



Remarks made at Rededication of the Sacred Garden

Alice Bentley, Architect, Blackwood Associates

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to be part of this beautiful, and important project.

When we were given the task of reimagining the design of the Sacred Garden, we commenced by observing what was given: the surrounding buildings; the orientation of the garden in relation to the movement of the sun through each day, and each year; the changes in level between the garden and Catherine's House; the setting for Catherine's Grave and the sacred nature of the burials in the upper garden. Given this place, with all its associations and history, we wanted to remodel the garden spaces, as a calm environment, where every visitor can find serenity, and contemplate their relationship to the Mercy Family.

Through our design we sought ways to soften the dominance of the enclosing buildings, limit the palette of materials and colours, and to enhance the experience of moving through the garden, and between the garden and the House. The raw materials for this transformation were the stillness and solidity of the new walls, steps, pools, rill and paving, the fluid movement of the water, the light of sun and sky, and the growing forms of the living plants.

Looking around the garden today, I hope everything appears to be in its place. However in order to reach this point there had to be a great deal of taking things apart and putting them back together again, with all the associated noise mess and disruption. I hope everyone involved is now in the position to benefit from the serenity that is the end product of all the work, time imagination, patience and money.

Many parts of this garden lie in shade for much of the year; the lower courtyard is rarely blessed by sunlight. Therefore we chose plants that thrive in such conditions. The design of these shady spaces has been inspired by the natural environments of woodland glades, and ravines. This led us to ferns, present throughout the garden, in both sun and shade. Ferns are resilient plants, providing grace and beauty in even the most inhospitable of places, revealing their splendours only to those who take time and patience to seek them out. As such they are symbolic of sincerity, grace and humility, tolerance and forgiveness, strength in adversity.

There is a serendipity here, the fern being a symbol of the Mercy International Association Worldwide Presence. Wherever one Mercy person is present, the whole of Mercy is there and the whole of Mercy is only complete if every Mercy person is present to it. Each individual frond of the fern holds the entirety of the fern's structure, while the fern as a whole would be incomplete without each individual frond.

This concept continues through the layout of the garden, which is made up of a sequence of spaces; each with their own purpose and character, each being essential parts of the whole.

The lowest level of the garden, is both the teaching space, and the place of transition between the inside of the House and the garden.

The Memory Corner and Catherine's Grave provide a place of quiet contemplation, a place to sit alone, or share prayer as a group.

The path to the left-hand side is enhanced by the densest planting: a place of sunshine and flowers.

Catherine's Corner invites the visitor to "Come Sit A While". This space has a sense of subtle enclosure, with the planted wall behind, the small tree, and the screen of Catherine McAuley roses.

Linking the spaces of the upper garden and the lower courtyard is the rill. The water leaps and flows over and around pebbles, smoothed through the ages of the world, and emerges into the lower pool, overhung by ferns and water loving plants, and enhancing the lower courtyard with the sound of falling water. For the path beside the rill we chose native silver birch trees, symbolic, in Celtic mythology, of hope and new beginnings.

This garden as we have redesigned it is a living place, it will change and grow through the seasons and years. The plants in the garden are young; in the process of settling into this historic place. Each plant will develop and their character evolve and become more defined as they mature. The natural materials of the walls and paving will weather in time, soften to their environment and use. Thus the garden reflects the eternal change, growth, decay and rebirth of life. We hope it reflects the Mercy International Association commitment to the environment, access to clean water, and education, and respect for human rights.

Like all good work the redesign of this garden has been a process of collaboration:

with the sisters of Mercy International whose vision we have responded to;

with the sculptors Mark Ryan, creator of the bronze globe, and Gael O'Leary, creator of Catherine's statue,

with artist Laura O'Hagan, who has realised the Sister Claire Augustine Moore tiles, the wall plaques, and the Memory Corner Slab, which was worked and installed by stone mason Tim Doyle;

with Carmel Ennis the horticulturalist, who has contributed so much with her knowledge and selection of the plants now growing around us;

with the engineers, Ray Goggin who found solutions to the many structural challenges of the project, and Delap & Waller who designed the services;

with the Quantity Surveyors, D.L. Martin & Partners, who helped us keep the works close to the available budget

and with the builders Lissadell Construction, including Kevin Dooner who was a constant presence on site, and all the crafts people who have constructed the new walls and paving, plastered the walls.

Within our own practice Kevin Blackwood, the project director, without whom we would not be here, and Rosie Smallwood and Aaron Jones who have all contributed to bringing this project to fruition.

As in the Mercy Family, everyone is essential, part of a greater whole, with their gift of time, care, skill and love. It has been a pleasure to be a part of this.

Gael O’Leary, Sculptor, Bayside Sculpture – ‘Come Sit Awhile’

When Sister Mary Reynolds contacted me two years ago about creating a copy of “Come Sit Awhile” for the Sacred Garden, I was both humbled and honoured. The original bronze sculpture is in the garden of the Stanmore headquarters of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea in Sydney, Australia.

I was invited by the Institute team to design a sculpture of Catherine which would be warm and inviting and to communicate something of the essence of this amazing woman.

I went up to Stanmore and spent some hours sitting in the garden, meditating and trying to open myself to Catherine and how she would best be represented.

It was there that I had a strong sense of Catherine sitting with me in the garden. I called the image ‘Come Sit Awhile’.

In this sculpture I wanted to show Catherine as a woman of compassion, faith and vision.

Sitting on a garden bench reading her prayer book, she is also a symbol of today’s Mercy women and their associates who seek to combine their desire for prayerful reflection with the call to be engaged with those in need.

Whilst finding her solace in prayer and her relationship with God, Catherine is ever ready to be there for others.

As I created the clay figure, I felt in some ways as if I was channelling Catherine, a woman of courage, infinite wisdom and deep faith; a woman who had a kind heart and a listening ear. I wanted her to be an inspiration and beacon of hope and comfort to all who come to sit beside her.

Here, in the beautiful setting of the Sacred Garden, there is an invitation for everyone who wishes, to come ‘sit awhile’ with Catherine; to be comfortable in her presence; to take inspiration from her spirituality and deep belief in the providence of God and to emulate her openness to others.

Mark Ryan, Sculptor- Bronze Globe

My name is Mark Ryan. I am a sculptor. I work in bronze, steel and stainless steel.

I was approached last December to see if I was interested in undertaking the sculpting of the bronze globe for the sacred garden. The brief was to create a work of art, which would symbolize the spread of Mercy International across the world and to acknowledge the world as our common home.

From the initial meetings, and through a series of scaled maquettes and drawings, the brief developed and evolved. On agreement of the final design, I started work in March this year. The globe was modeled in 30 different patterns, resulting in 60 individual bronze castings, shaped, welded, chased, patinated and polished to produce the final form, we see here today.

It is my hope is that I have managed to produce a sculpture that does the following:

Symbolises the spread of Mercy International across the entire world.

Acknowledges the world as 'our common home' for everyone

References the Earth, the sustainability of life and the universal recognition of the fundamental right to water.

Reflects harmony and interdependence with all creation. This is further reinforced by the mixture of open and closed areas – positive and negative spaces – one as important as the other.

I hope, brings a richness and warmth of colour, texture and surface interest. That the sculpture evokes familiarity, contemplation and a gentleness with an energy and vitality that echoes traces of the natural world.

Provides a topic of conversation and a focus for contemplation and responds successfully to its context and physical environment.

I hope that the artwork is understandable, intriguing, and informative and that it has a richness of symbolism and meaning.

Finally – I would like to say how much I have really enjoyed my time working on the commission, meeting the dynamic organization of Mercy International and learning about their work. Many thanks to Alice Bentley for her vision and support. I am pleased to have contributed in some way creation of this lovely important garden.

Laura O'Hagan, Ceramic Artist –

Congratulations to the Sisters of Mercy on commissioning this wonderful contemplative garden.

For me it brings the Past, Present and Future together.

The Sisters, Anna, Margaret and Mary met with Alice and me to view and discuss the Book of Flowers and how some of the work of Sr. Claire could be represented in the Garden as contemplative artworks.

We wanted to be able to see some of the imagery from different places in the Garden so I set about enlarging sections of the images and creating ceramic prints suitable for exterior conditions. It involved overcoming in-depth technical challenges and artistic endeavour and the results are the six porcelain tile panels installed on the garden wall above the running water.

Meanwhile we had a discussion about the name plaques as part of the new garden wall, we were looking for a more integrated feeling into the garden from a distance and yet individual dedications up close. They are all hand made from a white

And now back to the beginning: The Memorial Wall

This area and the women remembered here are those who have inspired and keep inspiring this International Community of people who work together to help others.

To remember them with respect and dignity and make their names legible to you the viewer in a way that would stand the test of time as well as connect to the Tomb here was what I set out to do.

There are over 2,020 characters on this stone which determined the scale of the piece.

My graphic artist friend Luke Hannigan helped me with the lettering which after a lot of massaging it eventually worked to scale. Then he and Tim Doyle the stone mason needed to have compatible files to allow for the stone to be carved. Tim then delivered the stone to the site but it fell and broke into six pieces! Pure determination and a lot of prayers got us to the site on time with a new stone. Tim installed it and the Sisters sang a hymn – we were all relieved.

