to sit awhile with Catherine.

Work is currently in train to enhance the preservation and potential of our heritage collection.

Communication

Keeping all the Mercy family connected and informed has been of major importance since the beginning. The first Mercy World web site was built in 1998 and several updates and re-designs were undertaken to keep pace with the development of MIA. Responding to the needs of a growing audience and supported by advances in web technology a new site was built and launched in 2010. Our current re-build was completed in 2018. *Mercy eNews*, first launched in 2001, followed a similar growth of redesign and re-development, and is now an integrated part of the Mercyworld.org website.

Together the website and e-News are an extraordinary resource and a wonderful means of connecting and informing the mercy family worldwide. Last year the website and *Mercy eNews* gained four international awards.

Fundraising

Catherine herself said that little is ever accounted for without the use of money and this of course is true of Mercy International. The Mercy Congregations have from the beginning been the major funders of Mercy International Association. Due to changed demographics, increasing demands on Congregations and shrinking resources, it was evident that this could not continue into the future. Consequently, in 2012 to secure the future of MIA, the Board of Directors made the decision to conduct a major fundraising campaign named **Advancing Mercy's Mission**. This was in order to assure the continuance of MIA's mission and to safeguard the Mercy charism and legacy into the future. MIA is convinced that fundraising is a way of announcing its vision and inviting other people into the Mercy mission. It is proclaiming that we believe passionately in the vision and mission of MIA in such a way that we offer other people an opportunity to participate in that vision and mission also.

Trusting Catherine's advice about reliance on the Providence of God, we initiated Phase 1 of the Campaign. The aim of this phase was the establishment of a €20 million Endowment Fund with the hope that this would yield an annual sum approximate to what the congregations formally paid. The campaign took place in Ireland, Australia, England, New Zealand and the United States. Thanks to the generosity of the

Congregations and Institutes and to a very generous circle of donors, we reached our target in June this year.

The phase 2 campaign was initiated during the latter part of 2016. It was initiated because the campaign to create the endowment was designed to replace existing finances of MIA operations. The MIA Endowment Fund is not sufficient to provide further increases in capital needs and programme development. The goal is to meet €9 million in order to complete the campaign. While this is ambitious, we believe that if God wants the work to continue, God will provide us with the means. But as Catherine said, while trusting as if all depended on God, we must work as if all depend on us

Among our fundraising activities is the Good Cup of Tea Event which is run during the Season of Mercy from Sept. 24th to Dec. 12th. so we encourage all associated with the family of Mercy to hold Good Cup of tea events and to use these occasions as a fundraiser. We are also encouraging other donors to get involved in our fundraising for capital and programmatic needs.

Conclusion

We are delighted to take the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of Mercy International Centre to pause and reflect on the blessings of the past 25 years and to acknowledge this celebrative milestone in the journey of our story. I am quoting Sr. Sheila Carney when I say that a Silver Jubilee signifies fidelity, forbearance, compromise, commitment, love that endures and that it is on the strength of those years that people can dare to re-commit, trusting themselves and their God.

Reeling in the 25 years, our hearts are full of gratitude as we look back and focus on moments that were turning points, people who were influential, graces asked for and received.

More than 25 years ago, a dream for Mercy International Centre emerged. Over the years more strands have been woven into that dream and the dream has been tended and nurtured. Today we are the keepers of the dream, privileged to discern with our Mercy family the dream for the future as we search out new possibilities. We firmly believe that the God who worked such great things through the generosity of many, will continue to bless with abundance the seeds we are planting today.

In conclusion on this Jubilee Mercy Day, I would like to join with all the Mercy family around the world in proclaiming that together

‘In Mercy, we touch the hearts of those who are in misery.

In Mercy, we’re touched by them and feel their strength and courage.

In Mercy, we heal the pain of those who are in sorrow.

In Mercy, we’re healed by them and see the face of hope.

Refrain:

For the circle of Mercy is timeless

it is spirit of Life itself,

which grounds us in faith

and lifts us in hope,

and holds us in God’s loving care,

and holds us in God’s loving care.’

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