

MERCY AROUND THE WORLD

25 September 2014

Mercy International Association

64a Lower Baggot Street

Dublin 2

Remarks by H.E. Dr Ruth Adler,

Australian Ambassador to Ireland

Thank you for inviting me today to help celebrate *Mercy Around the World*. I would like to thank Sister Mary Reynolds, Executive Director of the Mercy International Association (MIA), for inviting me to speak today.

Since being established by Sister Catherine McAuley in 1831, the congregation has grown and generations of Mercy sisters have dedicated their lives to caring for the poor and the sick.

They have created a legacy which we here today to celebrate on this 20th Anniversary of the Mercy International Centre, which has linked the international engagement of the Mercy orders and institutes around the world, including through the UN and other international organisations.

I am here because the good work of the Mercy Sisters was not limited to Ireland. Within five years of the death of founding Sister Catherine McAuley, those who believed in her message were creating a new chapter of her legacy on the other side of the world.

Sister Ursula Frayne established the Sisters of Mercy in Perth in 1846. As western settlement of Australia expanded, further Sisters of Mercy foundations were encouraged by Australian bishops. The initial founders came from various places around Ireland, from England and even one from Argentina. But as their numbers grew in

Australia, new foundations began to come from the early Australian groups.

By the early years of the twentieth century there were 52 autonomous Mercy congregations in Australia. Although they were independent of each other, all the Australian congregations were united by the original Rules and Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy.

The history of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia is as complex as it is fascinating. In both urban and rural areas, particularly in outback Australia, the sisters responded to the human needs for evangelisation, education, health care, welfare services and a myriad of pastoral services.

Through their work, particularly in teaching and nursing, many Australians gained faith, realised their potential and found hope and healing through the sisters' ministries. And in the execution of their work, the sisters made a significant contribution to society through families, social networks and work places by spreading the Mercy values of justice, compassion, tolerance, peace and forgiveness.

One element which I myself have a personal connection to - and which perfectly illustrates the great contribution that the Sisters of Mercy have made to Australia - is education. From the beginning, the Sisters of

Mercy recognised the importance of education as a crucial path for both children and adults to reach their potential.

In Australia, the Sisters of Mercy have been at the forefront of educational endeavours, particularly through the Catholic school system in both primary and secondary schools in rural and urban areas.

While some of these schools established are no longer owned and operated by the Sisters of Mercy, they continue with lay leadership in the Mercy tradition. From 1973 until 1986 my mother, Mrs Lesley Adler, taught science and biology at Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College in North Sydney. It was significant period of her teaching career and I think the story of the school itself is a perfect microcosm of the Mercy Sisters' story in Australia.

The school was established by the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney, Mother Ignatius McQuoin. She arrived in Sydney from Liverpool on 15 November 1865. She quickly established a school at St Patrick's, Church Hill, and began carrying on the work of Mercy – educating those in need. The education provided by the school from 1895 to 1912 was very much attuned to its time, with a focus on art, needlework and music, as well as English, arithmetic, history and geography.

Sister Clement Flanagan arrived at Monte in 1922 and sought to foster the pursuit of sporting achievements and

academic excellence. Monte continued to expand physically, particularly after the Second World War, and by the mid-1950s Monte was well on the road to becoming a major force in Sydney education.

In 1973, Sister Maureen McGuirk became Principal and over the next 21 years continued the development of the school's curriculum, as well as the updating of facilities and a building program that has benefited the College community greatly.

In 1994, Sister Sharon Price continued the development of the College and was the last Sister of Mercy to lead the College. She was responsible for the establishment of the College Board, the Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College Foundation and Board of Directors, and for preparing the College for transition to lay leadership.

In 2000, Mrs Beverley Johnson became the first lay Principal to be appointed by the College Board and the Trustees of the Sisters of Mercy. Under her leadership, the College pursued innovative approaches to teaching and learning, and the integration of Information Communication Technologies to facilitate and enhance curriculum delivery.

In 2004, Ms Catherine Alcock came to the College with a philosophy of academic excellence. Under her leadership, the College introduced the Middle Years and Diploma Programmes of the International Baccalaureate.

The College Principal is currently Mrs Nicole Christensen, who is here with us today. Under her leadership, the school has focussed on preparing young women for a life full of success, significance and purpose, based on the belief that education should be a rich interweaving of knowledge, skills and spirituality.

This is just one example of the positive legacy of the Mercy Sisters in Australia. A legacy that has grown and evolved to suit the needs of the community, while providing young women with a spiritual foundation for their education.

It is also significant that in 1956 Australian Mercy sisters expanded their work to Papua New Guinea, a key regional neighbour of Australia. This linkage was consolidated in December 2011, with 15 Mercy congregations forming the *Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea*, which is dedicated to serving people who suffer from injustices related to poverty, sickness and/or lack of education. This new administrative structure has provided greater potential for the Institute to respond to contemporary challenges such as the displacement of people worldwide, human trafficking and aged care.

During my time in Ireland, I have been struck by the depth and breadth of the connections between Ireland and Australia. Whenever I have gone, I have been met with

stories of connections to Australia, both old and new. We have a unique friendship and the Irish and their descendants have made a major contribution to Australia.

Indeed, in 2011 over 2 million Australians described their ancestry group as Irish, which represents more than 10.4 per cent of the population.

The Sisters of Mercy have played an important role in Australia, helped so many and continue to do great work. I have no doubt that this contribution will continue for many years to come.

Thank you.

Sources:

Sisters of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea, "*From Past to Present: Explore the History of Mercy in Australia and Papua New Guinea*" <<http://www.mercy.org.au/history/index.html>>

Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College, "*Monte Sant' Angelo Mercy College: Our History*"
<http://www.monte.nsw.edu.au/about-monte/our-history/>