

**In July, 1994, I was one of four volunteers at Mercy International Centre. After I returned to Newfoundland in September that year, I wrote this reflection. As we celebrate the twentieth anniversary I thought I would share this reflection with you.**

## **Reflection on Summer 1994 at Mercy International Centre**

This past week we viewed with our associate group the video of the official opening of Mercy International Centre, July 23, 1994. As I watched I was transported back to Baggot Street in Dublin. Today as I walked in the park I was reflecting on the feelings that I associated with those two blessed months of July and August. For me there were feelings of joy, excitement and awe; first of all, for just being in Ireland, the home of my ancestors; and secondly, for being in Catherine's house and at such a historic time. Both of these were dreams that I never felt would become a reality. I remember hearing concerns expressed early after my arrival in Dublin, that having set the date for July 23, all would not be in readiness. There were certainly feelings of exhaustion as we fell into our beds late at night having worked as many as eighteen hours a day.

The first three weeks of July were spent basically preparing for the official opening day, while continuing the day-to-day normal activity. Workers were still around doing last minute things, trying to meet the deadline. We didn't have any lay help. The members of the World Mercy Association were at the Centre for their meetings and the seventeen sisters involved in the ritual for the opening celebration were present each day for a week of reflection. Others were coming and going, helping wherever the need arose. There was practice going on at various times for the Chapel ceremony, the Church celebration, as well as choir practice. The place was a beehive of activity.

There were four of us volunteers who were largely responsible for helping the staff in cooking, baking, cleaning, setting up the gift shop, preparing the registry of names for the Heritage Room, running errands, taking time at the reception desk and generally being available for whatever needed to be done. And there was much to be done. A big part of our work was preparing lunch and dinner for those staying or meeting at the Centre, whose numbers ranged anywhere from ten to thirty people. We also saw that visitors who came had a cup of tea and that the poor who came to the door got something to eat.

Since I could bake I took on the job of making tea buns—not quite the same as the Irish scones, but nevertheless enjoyed by all who tasted them. One batch didn't look or taste like the others. I had forgotten to add the butter! Needless to say they didn't make the basket for the table but the wastebasket instead. I literally made hundreds for the official opening day and had the freezer filled for good measure. We had enough for the three hundred people who came for the official opening and for the hundreds who came during the week. It was like the 'loaves and the fishes'. Off course, Ursula and Catherine contributed greatly to the day with Australian 'slices' and I did some Newfoundland 'squares' as well. Irish Mercies contributed in great measure, too.

Buying groceries daily, purchasing our meat daily at the butcher shop, going to the vegetable market or the fish market in town were new experiences for me. I would tag along with Ursula until I could make it on my own. The burn marks on my fingers and arms during July told the story of adjusting to a convection oven and a gas stove, both of which I would love to have now. Making 'macaroni and cheese' for thirty gave me a few anxious moments. Was there enough? We used it for two days as I had made enough for sixty with some left over! Trying to stretch the stew or the soup when extra guests would arrive at mealtime was a challenge as Clare Murphy and I often resorted to adding packaged soup and water to make enough. We had a great laugh over it many times behind the scenes. There never seemed to be any leftovers, no matter how much we cooked. Washing the dining room floor one night about 9:30 prompted us to say we hadn't worked as hard since novitiate days!

The night before the official opening many last minute things had to be done. The reception had to be set up in the dining room, chairs had to be set up in the chapel for one hundred and fifty people and in the International Room where another one hundred fifty people would view the ceremony on closed circuit TV. A lot of people came to help. After the opening the chairs that we had brought upstairs had to be carried down again before we went to the Church service later that evening. We formed a human chain from the parlour to the International Room. Ruth Mulligan was engaging everyone she saw to help with this task. When she asked a prominent Irish Sister of Mercy, would she like to be part of the chain, her reply was, "I don't do chairs." We had a good laugh over that one!

I was privileged not only to prepare for the official opening but to attend it as well. Clare Murphy and I were ushers for the morning celebration in the chapel. Ushering the invited guests, those who worked in many capacities on the project, the Irish Mercies who had lived at Baggot Street, the members of the MIA from around the world, and many who came from other countries was exciting and interesting and helped me to see the global face of Mercy. It goes beyond race, colour, and distance. It circles the globe.

I experienced privileged and moving moments at Catherine's tomb and in the room where Catherine died. I felt privileged to walk in Catherine's footsteps, to pray and attend Mass in the original chapel, to sleep in her house, to walk her Dublin, to visit Coolock House and George's Hill. I was privileged to give guided tours through the Centre and to witness others being moved to tears as they walked in Catherine's footsteps.

I felt privileged to meet so many Irish Mercies and to be welcomed and accepted by them. I felt privileged to work with an international group, and to be entrusted the day-to-day running of the Centre with them. I would not have traded the hard work of that summer for anything. I am grateful for the opportunities the experience gave me, in particular, to be part of, in a very tangible way, the International Circle of Mercy.

*Sister Monica Hickey*  
*September 1994*

