

Being the MIA Administrator

One of the most exciting aspects of this role was keeping in touch with the various networks which sprang into existence to give life and vitality to the MIA dream. Once the Mercy world decided that MIA would keep alive the spirit of Catherine McAuley in ways which are creative and appropriate to the needs of our time there was an enormous burst of Mercy energy and Mercy questions to meet the needs of this new chapter in our Mercy story. Some of the questions follow:

How do we live into the reality of our new organisation?

As the fledgling Association took wings and learned to fly one of my strongest MIA memories is that of the annual meeting of the MIA Members – leaders of Mercy congregations worldwide. They listened to one another deeply and attentively, searching for the potential in the changing whole. It sounds heavy – but there was a lightness of spirit, of joy, of welcome, of laughter and celebration in those gatherings.



MIA Members at Handsworth, Birmingham 2005

Back Row: Nerida Tinkler, Breege O'Neill, M Lourdes, Denise Fox, Dolores Magee, Patricia Bell
Front: Marie Chin, Evelyn Gallagher

How do we network to connect the rich and the poor for the life of the world?

This question meant that the rich resource of 58 Mercy women from cultures and nations worldwide learned from one another and created practical action plans unprecedented in Mercy history when they gathered in South Africa in September 2001.



Second Mercy International Justice Conference South Africa 2001

Related outcomes later led to 'Bridging the Gap' workshops, where Deidre Mullan assembled resource people in New York to teach Mercies and their co-workers how to access United Nations processes through Mercy Global Concern.

How can our congregation leadership teams support the bold and challenging MIA vision?

From creatively telling one another simple stories which described local realities, team members reflected attentively and found that a focus on the massive displacement of persons worldwide emerged as an urgent global reality with which all could identify. The impact of these insights and commitment to action was further explored by leadership teams in 2006.



Mercy Leadership Teams Dublin 2006

What stories do we tell?

It was exciting for me to experience the 'Beyond Catherine' and 'Beyond Baggot Street' times which brought together networks of archivists, theologians, scripture scholars and researchers. These moments of intense, generous and forward-looking sharing demonstrated that there is much we can do together that cannot be done in isolation. As a result, historic documents, stories and information from many parts of the Mercy world are now available to all.



**Marianne Cosgrave Archivist and
Mary Sullivan rsm Researcher**

How do we promote Catherine McAuley's life and the charism of Mercy?



Shortly after I started working for MIA a number of men and women from around the globe wrote to the Association asking when Catherine McAuley was going to be canonised. The resurgence of interest in the canonisation process brought Mercy leaders to a wholehearted support for an international structure of link people which has held the process lightly but firmly under the leadership of the Irish Congregation and the current Postulator Brenda Dolphin.

How are we to be together?

Given our Mercy history of autonomous congregations, it was a great blessing that at the time that MIA came into existence there was an explosion of information technology that opened doors our founding members never dreamed of. The gifts, imagination and expertise of the MIA Communications group have given us new, simple and effective forms of communication so that we

know one another better, and have a range of choices about how we can be together. Adele Howard and her Fraynetwork colleagues travelled the world to advise, encourage, and educate about IT stepping stones to local and global communication and social transformation.

How do we celebrate?

During these years I was at many MIA meetings. Every meeting I was part of took place in a spirit of joy and celebration which lightened and assisted the intensity and seriousness of the agenda. Moments of colour and ritual, light and darkness, joy and sorrow, music, movement and prayer deepen and reveal our interconnectedness and celebrate the wellspring of Mercy at the heart of life. It has been a real joy for me to learn how our real and 'virtual' international Mercy connections both foster unity of mind and heart and impel us to action in response to need.



**Celebrating 175 years of Mercy 2006
Mary Conway rsm and Anne Walsh at Westland Row**

Keeping hope alive

From 2001 until 2009 I was welcomed into many Mercy congregations and communities. Newfoundland, Australia, the Philippines, Great Britain, the United States, New Zealand and Ireland gave me a place at some of their most sacred and searching moments. I met many gifted, talented and generous men and women who live and support the Mercy charism in over 40 countries in the world. In all places I made immediate connections with Mercy signs, symbols, values and celebration days which express the Mercy heartbeat.



For all of us Mercy International Centre has become an icon which stands for the fire of the Mercy charism, meeting Catherine anew, and people finding strength and courage to continue the works of mercy. When I arrived in Dublin in 2001, Rosie Carroll gave me a key to 64A Lower Baggot Street and told me I would be welcome there any time. For me that key has become symbolic of the power of the open door, open mind and open heart possibilities that keep hope alive in our world today.

Ethel M Bignell rsm
March 2014