

Walking Gently on Earth

Mercy Sisters Western Province



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Eco-Congregation Award

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Catherine McAuley - Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy.
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Foreword

This book is a response to a nomination by Vita for an Eco-Congregation Award. Eco-Congregation is a development among four Irish churches – Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist and Church of Ireland – that “*encourages churches to celebrate the gift of God’s creation, to recognize the interdependence of all creation, and to care for it in their life and mission and through the members’ personal lifestyles.*” Resources and support are provided alongside awards to affirm good environmental work and witness this to local communities.

Emeritus Professor of Geography at NUI Maynooth, Prof John Sweeney, says: “*Eco-Congregation provides a dynamic that is inspirational, and the sense of community which this ecumenical organisation fosters offers a template for what needs to be done at national and international levels to address the complex problems involved in translating local action to global benefits.*”

Dr Alastair McIntosh, Fellow of the Centre for Human Ecology, says: “*It’s about forming green groups in your church, about having a check-up of the environmental issues in your church, getting the authority of your church decision-making body and then working towards a series of steps which, although practical on the outside, on the inside are about a deepening of the spiritual life, about inner transformation and the regeneration of what the church and community is.*”

Vita, an NGO whose principle work is in the Horn of Africa, has nominated the Western Province of the Sisters of Mercy for an Eco-Congregation Award. Vita and the Western Province share many core values, sustainability being central. Walking gently on earth - the universe story - incorporates spirituality, ecology and ministry. It flows from each person, resonates through the local community and vibrates into and onto national and international spheres. Our vision is “*The wide world my parish,*” as John Wesley said, seeing, like William Blake, “*the world in a grain of sand.*”

This publication is an invitation to hear *The Cry of the Earth* and *The Cry of the Poor*. It is a little book with a big heart!

In 1831, Catherine McAuley founded the Order of the Sisters of Mercy for the alleviation of poverty and the education of women. Catherine, who had inherited a family legacy, put her entire resources at the service of people gripped by poverty and neglect. The Mercy Order spread widely from the founding house in Baggot Street, Dublin, during and since Catherine’s time. Independent convents were opened and gradually re-organised into different configurations around the world. In Ireland, communities came together at diocesan level. On 14 July 1994, a new congregation was formed from the individual dioceses, missions outside of Ireland, and Sisters in South Africa. This led to a new configuration of seven provinces, four

of them in Ireland - one of them being the Western Province. Today, Sisters of Mercy continue to live out the inspiration of the founding call: to be a compassionate presence on Earth, in communion with all creation.

The aspiration to be a compassionate presence calls forth from us great courage, a generosity that does not count the cost and above all a radical and profound transformation. For over 40 years the Sisters of Mercy in the Western Province, in their literature and teaching have given voice to new awakenings from cosmology and ecology. Today, they continue to search new ways and possibilities to express the gift of Mercy in the evolving universe. In 1996, the Catholic Bishops of Ireland, in heralding the new millennium, called us to rediscover our traditional spirituality with its *"keen awareness of God's presence in our lives; a deep respect for God's creation; a profound reverence for every human being."* Their pastoral reflection, *The Cry of the Earth* (2009), focussed on climate change and they stressed how *"action at personal and local level is critical to addressing common or global issues such as climate change."*

Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015) has heightened global awareness of the crisis of the earth as it trembles under our lifestyle choices driven by consumerism and waste. The Pope is appealing for *"dialogue with all people about our common home."* He stresses that the ecological crisis we have created is *"not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience."*

As we grow in our awareness of the interconnectedness of all life and the Divine presence in all things, we seek to be in the earth community with reverence and in loving relationship with all that is. In this book, the Sisters of Mercy share an insight into some of their efforts in the Western Province, at local and global levels, to protect the environment and to address the underlying causes of poverty.

When we change at ground level, we effect change at all levels. Sustainability is not a popular conversation piece; it is our lifeline. As a way of living it informs all our daily choices from the water we drink to the clothes we buy to the food we eat... The choice of sustainability as our way of being, gives a living embrace to communion with all creation.

It is hoped that this publication will inspire the reader to deeper reflection, dialogue and collaboration on behalf of our common home, knowing, as Pope Francis pointed out, that it is the people who least cause the problem of climate change who suffer most.

"The proof of love is deed." - Catherine McAuley

Juliet Walsh (Provincial Leadership Team)



Provincial Leadership Team 2012 – 2018.
Front l-r: Anna Burke, Caitlín Conneely (Provincial Leader), Juliet Walsh.
Back: Mary Glynn and Breege Donohoe.

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Introduction

*When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees:
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze:
Then sing my soul my saviour God to thee,
How Great Thou Art! How great Thou Art!*

How Great Thou Art [Carol Gustav Boberg 1885]



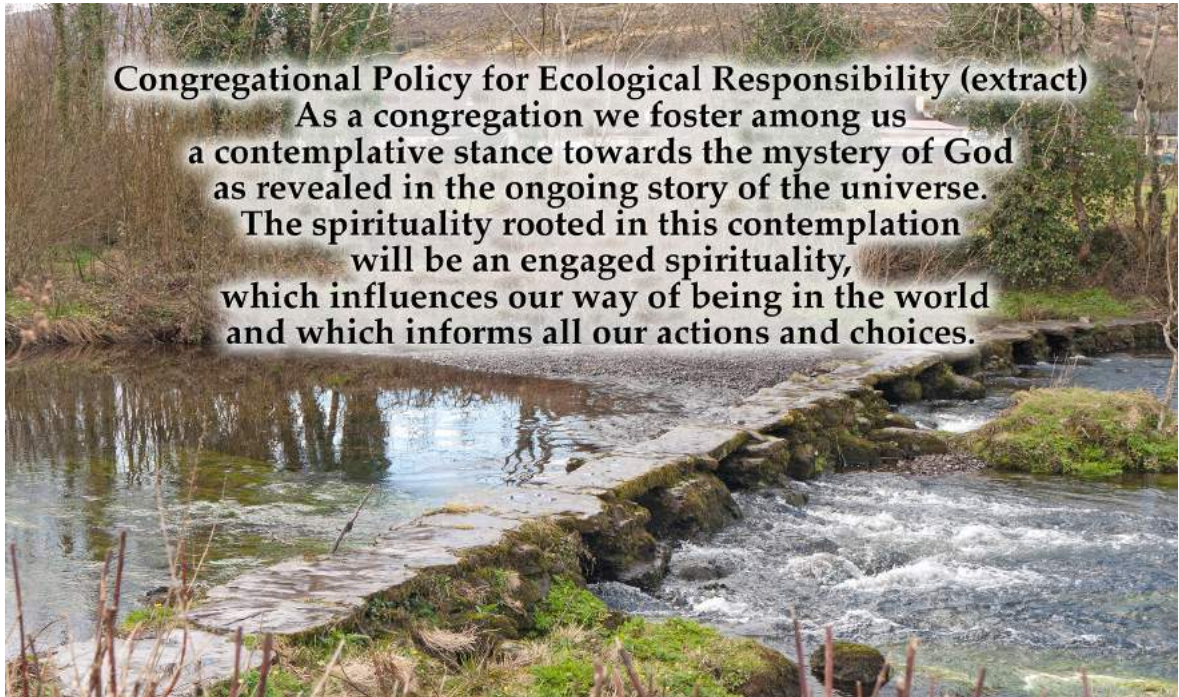
The predominately rural background of the Sisters of Mercy Western Province, as well as the attraction for things spiritual, have led them on an eco-friendly journey.

Environmental experts within the congregation and in the world of religion, science, theology and communication have further enlightened and nourished the seeds of awareness generating a new consciousness in the sisters.

I am reminded of many Sisters long gone to their eternal reward and their appreciation of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's (1881-1955) insights into the love, truth,

goodness and beauty that is an intrinsic part of the cosmos. This led them on a mystical journey. De Chardin perceived God, Christianity and science in a radical way and left the interpretation of his insights to future generations.

The Mercy Sisters have been fortunate to experience the development of these glimpses into the divine mystery, into the human person and into the new energies of love needed for the care of all life.



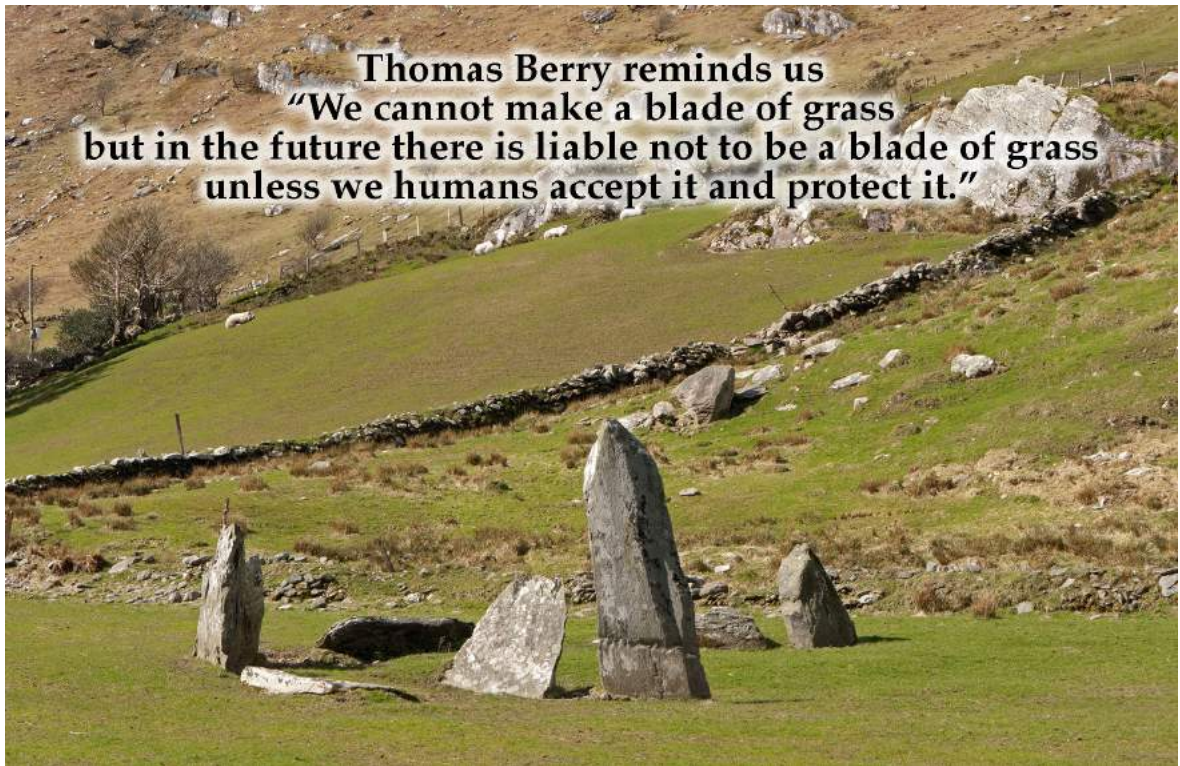
Down through the years of successive chapter gatherings, the congregation teased out new insights in mission statements and directives. The call to community, to lifestyle choices, to ecological awareness and to closeness to the poor has heightened our awareness. This has been affirmed with the publication of *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis in 2015.

Ilia Delio writes in the introduction to the book, *From Teilhard to Omega*:

"... for the first time since the appearance of human life on our planet, all the tribes, all the nations, all of the religions are beginning to share a common history, people are becoming aware of belonging to humanity as a whole and not to a specific group."

The intensity and suddenness of climate change and its consequent adverse effects on poorer people have a shared dimension. We are aware that small changes in one part of the planet's rhythms and systems can have significant if not irreparable consequences for the whole of the earth and its creatures. Our earth is an abundant

but a finite dynamic organism and needs to be maintained by our actions, so that all creation and peoples of all races and nations can live with the dignity which is their right.



In the following pages, you will read what the Sisters of Mercy in the Western Province are doing, in an effort to answer the Cry of the Earth, the Cry of our Common Home, the Cry of the Poor and the preservation of this wonderful world; a world, where the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat support life everywhere in the universe. Efforts to support the dream of ecological conversion have, in recent times, made humanity more sensitive to the catastrophe our planet faces.

The Paris COP21 [21st Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change] gathering agreed on a deal for climate justice. We are constantly reminded of our responsibilities in this matter.

What follows gives examples of the small steps we are taking in the areas of spirituality, practicality, community and our connection to the developing world, to make the dream a reality.

Mary Doherty

Part One: Sowing the Seed

*“Prayer is a plant, the seed of which is sown in the heart of every Christian.
If it is well cultivated and nourished, it will produce abundant fruit,
but if it is neglected it will wither and die.”*

Catherine McAuley

A scenic landscape view from a rocky hillside looking down at a coastal town and a large bay. The foreground shows a rocky, reddish-brown slope. Below it, a lush green valley contains a small town with white buildings and a church spire. The town is situated on a peninsula or near a large bay. The water is a deep blue-grey color. In the background, rolling green hills and mountains are visible under a cloudy sky.

Chapter One
Our Evolving Ecological Consciousness

Our Evolving Ecological Consciousness



“Since once again, Lord — though this time not in the forests of the Aisne but in the steppes of Asia — I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labors and sufferings of the world... My paten and my chalice are the depths of a soul laid widely open to all the forces which in a moment will rise up from every corner of the earth and converge upon the Spirit.”

Teilhard de Chardin, Mass on the World

“We need to move from a spirituality of alienation from the natural world to a spirituality of intimacy with the natural world; from a spirituality of the divine as revealed in verbal revelation to a spirituality of the divine as revealed in the visible world about us; from a spirituality concerned with justice merely to humans to a spirituality of justice to the devastated Earth community; from the spirituality of the prophet to the spirituality of the shaman. The sacred community must now be considered the integral community of the entire universe, more immediately the integral community of the planet Earth.”

***Thomas Berry, An Ecologically Sensitive Spirituality
in Minding the Spirit***

Our Monumental Shift In Consciousness

Today, new insights provide us with new understanding that call for a monumental shift in our consciousness.

From the early 80s onwards a number of influences were gently and gradually shifting our level of consciousness. The first of these influences came from modern science which gives us a new and comprehensive account of the story of our birth. The new Creation Story, which astounds and confounds, tells us that our universe came into being from a tiny explosion of light almost 14 billion years ago. It also tells us that our galaxy, the Milky Way, is but one of billions of galaxies, each with billions of stars. Our amazing universe is immense; it boggles the mind in any attempt to grasp its expanse. Perhaps the most mind blowing insight offered by the new Creation Story is the fact that since the first flaring forth of light nothing new has come into our universe: that tiny explosion of light contained the potential for all further created things. Everything in the universe is genetically related to us and to everything else because the elements in us and in every other being were formed in ancient stars: all life forms have deep kinship since all are formed of stardust.

Science told the story. Spiritual writers gave it meaning. The works of Teilhard de Chardin, palaeontologist, scientist and mystic, began to slowly influence our consciousness. Teilhard's synthesis of mysticism and science set our hearts on fire, even though we only caught glimpses of his vision. Through working with rock and stone Teilhard saw that matter is alive with an awesome vibrant presence. Mystically he was in tune with "... *the Divine radiating from the depths of a blazing Matter...*"

Building on the work of Teilhard, cultural historian Thomas Berry and cosmologist Brian Swimme affirmed his awareness of the sacredness of matter. For them, the entire universe and every part of it pulsates with bio-spiritual energy from the beginning. Our Mercy Congregational policy for Ecological Responsibility captures the essence of this insight as follows:

"A growing awareness that the spiritual and psychic energy is present in the Universe from the beginning and is the context in which we humans evolved, gives us a glimpse into the depth of the mystery within and around us."

The sacredness of Earth is a concept familiar to the Western Province. We grew up in a culture still glowing with embers of Celtic spirituality, a spirituality that saw the presence of the Holy One in all things. However, we had difficulty grasping the revelation that we did not come into Earth but grew out of it.

As Berry states,

*“In our totality we are born of the earth. We are earthlings.
The earth is our origin, our nourishment, our support, our guide.”*

As we grappled with the implications of these insights and pondered them in our hearts we came to realise that a monumental shift in our consciousness was needed and that this shift required a re-thinking of our understanding of God, ourselves, and our earth. The benign old man in the sky image of God faded before the Incomprehensible Mystery God of the new Creation Story. The imaging of the human as the centre of creation whose role was to have dominion of Earth was replaced by the new story's concept of the human as the consciousness of the cosmos, the universe having evolved to the point of being conscious of itself. Our role in this context is to admire, celebrate and protect the wonders of creation. The understanding of Earth as a static object to be used for our benefit changed to an awareness of Earth as an alive, breathing organism beautifully abundant yet finite.

Another important insight from modern science came through the work of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis who maintain that Earth is a self-regulating ecosystem, a biological organism in its own right. The understanding of Earth as a self-regulating eco-system where everything is interdependent and interconnected had a major influence on the environmental movement.

The environmental movement came to prominence with the publication of Rachel Carson's mind altering, earth altering book, *Silent Spring*. It presented a view of nature compromised by synthetic pesticides, especially DDT. Once these pesticides entered the biosphere, Carson argued, they not only killed bugs but also made their way up the food chain to threaten bird and fish populations and could eventually cause sickness in children. Following Carson's research, environmentalists worked diligently to make humans aware of how we are destroying the systems of Earth, thereby disturbing the balance of nature and slowly killing Mother Earth herself.

Through deep contemplation on these awe-inspiring, challenging insights from science and environmentalists, we slowly began to hear within ourselves the sound of Earth crying and to respond to that cry. Imperceptibly, we had changed our mind-set. The evolution of our ecological-awareness can be traced in the language and statements of our Chapters (our decision making gatherings that occur every six years). Throughout the 80s and 90s words like 'care of the earth,' 'interconnectedness,' 'stewardship of creation' begin to appear in our documents; compost heaps and recycling bins appear around our convents; an ecological awareness appears in our prayer and ritual.

At our 2007 Provincial Chapter the following statement, which led to our partnership with Vita, was formulated:

“We commit ourselves to share generously. We will support and resource discerned ministry needs at Congregational, Provincial and Local levels. We will heighten our awareness that our lifestyle choices contribute to extreme poverty.

The provincial Team will set up a Working Group to:

- *Research and identify areas of extreme poverty for a Provincial response*
- *Engage membership and others in this process*
- *Collaborate with relevant groups*
- *Implement, manage and evaluate.”*

It is clear from this statement that we are aware of how our lifestyle impacts directly on people who are poor, and though ‘poor earth’ is not specifically mentioned a heightened consciousness of the devastation humans are bringing to Earth was developing among us. The principle of collaboration mentioned in the statement springs from two sources. The first source comes from our understanding of how earth systems work together in harmony. The second source is a much more practical one: we are an aging province no longer able to give the commitment we gave, particularly in Africa, to working on behalf of poor people and our impoverished earth.

Our collaboration with Vita in southern Ethiopia enhanced our awareness of how our lifestyle choices impact on the lives of poor people particularly on those affected by climate change. Our partnership has also heightened our awareness of how our lifestyle can contribute to climate change.

The journey of our evolving consciousness is amazingly and beautifully acclaimed, and proclaimed in the call of our Congregational Chapter 2012. It reads:

“As we explore the heart of who we are as Sisters of Mercy and as we discern our mission in our time and in our evolving universe we ask:

- *In what ways might we respond anew, in hope, to our call to be a compassionate presence of God in our differing realities?*
- *In what ways will we deepen our understanding of the diversity that is among us?*
- *In what ways will we allow our place in the interdependent and interconnected community of all of life to influence us?”*

We continue our journey into greater awareness, knowing in the depth of our cosmic souls that the Chapter Statement is a radical call to reconnect with our deepest roots and to find our rightful place in the web of life as one species among many.

As we journey we remember the advice of farmer-poet Wendell Berry:

“And the world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles, no matter how long, but only by a spiritual journey, a journey of one inch, very arduous and humbling and joyful, by which we arrive at the ground at our own feet, and learn to be at home.”

The challenge at the 2007 Provincial Chapter (Gathering) is illustrated below:



This process of theological reflection, informed by the New Creation Story, leads into action.

Kathleen Glennon

Chapter Two
Vision in Action



Vision in Action



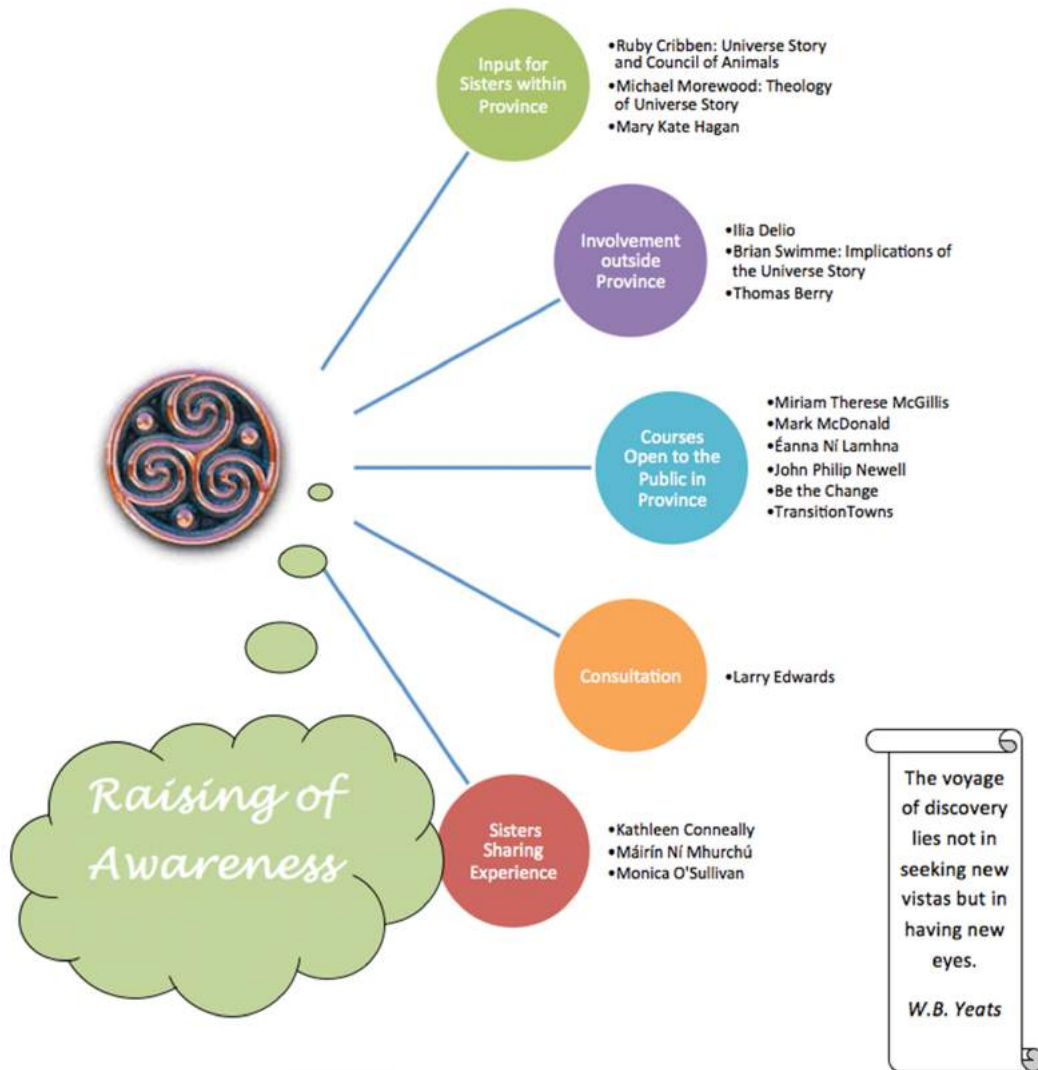
“Let ours be the time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice.”

Diarmuid Ó Murchú

“From the very beginning, the entire creation has been groaning in one great act of giving birth. And not only creation but all of us ... we too groan inwardly as we wait for our very selves to be set free.”

Romans 8:22-23

The seed of the evolving consciousness of the Western Province was helped in its germination by mutual engagement with many others, some of whom are illustrated here:



The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw – and knew I saw – all things in God and God in all things. *Mechthild of Magdeburg*

Programmes Promoted in the Western Province

Sustainable Living Kit: developed by Presentation Sisters;
and distributed to every community in the province.

Issue of Water Conservation: information flyer produced
and sent to every community in the province.

Questionnaire on Sustainable Living: sent to each sister
and results published in the province.

Places where our Sisters have studied Earth Literacy

Genesis Farm, New Jersey, USA

Sophia Centre, Holy Names University, California, USA

An Tairseach, Wicklow, Ireland

Centre for Ecology/Spirituality, Glenburn, Australia

Centre for Ecology/Spirituality, Tabgha Farm, Australia

Dalgan Park, Ireland in association with Lampeter University Wales

Publications by our Sisters on Environmental Themes

Books published by Kathleen Glennon are: *Earth Rituals for the Celtic Year, Healing and Wholeness* and *A Sense of Place*. Some of those published by Anna Burke are: *When Blessings Flow, Sacred The Hour, While They Were at Table* and *The Quality of Mercy*. Many of the Sisters of the Western Province write about the natural environment. Some of these are mentioned above. Among other contributions are poetry books by Rose Moran, Goretti Feeney and Rosalie Murray. Sisters

also contribute regularly to our Provincial Newsletter: *Scéalta ón Iarthar*. In the following article, Anna Burke shares her inspiration for writing:

At the Source

The character of the Emerald Isle may be changing rapidly but in some kind of an interesting and thought provoking way there are ancient elements that still rumble at the core. Many people who have long left the formal expression of religious tradition still join in when the Rosary is introduced, still walk the Way of the Cross on Good Friday and return with the family to the parish church for Midnight Mass. You could call it custom, routine, respectability but you could also call it hunger for the connection, for sustainability, for the Source. When I put pen to paper I am called into the moment by the common threads that weave the web of life in every changing time. This pulse beats across space and place and it spills out in word and song from land and sea and sky.

Sacred the Hour: The Rosary in Mystery recalls moments where human longing and the groan of creation come together to sing Ave. These moments are critical stopping points on the journey especially When Silence Falls in our lives and when the people gather in the cosmic prayer of love, broken and shared While They Were at Table. Although words can confine the impact of the River they also help us in a little way to converse with the flow and to hold the moment. When I write, I feel connected.

All my books are little books. They are about moments, the ones that take your breath away, where the very stones cry out. In *Where Blessings Flow* I am listening to the sacred touch anointing every blade of grass, the heather and the buttercup, filling the senses with the Holy Water. In this ecological environment of holy presence, blessings flow in a Living Spring.

When I wrote *When Silence Falls* I was attempting to contribute to the ancient and deeply valued prayer journey of the Stations of the Cross. Again the words took me into the universal story of sorrow and gladness, of falling and rising, of sunrise and sunset. I saw again his blood upon the rose and his cross in every tree. I had often wondered how the Stations of the Cross have outlived the changing cultural landscape and the answer seems to lie in their universal language and in the connection they weave with the cry of the earth and the silence of the lambs.

In 2012, Ireland hosted the Eucharistic Congress. We recalled 1932 and how the people gathered back then to sit together at the table of the world. When I wrote *While They Were at Table* I was aware that a Eucharistic Congress is a meeting of the nations where the Bread of Life is shared. It is the ultimate evolutionary action attracting all things into the fullness of being.

In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that Christian charity “is first of all the simple response to immediate needs and specific situations.” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 46). “Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbour. The concept of ‘neighbour’ is now universalised, yet it remains concrete.” (DCE, 15). The book *In The Secret of My Heart*, which I wrote in 2010, is inspired by the call of Benedict XVI to a heart that “sees where love is needed and acts accordingly,” (31b).

The call of Pope Francis to a Jubilee Year of Mercy has deepened the conversation and in unfolding God’s Mercy we experience what a universal language sounds like and how easily it is read across the boundaries of history and geography. In *The Quality of Mercy* I look again at Mercy, pouring from the Heart of Jesus, written in the question. It was to this quality that they came for sustenance and healing; it is to this quality that we look in unfailing hope for climate justice, the kind that opens the door and sets us free.

Anna Burke (Provincial Leadership Team)

Chapter Three
Spirituality



Spirituality



*“Now the ears of my ears awaken
the eyes of my eyes are opened.”*

E.E. Cummings

“Sophia says... God created me when his purpose first unfolded, before the oldest of God’s works...I was by God’s side, a craftsperson, delighting God day after day, ever at play in God’s presence, at play everywhere in the world, and pleased with the human race.”

Proverbs 8

“Life is a rhythm of losing and finding: every little search reflects the yearning for completion, stirring the heartbeat of all creation.”

Anna Burke, The Quality of Mercy

Centering Prayer as a Means to Transformation of Consciousness

Tom O'Connor, a businessman living in Ballinrobe, once said to me, *"If you want to get something done properly, get the cailíns to do it."* His reference to *the girls* was to the Mercy Sisters of the local community, whom he saw as being dedicated women, achieving a lot with few resources. This has been our *modus operandi* as religious since our foundation in 1831, as we developed a rigorous work ethic for what was seen as a greater good. Yet, Catherine McAuley herself wrote *"...above all things, constant, fervent prayer."* This spiritual dimension of our lives is the source from which we draw strength and inspiration.

When doing an MA in Applied Christian Spirituality, I did my thesis on Centering Prayer, a type of meditative or contemplative practice. It derives from the life of Jesus, when, in the midst of his short ministry, he spent time in the desert and often took comfort in solitary prayer. Jesus' life inspired the early Desert Elders, when they left all material possessions and faced what they termed inner demons. The wisdom they garnered was revived by a Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, who identified the influence of their prayer as being of enormous significance on the world of their day. Society went through a major shift at that time, changing from being tribal in nature to what we would now identify as being modern. This shift has been termed as a development to the first Axial Age.

This revival was further developed by another Trappist monk, Thomas Keating. He and some of his community went back to many Christian sources of contemplative prayer, notably the fourteenth century book, *The Cloud of Unknowing*. What is now known as Centering Prayer came from these sources and is practiced by many across the world. It is a simple way of prayer, whereby one spends daily time in silence, with the intention of inviting God's presence within, repeating a short, sacred word. It involves handing over the prayer time to the Divine, so as to be led by the Spirit through all the events of the day.

Looking at how our human way of living as a species affects climate change, causes war and propagates extreme inequality of resources, it is clear that our lifestyle has to change. Our standard of living damages the very fabric of life itself. If we do not choose an alternative way to live on our beautiful but fragile home planet we, and many more of our companions in the web of life, will perish. We need to come to our senses and choose to live in a radically different way, one that is being recognised as the second Axial Age.

In my thesis, I wanted to explore how Centering Prayer could be a practice that could be an enabler of this shift to the new Axial Age. When writing my thesis, I

invited some Mercy Sisters to participate in the study. Narrowing my focus, I chose to invite sisters who had entered religious life before Vatican II and who had lived in Ireland during the previous twenty years. This meant that they had lived through enormous change in religious life, as well as being the subject of much controversy following the *Ryan Report (The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse)*. In this way, I could measure if the practice of Centering Prayer could be an influence in healing of past hurt, as well as being something that could enable a change of heart.

The chosen *cailíns*, over the weeks of Lent, dedicated themselves to the twice daily practice of Centering Prayer and, true to Tom O'Connor's words, came through with flying colours. The interviews they gave showed clearly that this contemplative prayer method can indeed change hearts and open people to a new way of living.



By its nature, my research was limited, needing to focus on a small group of people. Nevertheless, it has demonstrated the powerhouse for change that exists among our sisters. Contemplative prayer is practiced in many of our communities and is being opened to many of the wider community on a constant basis. It is part of a much larger, global movement that holds great potential for that much desired leap of faith into a completely new moment of evolution. The practice of meditation is a scientifically verified means of flexing the inner muscles that are part of moving beyond routine action into ego-diminished, radical change. The perennial demons,

natural to the human spirit, continue to manifest themselves today though we give them new names. What had been termed gluttony by the Desert Elders might be recognised in modern consumerism. The demon of lust might be recognised in different addictions today. One of the worst demons was named by the Desert Elders as *accidie*. This extreme listlessness or lack of willingness to act could be identified today in the insidious presence of depression in contemporary society. Such passivity or sense of being ineffective as an individual might be identified as a reason for not taking action in the face of injustice.

At the same time, what has been called subtle activism is making a difference. One of the participants in my study was able to cite the lowering of anti-social behaviour in an area through the establishment of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the local church. Some say that the first place to rectify environmental damage is through admiration of the natural world. The bottom line is that doing tasks alone cannot solve the problem – we must begin with a change of heart, moving from a place of transformed consciousness.

Suzanne Ryder

Catherine Coleman was the first person to bring Centering Prayer to Ireland. While in ministry in the USA, she got to know Basil Pennington, a member of Thomas Keating's community. He was one of the first to formulate Centering Prayer as a modern method. Catherine introduced it to the Star of the Sea Retreat Centre in Mullaghmore when she worked there. Now that she has moved to Galway, she shares it with different groups.





A meditation group meets regularly in the Árd Bhríde community in Castlebar.

Bethany Bereavement Support

“Love, speaking in silence is the way into another’s grief,” (Basil Hume OSB). This sums up Bethany Bereavement Support Group ministry. It is a parish-based group ministry which aims to help those bereaved and grieving. Support is offered on a one-to-one basis in the home, by phone, to groups in drop-in centres and help is given at liturgies, if requested. The distinctive features of Bethany are that the group does not wait to be asked, but initiates contact with the grieving family, every family is visited irrespective of religion, nationality or cause of death and the spiritual dimension of grief is recognised.

Death is a fact of life and something each of us experiences many times. In Ireland, in the past, death was a community event accompanied by specific rites and sacred rituals. The entire neighbourhood was involved in providing practical assistance and emotional support to the bereaved. The bereaved were given the time and the space to openly mourn their loved one. Sadly, for many, these wise, long-established customs have well-nigh disappeared. The growth in the number of nursing homes, hospices and funeral parlours coupled with the change in the fabric of our society have led to the demise of some wholesome traditions concerning death and dying.

Dr Elizabeth Kubler Ross's research for her book *On Death and Dying* was done, mainly, in Columbian Presbyterian Medical Center, New York. It was in that centre that Fr Myles O'Reilly SJ, began working as a chaplain in 1975. On his return to Ireland in 1982, he initiated retreats in Milltown Park, titled *Death - A Christian Response*. From these retreats, Bethany Support Groups were born. Training began and in 1986 the first Bethany groups were established.

In 2007, this ministry spread to the west. In a survey done on the needs of the parish of Athenry, support for the bereaved topped the list. A group of twelve in the parish offered to get involved. The National Executive of Bethany was approached leading to my being trained as a Co-ordinator/Trainer. Esker Retreat House near Athenry seemed the obvious venue for training, but how would people feel about a twelve-week course there and where would I find people with the expertise to deliver aspects of the course outside my areas of specialisation? I shared my concerns with Frs. Tony King PP and Johnny Doherty CSSR, and we agreed to form a west of Ireland core group of volunteers interested in promoting Bethany. Within a few weeks, we had a clinical psychologist, a palliative care nurse, a psychotherapist, a third-level chaplain with graduate qualifications in bereavement, and a pastoral care worker dealing with families affected by suicide on board. The enthusiasm and generosity of this group convinced me that the hand of God was in this venture, and all would be well.

The essential modules of the course are skills of listening and empathy, self-awareness, stages of grief, the grieving process, grief related to the death of a child and death by suicide, coping with loss and change, group facilitation, forgiveness, funeral liturgies, the structures of a parish group, finance... The final day is a mini-retreat. Through prayer, reflection, sharing, rituals, symbols and hymns, trainees face their own journey through grief. Esker Retreat House is an excellent venue to explore the spiritual aspects of grief. The chapels and the grounds offer beautiful space for prayer and reflection. To date, we have trained about 24 parish groups consisting of men and women of all ages. We also trained a group from Northern Ireland.

God has blessed every step of Bethany's journey into the west. I see this ministry of consolation as very much in keeping with our Mercy charism, and Pope Francis's challenge to be people of compassion. I am greatly heartened by the generosity, commitment and enormous goodness of both the core group and those we have trained. I see real hope for our Church because people are being given a more active role in their parishes, especially in liturgy. It is a privilege and a joy to be part of a movement which enables people to enter the sacred space of compassionate listening. This is holy ground and as Macrina Weidekeher writes :

*“Blessed are you if you can offer to others a heart that feels their sorrow;
a heart that can wait quietly beside them;
a heart that doesn’t try to hurry the healing;
a heart big enough to embrace the mystery of another’s grief.”*

Seasons of the Heart



Mary Glennon

Christian Meditation

Rita Mc Garty is part of a group that meets for Christian Meditation in Sligo. Approximately thirty people meet on a weekly basis, following the style of meditation developed by John Main. Jesus prayed for oneness, so when they pray, they feel the connection with all on the planet. The space in which they meet is small but they believe such groups send the energy of love to the ends of the universe. There is no limit to the ripple effects!



The Ecological Dimension of St Michael's Family Life Centre, Sligo

In 1995, the diocese of Elphin offered a beautiful building with its own grounds to the people of Sligo for family services. This was an exciting and challenging moment for all those in this place at that time. From the beginning, we saw its potential - an attractive house in the womb of nature. It was an ideal setting to implement our mission statement: *“St Michael's Family Life Centre promotes the wellbeing of the family through education for relationships with God, with each other and our earth.”*



Long before *Laudato Si'* the centre community was aware of the importance of cultivating and nurturing the beauty of earth. This in turn enriched visitors to the centre. As people walked up the avenue to this place of hospitality, which is the Family Life Centre, they experienced the healing effect of shrubs and flowers. The trees at the back are a reminder that all things change. The mountains that can be seen from the front invite us to seek what is permanent.

One of the first ecological projects developed by the centre was a community garden for the organic growing of vegetables. As well as learning skills of gardening and composting there is a magic in picking one's own vegetables straight from the earth. This is true especially for people who grew up in urban areas. This work was supported by a monthly newsletter on the environment. In conjunction with this project we organised organic cookery classes. Once a year, staff and volunteers brought our best vegetables to the Organic Centre in Rossinver, where we had a celebratory meal together. Long after the food was eaten the camaraderie lingered. Frequent seminars, with an ecological dimension, continue to this day.



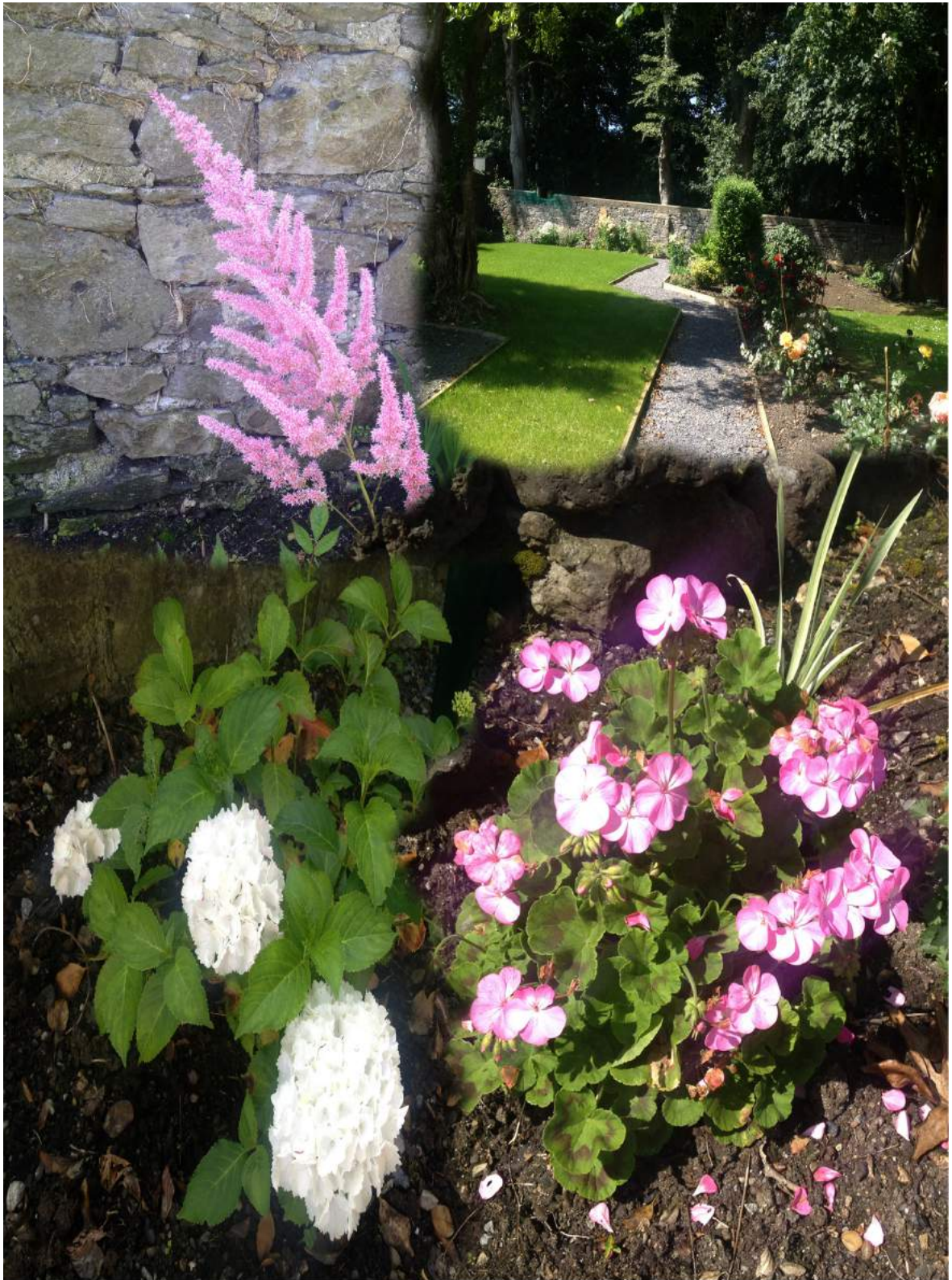
The natural world is never far from the life of the Centre. I remember dancing the Dances of Universal Peace outside on the lawn in our bare feet. Here we experienced our God, each other and our earth. For me these were moments of bliss. In moments of sorrow, nature also befriends us by providing a healing space. At one stage, the centre developed a support group for women who lost babies through miscarriage. It was known as *CALM - Care After Loss Through Miscarriage*. As part of the grieving process the group planted a rockery on Good Friday in memory of their precious



children. The gardener tends this plot with care in respect for the pain of those who created it.

When the Centre reached its twentieth anniversary what better way to mark this significant occasion than to plant a celebratory garden. A neglected piece of earth was transformed into a place of beauty. This is a gentle oasis in a sometimes fast and furious world, a space to reflect, to meditate or just sit quietly and discover who we are expected to be. Surrounded by a multitude of species we find our unique place on the planet. On a summer day one can feast on a riot of colour from a variety of roses, gelaniums, dahlias, salvias, aubretia to name but a few. This is a soulful place. Truly, *'One is nearer to God in a garden than anywhere else on earth.'*

Rita Mc Garty



Breda Fadden is one of the many sisters in the Western Province who is trained in the art of Spiritual Companionship. As well as meeting people in this role, she provides one-to-one bereavement support in Galway City. The centre is grant-funded and can therefore be offered as a free service.



Bernardine Morrisroe

Bernardine Morrisroe is a Prayer Guide at Knock Shrine. Prayer Guidance invites people to take some quiet time each day for a week. They can share how they feel themselves being led by the Spirit with a trained guide. In this way, they have the opportunity to look at their lives and to appreciate their gifts. Several of our sisters serve in this role, in Knock and elsewhere.



Goretti Bohan

Patients and their families need great care while in a hospital. As well as care of the body, they require pastoral care. **Goretti Bohan**, one of our sisters in Galway,

engages in this ministry in the Bon Secours Hospital in Galway. Others among us have engaged in this ministry of chaplaincy in different hospitals over the years.



Pilgrimage and ritual are other ways that we celebrate and share our spirituality.



Sr Berkmans meditating on the Stations of the Cross.

Spiritual Renewal

I had the opportunity of spending a few great weeks being exposed to the message of the *An Tairseach Ecology Centre* in Wicklow in the Spring of 2014. It was only after I came away that I realised the great grace it was for me and how it has affected my sense of God and my spirituality. I had previously spent many years in Kenya in busy work environments, and despite participating in many 'spiritual' exercises my faith had not 'developed' much from the 70s and 80s. It was now like as if I was given permission to question, but more so it opened up a very rich understanding of the universe and God, and the spiritual treasure of looking at creation and all of life in the light of evolution. We were exposed to a certain amount of ecology, e.g. organic farming, climate change, global warming and its consequences, and the greenhouse gas effect which is mainly caused by 'first' world pollution and extravagance.

In the many years I was in Kenya it was at times very evident that climate change is taking hold. Periods known as 'the rainy seasons' were shortening and becoming more unreliable, resulting in poorer crop yields. Overgrazing of the land and felling of trees for firewood contributed to soil erosion and expansion of the semi-arid or even semi-desert and desert conditions. Add to this the increased population growth and you have a situation where many people remain in a subsistence mode of existence.

The population of Kenya has increased by a factor of more than six times since independence in 1963! Population growth has been due to exposure to modern medicine (albeit limited), better nutrition and increased longevity. Education has opened the minds of rural peoples to modern life and they want the best for themselves and their families, as we do. Modern technology is enabling them to 'skip' a few generations of struggle that was so much part of our history.

I often feel the institutional Church does not acknowledge the fact that a high percentage of our people today are highly educated. It continues to preach pious platitudes which belong to a past age and which no longer address the vital questions which science and modern thinking raise in our minds. I wonder if the 'official' church will take Francis's *Laudato Si'* seriously.

One of the greatest spiritual thinkers of the 20th century, Teilhard de Chardin, is still *persona non grata* in the Church. His writings, and the more recent writings of Ilia Delio and John Feehan, hold profound treasures of thought which delight the soul and bring together factual science and its implications for our faith and living.

Marian Dolan (recently returned Missionary)

Part Two: Green Shoots

*“But ask the beasts to teach you, and the birds of the air to tell you;
or the reptiles on earth to instruct you, and the fish of the sea to inform you.*

Which of all these does not know that the hand of God has done this?

*In God’s hand is the soul of every living thing,
and the life breath of all humankind.”*

Job 12: 7-10

*“A flourishing humanity on a thriving planet rich in species in an evolving universe,
all together filled with the glory of God: such is the vision that must guide us
at this critical time of Earth’s distress, to practical and critical effect.”*

Elizabeth Johnson, Ask the Beasts



Chapter Four

An Gáirdín

*"The difficulty is that we began to think of the universe
as a collection of objects rather than a communion of subjects."*

Thomas Berry

An Gáirdín



An Gáirdín Organic and Ecology Centre.



Anne Mills feeds the hens at An Gáirdín.

Twenty-five years ago a community of Mercy Sisters in Portumna, Co Galway set aside a portion of land which they called *An Gáirdín*, (the Irish for garden). They built a house/ dwelling using sustainable design, materials and energy. The installing of the geothermal heating system was remarkably innovative at that time. They set out with a modest vision and a desire to be open to recovering that lost and forgotten connection with the land, that mutual relationship between human and the land. They were aware that the road is made by walking.

Looking back on those twenty-five years, they realise that *An Gáirdín* has been an inner as well as an outer journey. They are one journey. The source of their journey has been the Universe Story as the New Creation Story. Opening to the Universe Story has enabled an ongoing change of consciousness within the congregation and also within the wider community.

An Gáirdín is more than a nice patch with an interesting variety of plants. It is about relationships, not only with other human beings but with the land and with all manifestations of life. It is about opening ourselves to that intimacy with all other species that is innate in us by virtue of our genetic origins. We will respect that with which we have an intimate relationship; we will not destroy that which we love. This vision is not merely about sustainable actions. It is no less than we humans coming to a new and radical understanding of who we are in the context of everything else. We are moving into a new identity as a species, a new identity of who we are and of our place in the great web of life. This means a radical change of consciousness, a radical conversion that does not happen in an instant but comes piecemeal as gift when we open ourselves.



An Gáirdín invites others into this vision through its programmes, e.g. organic horticulture courses, herb production and herbal medicine courses, creating wildflower meadow workshops, cooking classes, etc. There is an ongoing study group who read and reflect on the implications of living out the Creation Story. *An Gáirdín* implements the *Living Beings* module of the *Discover Primary Science and Maths Programme*. It works closely with the local biodiversity group, *Port Omna Beo Nature and Wildlife Group*. They organise biodiversity training programmes, field outings and various events highlighting aspects of biodiversity.



Caroline Lalor, M. Sc, MCIEEM, Ecologist demonstrating bio-diversity.

Celebration is an integral part of life at *An Gáirdín*: aware that we are part of the natural world and tuning into the flow of the changing seasons, the solstices and equinoxes are celebrated.

The practical living out of *An Gáirdín's* vision touches every detail of life, from the moment of rising in the morning to retiring at night. One grows into increasing awareness of every decision, even the smallest one; what one wears, eats, drinks,

cleans, washes, where one shops and what one buys. Where and how one travels and recreates are no longer routine activities. Sensory awareness becomes increasingly fine-tuned as one awakens to the subtle nuances of sound, colour, scent and taste of the surrounding natural world. One grows into a sense of being one community of plant, animal and human. One becomes aware that one's language changes. What we once defined as resource becomes gift because one's relationship has changed. What was once it or object becomes subject. Likewise, by changing the language, the relationship changes.

The outward expression of *An Gáirdín's* vision can be summarised under three headings: Sustainable Horticulture, Sustainable Energy and Sustainable Building. They overlap in many ways:

Sustainable Horticulture: This entails growing food and teaching others to do so in a way that is mindful and respectful of the integrity of the soil, its millions of organisms and of all the elements. *An Gáirdín* supplies a small weekly local country market as well as food for the community needs.

Sustainable Energy: The visible expressions of renewable energy are the geothermal and air-to-air heating systems. They are both heat-pump technologies. There are three wood-burning stoves – two in the house and one in the centre. These are fuelled mainly from the prunings of the garden and backed up with wooden logs manufactured locally from waste wood. The training room is insulated with hemp and warmcell. (Hemp is perhaps the most versatile plant on the planet – it will grow in most climates including the Irish climate, can be used for clothing, building, insulating and as food or medicine. Warmcell is recycled shredded newspaper, treated for fire and vermin.) There is a solar panel to heat the hot water. Low-energy light bulbs are used and there is minimum outdoor lighting. There is minimum office paper printing. Eco-friendly cleaning materials are used.

Composting holds pride of place in the overall story of *An Gáirdín*. Nature is the model and teacher of all aspects of life at *An Gáirdín* and there is no waste in nature. There is constant regeneration. In composting, *An Gáirdín* is also aware of making its small contribution to regeneration of soil in the context of the great erosion of topsoil that is taking place locally and globally.

Sustainable Building: The dwelling, built in 1991, is a timber-framed building with some recycled materials used in the construction. The small training centre is a recycled wooden building. 99% of the building and its furnishings are recycled. The slates are made from the plastic parts of the insides of old cars. The inside walls are hemp and lime-plastered. There is an underground rainwater harvesting system

holding 4,000 gallons of water. A henhouse is built from cob. (Cob is a mixture of subsoil, water and straw, built manually and is a highly sustainable building method.)

At *An Gáirdín* the road is made by walking. In the spirit of the *New Cosmic Creation Story*, life evolves. One tunes in with Earth's unfolding story. The vision at *An Gáirdín* is: once one takes the first step on this road there is no turning back. They believe there is no other way. There comes a great sense of wonder, freedom and gratitude.



Wood burning stove in the meeting room.

It is fuelled by eco-logs produced locally and by prunings of the local trees.

Every culture has its Creation/Origin story. Origin stories answer the very fundamental questions about birth, suffering, death, afterlife; questions like, 'Who am I?' 'Where did I come from?' 'What is my relationship with everybody and everything else?' Answering such questions creates an ordered cohesive, functioning society. Out of the story come the shape and type of institutions we have - our economic, educational, political, religious, health systems, etc. Our story in the western world is a combination of the biblical Genesis story, ancient Greek influence and nineteenth-

century science. It does not serve us any longer because we now know scientifically that our universe evolved over 14 billion years. Teilhard de Chardin (Jesuit priest) recognised that the process of evolution could be understood as a sacred process, as our origin story. Chardin was Thomas Berry's (Passionist priest) inspiration because he carried on and expanded Chardin's vision. He articulated that our Western origin story is no longer effective, though it served us in the past, and that we are between stories. Berry took the science of evolution and formulated the evolutionary story of the 14 billion years as the new *Universe Story*.

At *An Gáirdín*, we continue to deepen, reflect on and study the Universe Story and its implications. We find that ritualising the new Universe Story (as created by Genesis Farm in New Jersey), to be powerfully transformative. Our desire is to invite others into this new vision. Some ways we do this are: A Study Group / Earth Circle; Schools' Programme (Discover Primary Science and Maths Programme including a module on 'Living Beings'); Courses: Organic Gardening and Sustainable Cooking; Workshops: on biodiversity, planting native flowers and trees, nature walks, etc. All of these seek new ways of sharing the wisdom and depth of the Universe Story.



Noreen Lyons, Anne Mills and Máirín Ní Mhurchú

About your visit:

- Please bring packed lunches
- Be sure to dress appropriately for the weather
- Cost is €8 per child

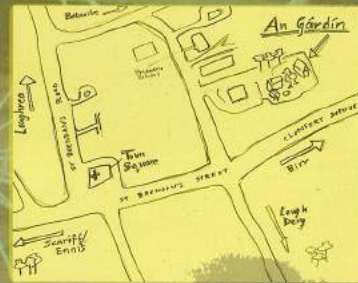
We endeavour to provide every visitor with an enjoyable day of learning, highlighting the wonderful diversity of our little corner of this planet.



"We will seek to give our children not only life and education but a Planet with pure air and bright waters and fruitful fields, a Planet that can be lived upon with grace and beauty and a touch of human and earthly tenderness"
- Thomas Berry.

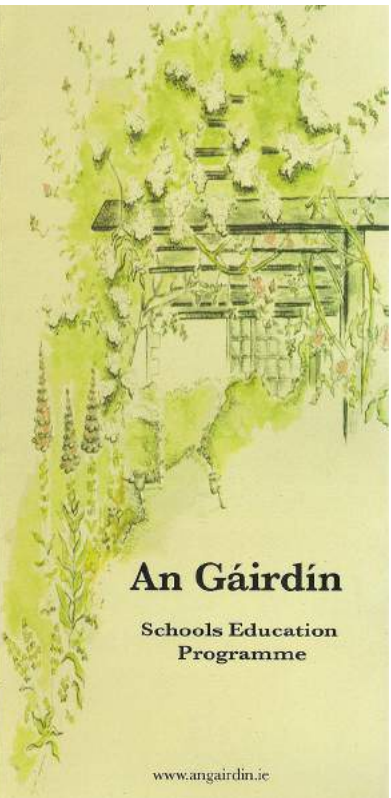
An Gáirdín Programmes and Activities:

- organic horticulture courses
- biodiversity education
- organic vegetarian cooking classes
- traditional skills workshops
- DIY workshops
- Be the Change Symposium
- tree/native hedgerow planting
- solstice and equinox celebrations
- ongoing study group on the implications of the Universe Story



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Organic & Ecology Centre
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An Gáirdín

Schools Education Programme

www.angairdin.ie



At An Gáirdín here in Portumna, we cherish and celebrate the natural world as a wonderful web of interconnectedness and interdependence.

An Gáirdín - A Collection of Habitats:

Our organic garden, wildlife areas, hens, orchards, ponds, trees, native hedgerows, herbs and flowers provide the ideal place for children to immerse themselves in the world of nature.

Renewable Technologies

Children see first-hand and real functioning renewable technologies: geothermal heating system, solar panels, rainwater harvesting, natural insulation, cob building, cob oven, a completely recycled building - IONTAS

An Gáirdín is a recognised, accredited Discover Primary Science Centre. A visit to our gardens fulfils the criteria of DPSM to achieve the award of excellence.



All our activities incorporate and link the four strands of the SESE curriculum.

Our programme aims to:

- nurture the love and respect that children instinctively have for nature by exploring our collection of habitats.
- awaken each child's appreciation of their own place in the ever-evolving Story of the Universe.
- provide hands on engagement with nature's produce in a vegetable collecting and soup-making activity.



Depending on the season our Fun Activities include:

- enacting the Universe Story
- exploring An Gáirdín's native hedgerows and planting native hedgerows
- making soup from the garden's produce
- a wonder trail
- a tour of our garden.

Chapter Five

An Fóidín Glas

“We take these [ecosystems] into account not only to determine how best to use them, but also because they have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness. Each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself.”

Laudato Si’ 140



An Fóidín Glas



Spreading the message - Green Sod/*An Fóidín Glas* members in a community parade.

*Green Sod Ireland/*An Fóidín Glas**

The Sisters of Mercy, who have been many years in education, recognised how important it is in promoting and encouraging public awareness of the necessity of conserving land and protecting biodiversity for the sake of future generations of all species.

In recent times, an awakening has been taking place regarding our role in the life of planet earth. We have learned how we humans and millions of other-than-human species evolved over 14 billion years. However, the relationship we have had with Earth was essentially human centred and, while laudable, was lacking in concern for other forms of life on our home planet. It was only with the disappearance of some forms of life that we became aware of the intrinsic value of nature, regardless of its value in relation to us.

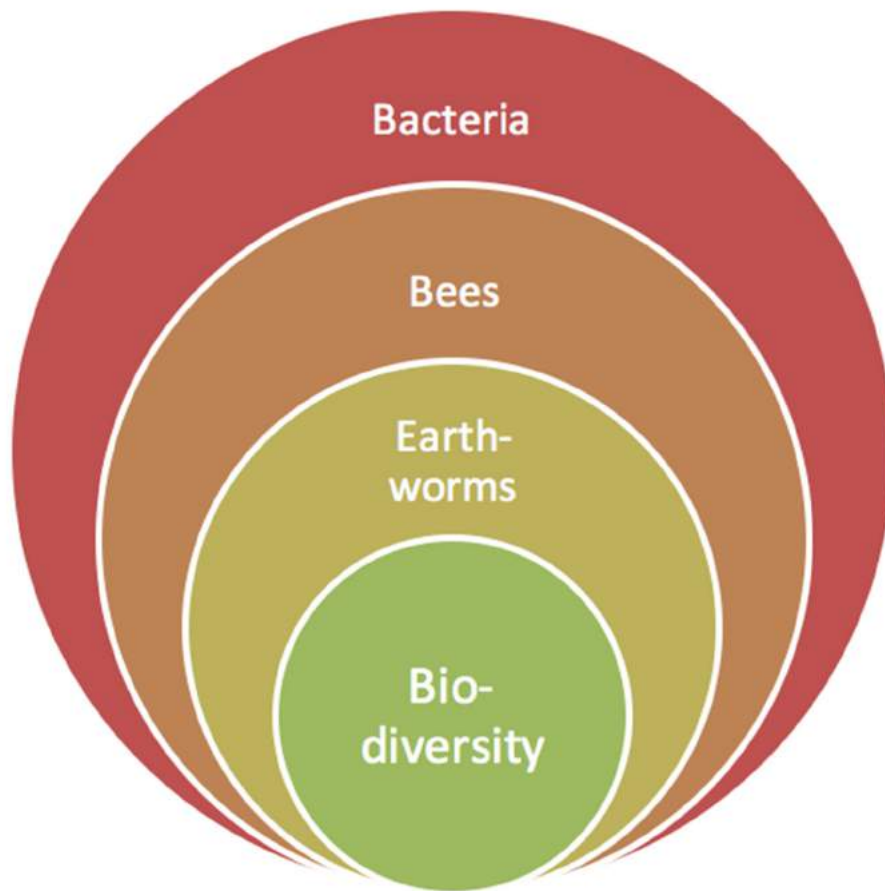
Máirín Ní Mhurchú explains the origin of *An Fóidín Glas*: *“Back in the late nineties I was looking for a name or title that would be an umbrella for any kind of earth-centred project in which I might engage. Goretti Feeney came up with An Fóidín Glas (The Little Green Sod) which I loved because I thought that organic growing might be a possibility. A request from a teacher in a very small school near Crossmolina to ‘do’ something with the children brought me on a totally different path. I remembered Thomas Berry’s command/appeal to tell the story and so I began – and it took time – to develop a version of the Universe Story that would be suitable for primary schools. I was fortunate to meet up with Sharon Cameron, newly appointed Environmental Awareness Officer with Mayo County Council, who was then promoting the Green Schools Programme throughout the county. She supported and sponsored me down the years. When filling out necessary forms for the County Council, Eco-Literacy best described what I was doing in schools.*

When two visionary and pioneering women (one of them a friend of mine) set up a land trust (Green Sod Ireland) in 2007 and were looking for an Irish translation, it seemed appropriate to offer them ‘my’ Fóidín Glas. Goretti Feeney gave her blessing to the transfer. In 2014, I felt the need to re-imagine my approach to working in schools. To give me space and time to experiment I terminated my partnership with Mayo County Council. Since then I have been a volunteer under the Green Sod Ireland/ An Fóidín Glas Education Programme. There is now a sense of having come ‘full circle’ back to An Fóidín Glas.”

In 2008, when biodiversity became a Green Flag theme, Máirín developed *The Food We Eat Programme*. This illustrates our dependence on biodiversity, which is in essence, the variety of life on planet Earth. Special emphasis is given to bees, earthworms and bacteria because they are essential for the growing of food.

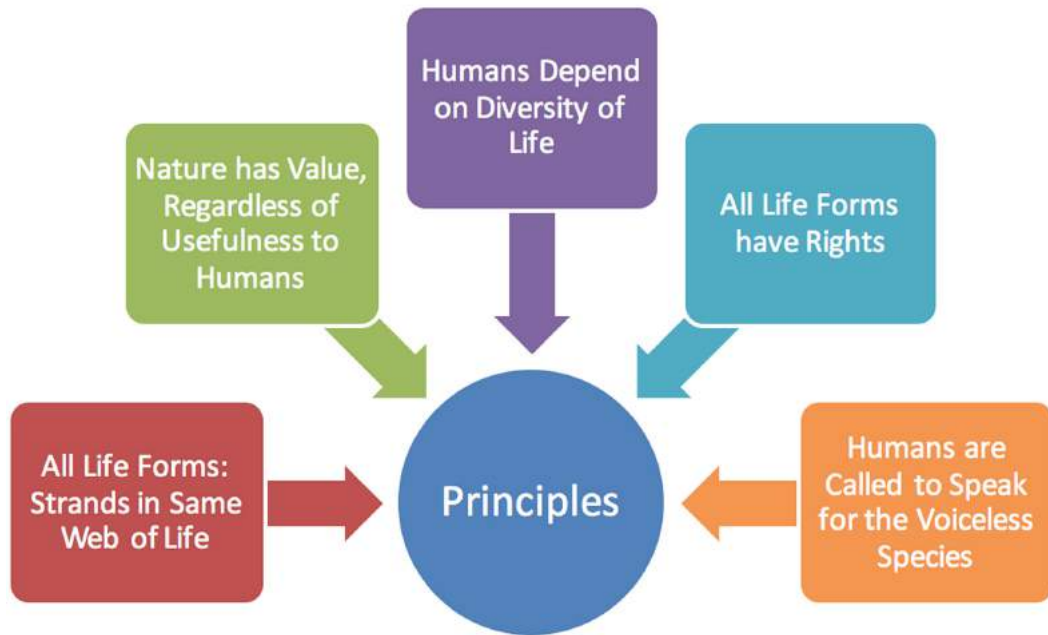
This programme includes preparing soup *from scratch* in the classroom, learning the principles and practice of organic growing, composting and creating a web of life telling the story of creation. One teacher contrasted an initial reluctance to even consider eating homemade soup in a class, to the sheer delight of the pupils as they queued up for second helpings. This programme has been taken up by 140 schools in Mayo, with requests for repeat sessions over the years.

Since 2014, Máirín has been updating the above programmes working now as a *Green Sod Ireland/An Fóidín Glas* volunteer. Her hope is to keep the story of the universe/ biodiversity as a core theme. Máirín now goes to fewer schools, preferring to spend more time in each one, as she develops a broader presentation. She offers modules that can be chosen by schools, e.g. organic growing, biodiversity and food, all through the medium of songs, poems, etc. She combines an enactment of the Universe Story



with engagement of the children in reflection on the Web of Life, through learning where food comes from. Ever creative, Máirín has written lively lyrics to songs that tell the stages of the Universe Story and has put them to traditional Irish airs. They may be heard by linking to <http://www.greensodireland.ie/education.php>

In each programme and session, emphasis on the following themes and principles is made:



We may note that the recognition of nature having a value in itself predates such an understanding in *Laudato Si'*!



Máirín has also brought her programme to the Mercy community in Árd Bhríde, Castlebar, Ireland.

Máirín Ní Mhurchú



A winter landscape with snow-covered trees and a clear blue sky. The foreground is filled with snow-laden bushes and trees, leading to a field of snow-covered trees in the middle ground. In the background, a line of dark evergreen trees is visible against the sky.

Chapter Six

Rural Development

*"We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world
in which the local and the global are linked."*

UN Statement

Rural Development



Reflection on Community Development in Rural Mayo Over Forty Years

How privileged I have been to work as a community development worker in Co Mayo for the last forty years. Having worked with *Teagasc* as a paid Home Farm Management Advisor, for practically thirty years, I then took up a position as voluntary co-ordinator of the *Tóchar Valley Rural Community Network* for the last sixteen years. Over the years I have gained fantastic experience and insight into identifying what are the essential building blocks of community development and rural revitalisation. I have learnt that people must be at the hub of their own community building. Consequently, much time and energy must be invested in training and empowering the people. Local people must engage in programmes of animation and capacity building in leadership, group work skills and good communication skills. It is only when people are adequately equipped to manage their own development that they will be capable of taking ownership and moving forward.

In 1998-1999, I assisted the communities of southwest Mayo to take up the challenge to address the problems that were becoming more evident every day, because of

the decline in production agriculture. This would dramatically change life in rural Ireland. They were dismayed by some of the changes, tired of a weak rural voice, but recognising the strength of co-operation and potential opportunities. Leaders and community members from twelve communities of the *Tóchar Valley* area (from Balla to Murrisk) came together to regenerate their space. They did not set out to stop change, rather they sought opportunity to manage change and create a modern rural way of life that would understand, respect and enrich their heritage.

The *Tóchar Valley* founders created a regional network to empower local residents to control and manage local resources for local benefit. Such a network enabled diverse groups and organisations to co-operate for various reasons, supporting the search for solutions to shared problems. With communities and other groups functioning interdependently, problems were addressed from numerous perspectives and abilities. Sixteen years later, the *Tóchar Valley Network* has grown from twelve communities to eighteen – non-governmental autonomous voluntary grass roots organisations which focus on community empowerment, sustainability and village revitalisation. Their overall objective was one of helping rural communities to help themselves.

The network works out of a philosophy that *“no one community on its own, can achieve as much as a network of communities – working towards shared goals (with a common vision).”* The mission statement confirms this: *“We are a voluntary autonomous grassroots rural network committed to the development of sustainable rural communities.”* Today the network includes the following eighteen Mayo communities: Aughagower, Balla, Ballintubber, Ballyheane, Brackloon/Drummin, Carnacon, Clogher, Killawalla, Mayo Abbey (Pride of Place Award), Manulla, Murrisk, Partry, Tourmakeady, Ballyglass, Islandeady (Pride of Place Award), Ballyvary, Belcarra (Pride of Place Award).

Each of the eighteen communities has its own unique story. The network area extends from Mayo Abbey in the east to Murrisk in the west. The 61 km walking trail (Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail) links the communities, commencing in Balla and ending in Murrisk. It offers you an opportunity to explore the beautiful countryside. While each community in the *Tóchar Valley* area follows their own community action plan they hold a common vision - to work towards sustainability and the preservation of its unique heritage and environment.

The Pride of Place Award which was bestowed on the Croagh Patrick Heritage Trail is the one that unified the total group - since each community had a part to play and winning this certainly made a statement which has motivated them to this day. Three of the communities also received the *National Pride of Place Award* – Mayo Abbey, Islandeady and Belcarra.

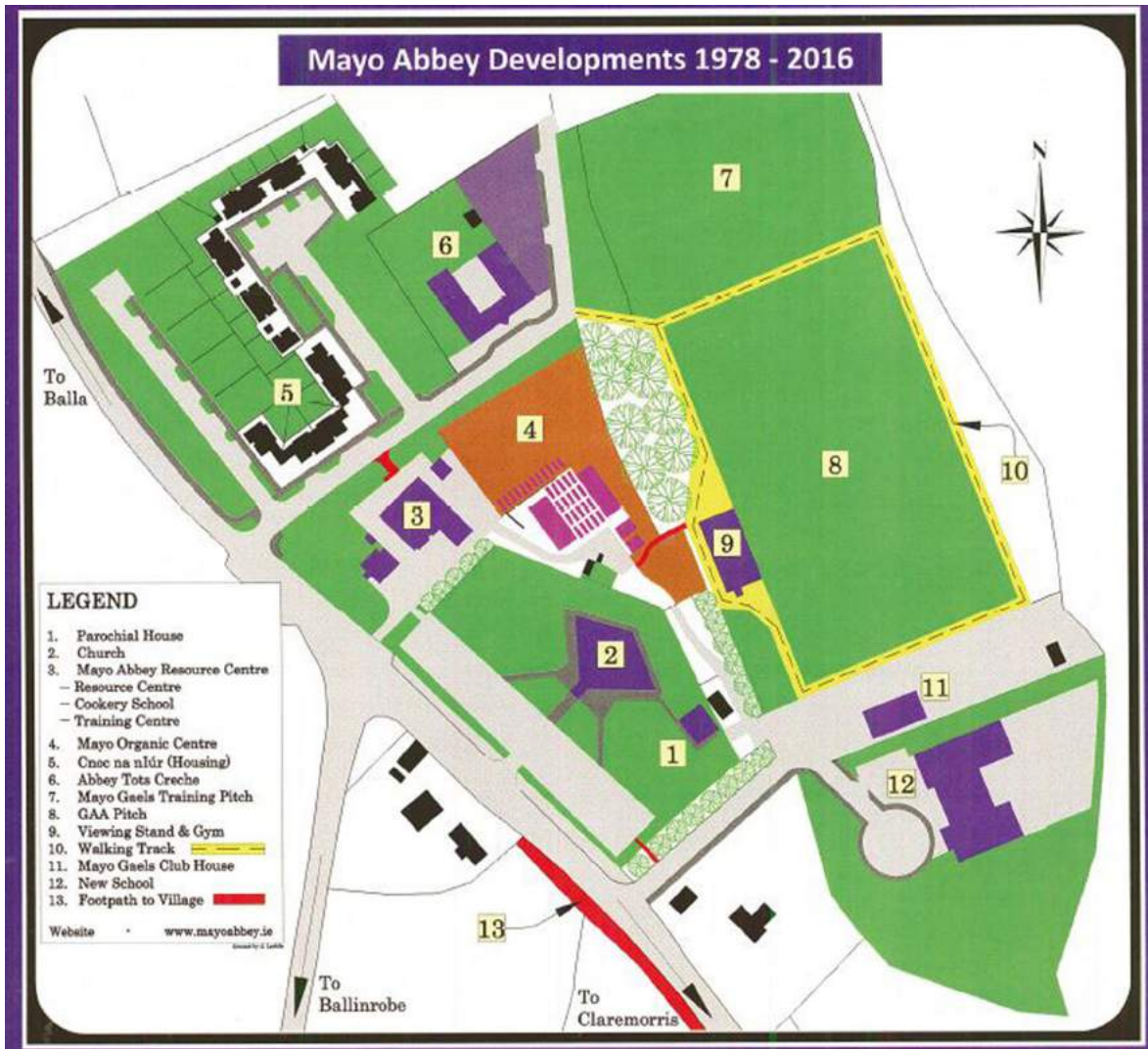


Maureen Lally

Today, Mayo Abbey community stands out as a lead community which has put in place a multi-purpose centre. The following services are now provided at the centre.

Mayo Organic Centre – This focuses on the production unit (the organic garden) and the consumption unit (kitchen and cookery school). Here a great grounding is given to the participants who are training for a career (e.g. chef) or as homemaker feeding the family. The practical training received by students young and old ensures that all are aware of the importance of home-produced fruits and vegetables. Cooking methodologies guarantee the retention of the nutrients.

At the centre there is a state-of-the-art information technology room where courses are offered to beginners and to advanced learners, which leads to a European



qualification (European Computer Driver Licence). In addition, there is a fully equipped training room available for delivery of training courses, meetings and conferences.

Mayo Abbey facilities include: Mayo Abbey Cookery School, Mayo Organic Centre, Information Technology Training Room, Conference Room, Audio Visual Facilities, Wi-Fi Internet Access, Community Office, Secretarial Services, etc. A community childcare service is in operation catering for almost 70 children aged from four months, up to after school services for children attending primary school. Youth needs are being observed through the *Foróige* group. Art, culture and history and a ladies group are very active and visible. At all levels, Mayo Abbey reaches out to a variety of needs, cultural, social, economic and spiritual.

Community Development: The Spiritual Dimensions

Spirituality, in its many guises, pulses through the *Tóchar Valley* communities. Towering over the Atlantic Ocean is the formidable Croagh Patrick – which provides a stunning backdrop to the daily hive of activities as residents go about their daily lives. Religious, patriotic and community spirit have long fused in this blissfully preserved region of Ireland, with the pride of its people driven by the history from which they have evolved.



Interior of Ballintubber Abbey.

Ballintubber Abbey is our spiritual hub in the *Tóchar Valley* area; celebrating its 800th anniversary in 2016. Now tastefully restored, it has a dual role as a national monument and a rural parish church, which has become again a Christian centre for prayer and retreats.

My dream was a career that would help me to reach out to others. Thanks to the Sisters of Mercy who have helped to put my dream into action. As time elapsed I began to see my vocation as a Sister of Mercy working in the area of rural revitalisation, self-sufficiency and the empowerment of people. Today, thanks to the Mercy vision,

my work has been directed by and associated with agricultural training and home economics training in colleges throughout the west of Ireland.

It would appear that the journey of practically fifty years has just begun. We have learnt many things over the years but one thing stands out as a consequence of our shared learning:

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

Margaret Wheatley

May our early childhood dreams continue to bloom and blossom and may all the rural villages of Ireland and beyond be proud of what they stand for – their relationship with God, with oneself, with other humans and with creation at the heart of life. As Pope Francis has written in *Laudato Si'*:

“We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity. Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realise that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others... The environment is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next.”



Climbing the Reek.

As we appreciate Mercy involvement in the sacred Abbey of Ballintubber, we are happy to read the reflections of Brian Grogan SJ in *Care of Our Earth* in the *Sacred Heart Messenger*, July 2016:

“Ireland’s Holy Sites offer a good place to begin an Irish response to Pope Francis’ appeal, with their earth, water, stone and landscape. They are rich with the prayer of the generations that have gone before us: there is an energy stored there on which we can draw at this critical time.”

Maureen Lally



Ballintubber Abbey.

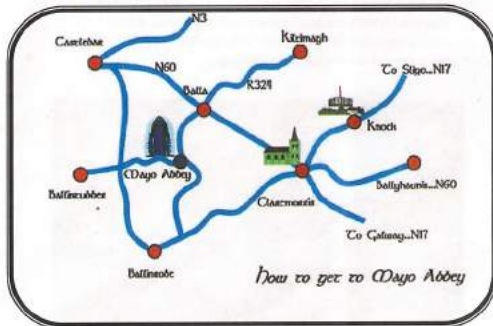
We celebrate two other Mercy Sisters who played a large part in the development of Ballintubber Abbey:

Ailbe Coyne (now deceased), a Mercy Sister who played a significant role in Ballintubber. It was she who developed the gardens around the Abbey, dedicating much happy time and energy to the project. She trained Richard Staunton, who keeps the grounds and the area around the Abbey as Ailbe would have wanted him to do.

Maura Gallagher spent 21 years in retreat ministry at Ballintubber Abbey, where she welcomed many groups, both school children and adults, in the pursuit of their spirituality. Retreats included visits to Church Island on nearby Lough Carra; time to reflect on the limestone Stations of the Cross on the Abbey grounds; and the possibility of doing some of the *Tóchar Phádraig*, the pilgrim path from the Abbey to Croagh Patrick.

The facilities at the centre include:

- Mayo Abbey Cookery School
- Mayo Organic Centre
- Information Technology Room
- Training Room
- Conference Room
- Audio Visual Facilities
- Wi-Fi Internet Access
- Community Office - Secretarial Services etc
- Wheelchair Accessible
- Free Car Parking



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Accredited Training Centre



In our state-of-the-art Information Technology Room we have courses for the beginner to the advanced through to ECDL (European Computer Driver Licence).



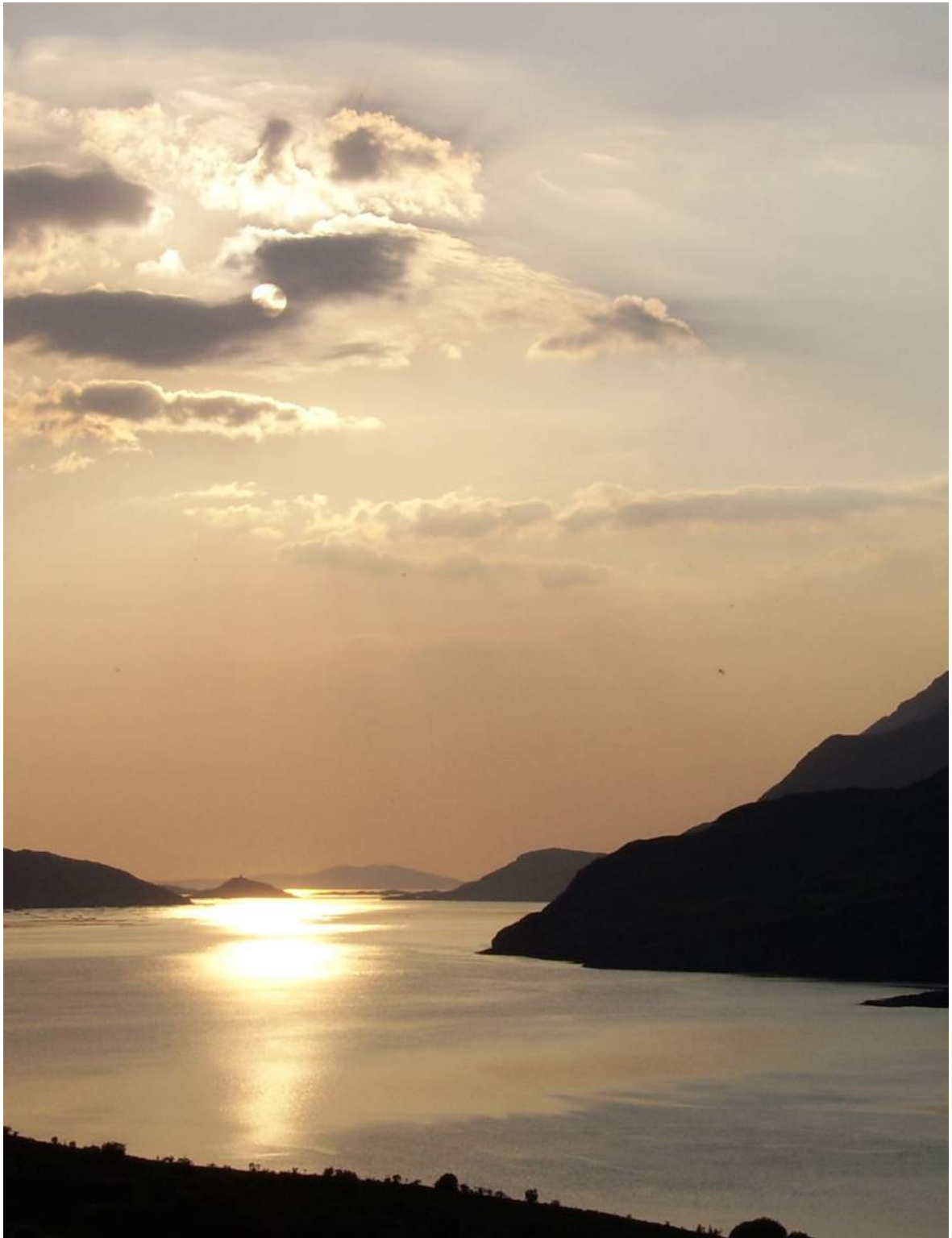
Regardless of your cooking ability, we have a course to suit you. In our newly built training kitchen, you will have the opportunity to learn practical skills so that you can amaze family and friends with mouth-watering creations.



We have full and part time Horticulture courses. We run courses for the amateur to the expert gardener. At the centre we specialise in Organic crop production with the main emphasis on vegetable growing.



Fully equipped Training Room available for training delivery, meetings and conferences.



Sunset on Killary Bay.

*Chapter Seven
Personal Commitment
to Lifestyle Changes*



Personal Commitment to Lifestyle Changes



Ita Mercedes Walsh tending her garden in Árd Bhríde, Castlebar.

“The average household throws away a quarter of a tonne of food every year! This is a huge issue in a world where many people are starving and where the disposal of food waste and packaging creates a problem.”

“Apple cores can take up to 2 weeks to decompose, while orange peel can take 2 years; banana skins can take up to 6 weeks to decompose; packaging (like milk and fruit juice cartons) decomposition time can be 2 to 3 months; tin cans and foam coffee cups can last in the ground for over 50 years; crisp packets can take up to 80 years to decompose.”

Guy Walters, Irish Daily Mail, 19 May 2016

Lifestyle Choices in the Province

The Vita and Lifestyle Choices Working Group has two objectives. One is to liaise directly with the NGO Vita. In parallel with this, they work towards mutual influence in the Western Province sisters with regard to lifestyles choices. To monitor this, the group sent out a questionnaire in 2015. The cover letter to the questionnaire gave the context thus:

Greetings from the Vita/Life Style Choices group,

You will be pleased to know that the Sisters of Mercy Western Province have been nominated by Vita for an Eco-Congregation Award. Eco Congregation Ireland is an organisation which encourages churches and communities to take an eco approach to worship, lifestyle, property and finance management, community outreach and contact with the developing world.

The independently-assessed Eco-Congregation Award is designed to affirm good practice in environmental stewardship and help churches/communities witness to the importance of caring for God's creation.

The award will focus on four main areas:

***Spiritual** – our Chapter directives, Congregational Policy on Ecological Responsibility*

***Education** – courses, training, workshops etc.*

***Practical** – what communities are doing on the ground*

***Developing World** – our partnership with Vita and other agencies*

As Pope Francis reminds us in Laudato Si' the earth, our home, has become endangered. We know that each community is working hard for the environment.

In order to make our presentation for the Eco-Congregation Award we are gathering information on what communities are doing around the province.

We intend to present our entry in the form of a CD/DVD. We would be very grateful if you would fill in the attached questionnaire. We encourage you to include photographs of your work on behalf of the environment. We need them for the CD/DVD.

The questions put to membership of the Province were:

QUESTIONNAIRE

If you are doing any/all of these please tick the box.

- Recycling 0
- Composting 0
- Collecting rain water 0
- Turning off switches when not in use 0
- Taking excessive weight from car 0
- Using Fair Trade products 0
- Bringing unwanted clothes to secondhand shops 0
- Growing vegetables for your own use 0
- Planting flowers as food for bees 0
- Using energy efficient bulbs 0
- Using eco-friendly washing powder, wash up liquids, cleaners etc. 0
- Adding at least one organic food product to your shopping list 0

Please tell us what else you are doing.

The working group received 99 responses, some from groups and more from individuals. In the letter thanking membership they said:

“You will be delighted to know that these responses show a high level of awareness of the imprint of our ecological footprint and a high degree of practice in living sustainably... Many communities/sisters promote biodiversity through growing flowers for the bees, feeding birds, sharing seeds and keeping beautiful gardens...There is an awareness of the spirituality of interconnectedness. Many sisters are involved in education making friends, family and others aware of the urgency of living sustainably. Sisters are also involved in education around the issues outlined in Laudato Si’, Glas: A Trócaire Call to Action for Climate Justice, and other related documents.

Over the last number of years we have worked hard in our Province to heighten our awareness of our inter-connectedness to all of the universe and of the fact that our actions and choices affect others particularly those living in poverty.

This has resulted in great efforts being made by communities and individuals to live sustainably and care for our planet. Our last audit showed good results.”

Recycling

All sisters were recycling paper, bottles, cans and books. Everybody brought clothes to thrift shops. Some were very creative in the way they recycled. One sister collected boxes, plastic containers, etc. and used them in her art work to store what the children made during their sessions. Another sister collected ribbons, scraps of material, cardboard, etc. to reuse and recycle. Many sisters avail of thrift shops, donating, purchasing and volunteering.



Proper preparation for the recycle bin in Drumshanbo.



Teresa Fahy volunteering in the *Faith and Light* thrift shop, Sligo – the only one in Ireland.

The sisters find creative ways of using up bits and scraps of wool, fabric, ribbons, unwanted buttons and other pre-loved items to produce knitted toys, cushion covers, caps, scarves, Easter egg 'chick covers,' etc. These items are sold at sales of work and the proceeds go to help missionaries and development workers abroad while enabling sisters at home to enjoy some of their leisure time in a productive way.

Stella Maria Sisters – in the business of reusing scrap materials with a difference.





Frances McNicholas with a doll knitted from scraps.



Items are prepared for inclusion in the Shoe Box Project to provide Christmas gifts for children in disadvantaged places.

The sisters in Stella Maria also support a scheme of knitting covers for chicks. This has been promoted since 2005 by Bríd McLoughlin. She has contributed to this initiative, through which over €250,000 has been raised for the Apostolic Workers. Bríd knows the needs in areas of extreme poverty because she spent seventeen years on mission in Kenya. She also responded to the genocide in Rwanda many years later, by spending three months there, sharing her nursing skills with *Trócaire*.



Bríd McLoughlin collecting some of the chickens in her green bag, assisted by Nora Fitzmaurice.

Careful use of electricity/oil

Among the actions the sisters are taking: turning off switches, using energy efficient bulbs, careful use of washing machine and dishwasher – time of use, full load, correct programme, boiling only the amount of water needed in the kettle, etc. Most sisters avoid using a clothes dryer, using instead a clothesline outdoors or an inside clotheshorse in bad weather. One community has an all-weather clothesline in their garden. Some sisters have draught excluders on the hot press and outside doors.



Bernadette McDonnell's draught excluder at her door in Cois Abhann, Athlone.



A covered clothesline in Ballisodare allows for air-drying in the rain.



A wash being dried in the open air, Teaghlach Mhuire, Galway.



Marian O'Connor with a water butt in Sligo.

Careful Use of Water

The conservation and harvesting of water is a priority. There are many ways in which sisters do this. Among them are: never leaving taps running when washing hands and teeth, using water sparingly in showers, re-using water from shower to water gardens in dry weather, collecting the water in the shower while waiting for it to get hot, many have buckets to collect rain water and several have water butts on their downpipes.



Angela Bracken re-uses water from the shower to fill the toilet cistern in Edgesworthstown.



In Drumshambo, Co Leitrim the sisters use a basin to save water.

Composting

Many communities/sisters do their own compost for use in their own gardens; others use teabags and banana skins as food for their flowers. One sister collects comfrey and nettles and makes fertilisers for the garden.



The Spiddal garden has a natural compost heap in a sheltered spot.



Mary Corcoran and Margaret Donohue, Cana Community, Ballinasloe.



Suzanne Ryder puts a biodegradable bag of vegetable and fruit peels in the compost in Saint Jarlath's Court, Tuam.



Helen Diviney does some mulching in Craughwell, Co Galway.



Compost bins in Longford.



Tea bags are prepared for mulching in Ballymote.



And the flowers are happy!



Clearing grass organically in Longford to plant wild flowers.

Food

All have an awareness of the importance of buying wholesome food grown locally, supporting the local growers and farmers' markets and avoiding flying miles. A number of sisters grow their own vegetables or at least their salads and herbs, either in their gardens or in pots on their balconies. Other sisters grow berries e.g. strawberries and raspberries. Some sisters make jams, and chutneys from apple trees in their gardens. Most sisters buy at least one organic product in their weekly shopping. There is also a consciousness of the prevention of food waste.



Lettuce and chives growing in Cois Abhann, Athlone by Maura Walsh.



Mary Glennon prunes some raspberries in Craughwell.



Separation of food waste in Longford community.



Margaret Mary Jordan weeds her garden in Árd Bhríde, Castlebar.



Agatha Durkan displays her allotment in Árd Bhríde, Castlebar.



Bosco Casey shows some of the colourful display in the Loughrea garden.



Netting protects the blackcurrant bushes in the Loughrea Convent garden.



Tomato plants enjoy summer sunshine in Cois Abhann, Athlone.



A colourful display of Patricia Kelly's in Cois Abhann, Athlone.



Tomato plants in Dún Mhuire, Athlone.



Teresa Walsh picks blackberries for making jam in Árd Bhríde, Castlebar.



Bosco Casey shows some of the blackcurrant and gooseberry jam made by the Sisters in Loughrea Convent from fruit grown in their garden.



A shelf of jam in Loughrea store cupboard.

Transport

Sisters walk where possible and pool cars when attending meetings and funerals. Almost all sisters noted they do not have excessive weight in the boot of their car. Most use public transport where it is available.



Sisters are conscious that a half-full tank of fuel uses less energy than a full tank and that a speed of 80 kph gives optimal fuel return.



Parking facing outwards is another aid towards reduction of fuel consumption because reversing a cold engine uses more fuel.



Olive Donohoe with a shopping trolley.



Patricia Fahy waits for a bus in Taylor's Hill, Galway.



Francis McMyler and Evelyn McDonnell get on their bikes in Árd Bhríde, Castlebar.

Biodiversity

Many communities/sisters promote biodiversity through growing flowers and plants providing suitable habitat and food for the bees and the birds. They also feed the birds, share seeds and keep their gardens beautifully.



The garden in Spiddal provides sustenance for bees.



This Buddleia shrub attracts many butterflies to the Spiddal community garden.



The Sisters in Spiddal share their plants with their neighbours.



View of the Spiddal garden.



The Spiddal apple trees have many avian visitors.



Máire Nolan in the courtyard garden she tends in Saint Jarlath's Court, Tuam.



A bird feeder in Saint Jarlath's Court, Tuam.

Ethical Buying

Sisters are conscious of the importance of shopping ethically, buying eco-friendly products, e.g. washing powder, washing-up liquid, cleaners and pesticides. Most sisters buy some Fairtrade products.



Ethical, environmentally friendly bathroom products in Saint Jarlath's Court, Tuam.



Similar kitchen products, also in Tuam.



Sisters Aiden Killian and Antonia Killian see the benefits of sharing a tea bag, which goes farther being Fairtrade. Both live in Cana, Ballinasloe.

Spirituality of Interconnectedness

Many sisters are involved in raising awareness and educating their families, friends and others about the urgency of living sustainably. Sisters are also involved in education around issues outlined in *Laudato Si', Glas: A Trócaire Call to Action for Climate Justice* and other related documents. Others are involved in Tidy Towns and in providing courses around food. Some are involved in promoting the spirituality of the New Cosmology.



Mary Folliard, Loreto Burns and Cecilia Heslin, Árd Bhríde, Castlebar contemplate the outdoors in Doolough, Louisburgh, Co Mayo.



L-R: Concepta Coen, Maura Walsh, Ann McDonnell, Margaret Tiernan, Vincent Fitzpatrick, Eva Walsh, Ignatius Killeen and Teresa Nugent celebrating Summer Solstice, Árd Bhríde, Castlebar.



A swallows nest in Drumshanbo, a doorway between the Mercy backyard and the Poor Clares backyard - the best of both worlds.



Agnes Curley planting flowers with Tom Madden (Community Service for County Galway), in Gilmartin Road, Tuam as part of a street rejuvenation project.

The reason for these lifestyle changes is to become more sustainable and to raise our consciousness with regard to how we perceive waste. We have become part of a throwaway culture and now need to ask Where is away?

Áine Mc Garty and Kathleen Glenmon

A close-up photograph of a purple flower, likely a tulip, with vibrant yellow stamens and a central pistil. The petals are a deep purple with visible veins. The background is dark, making the flower stand out.

Chapter Eight

Justice Desk

"The Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love: yes, cosmic because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. The Eucharist joins Heaven and Earth. It embraces and penetrates all creation."

Laudato Si' 236

Justice Desk

After the Mercy Congregation was re-configured in 1994, justice was recognised as a major issue. A Mercy Inter-Congregational Conference took place in 1996 in our founding house in Baggot Street, Dublin. This led to the establishment of a Congregational Justice Desk and the appointment of a full-time sister (Suzanne Ryder) in the role of Coordinator. Soon afterwards, the Western Province set up a Provincial Justice Desk with a sister appointed full time to the office, to support this vital area.

This office has continued since then. The task is to research justice issues, to keep the sisters informed, to liaise with other agencies and to involve the Province in campaigning and promoting different issues as they arise. Some of the issues were Debt Forgiveness, Fairtrade, GMO, with particular reference to the Transnational Company, Monsanto. May Lynam was the first sister in this role. She visited every community to show the sisters Fairtrade produce, washing powders, cleaning agents and products which are least harmful to the environment. She also showed the communities how to recycle. She visited every county council in the west and encouraged them to provide recycling depots. This campaign was very successful and she was instrumental in advancing council policy with regard to recycling. Nora Burke is the present sister working at the justice desk and the following is her reflection on what it involves:

As Mercy Justice Coordinator in the Western Province since 2007, I have experienced a significant change in our approach to this ministry. This is mainly because of the increasing awareness of the interconnectedness of the natural world, the cosmos, the earth and humanity. It is a known fact that whatever we do is not an isolated incident but somehow has implications for all other aspects of life and living. While we always knew this, it has never been more relevant than today where we see the destruction that has happened. Today we cannot afford to do nothing. With this awareness comes new efforts in the ministry of justice to move from a task-oriented strategic plan that set out what we had to do over a set period of time on set topics. Now there has been an evolution of consciousness-raising themes aimed at moving with current ecological thinking and wisdom, in the hope of helping to repair some environmental damage and prevent more destruction.

Justice today is more about taking on a 'Guide to Sustainable Living' and monitoring our own living standards as being personally responsible for the care of our planet. So there is no one to tell us what to do, all a coordinator can do is invite and lead by example. This approach relieves some of the suffering we cause through our

lifestyles to our sisters and brothers in the Southern Hemisphere. Our carbon emissions affect the climate of developing countries, which are least responsible for environmental degradation.

We have also worked unceasingly to get the Province to become Fairtrade conscious and again this is an invitation. Through our liaising with Fairtrade Ireland many of our schools and towns support getting a living wage for farmers in the developing world, thus encouraging them to live sustainably and with dignity rather than through hand-outs.

Through our involvement with Vita and Touch Ireland we are empowering communities in the Global South where people are helped through education, social development, sustainable living and infrastructural improvement.

At local level we endeavour to lead by example reaching out to support refugees, always with a mind to helping them integrate and become self-sufficient. This is not always easy but is a challenge for us and for the local communities where we live.

The trafficking of people has become a problem in many of our local areas and again we, through a dedicated team, in the Western Province, have alerted many towns and areas of the crimes involved. By bringing a theatre group to towns we have raised awareness that such crimes are real and need to be confronted by the right agencies.

Mineral extraction and fracking are other issues adopted by the Western Province as concerns and we have linked in with agencies such as Lovely Leitrim to lobby and demonstrate our stance on such destructive methods.

Nora Burke



L-R: Cathaoirleach Seán McDermott, Alex Flores, Nora Burke, Chamber President Gerry Faughnan, Executive Director FTI Peter Gaynor.



Nora Burke has one hand on the main banner, as the town of Carrick-on-Shannon is in solidarity.



Fairtrade stand in Carrick-on-Shannon.



Nora Burke is seen above alongside Mary Finean, with a telling poster.



Once again, Nora Burke has the support of the people of Carrick-on-Shannon.



Mary Doherty adds to the scene with Mary Finean.



Chapter Nine

MECPATHS - Mercy Efforts to Counter Child Prostitution and Trafficking in the Hospitality Sector

"Everything is interconnected. We are not dealing with two separate crises but rather with one complex crisis which is both environmental and social and this includes crises of human trafficking."

Laudato Si' 139

Human Sex Trafficking and Climate Change

What is the Link between Environmentalists and Sex Trafficking of People?

The question is not new - environmentalists, NGOs, eco-feminists, the UN, faith-based communities, Pope Francis and Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, are among those alerting the global community to the linkages between extremes of climate change and the violation of human rights:

“The human environment and natural environment deteriorate together; we cannot combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation.” Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* 48.

Similarly, in its *Declaration on Climate Justice*, the Mary Robinson Foundation notes: *“Nor can we overlook the injustice faced by the poorest and most vulnerable who bear a disproportionate burden from the impacts of climate change.”* www.mrfcj.org

Specific to the mission of the Sisters of Mercy, the linkages between ‘sex trafficking’ - the forced trading of women, girls and boys into sexual exploitation - and environmental disaster is the focus of the reflection to hand.

Those of us taking our initial steps on awareness of these issues might well ask how climate change and trafficking of persons are linked? Here, it helps first, to identify the link with climate change. Since these issues and their attendant questions are a relatively recent focus of scientists - some two decades - a careful review of the websites of interest seems a good place to start. Among the well-sourced sites is sistersagainstrafficking.org, a site under the auspices of US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking [USCSAHT]. The website outlines the root causes of trafficking of persons as economic, corrupt legal and political structures as well as social exclusion, wars, with the consequent displacement of peoples.

Climate change is considered another exacerbation of trafficking because rise in sea levels, shifts in rainfall patterns with consequent effects on water and land quality, hikes in temperature, uncertainty of sowing and harvesting dates - all, affect food productivity. The consequent poverty disproportionately impacts women and girls, the homemakers and fuel gatherers for family, sometimes, indeed, for the entire community. In fact, venturing farther and farther away from their village to collect firewood makes them vulnerable to traffickers - www.womengenderclimate.org

Thus, organised trafficking of women, girls and boys is emerging as a potentially serious risk associated with environmental problems. For example, flood, drought

or famine disrupts local security safety nets so that women and children face a risk of becoming targets for exploitation, gender-based violence and human trafficking when they are separated, unaccompanied or orphaned, due to the breakdown of normal social controls and protections. *Women on the Frontline of Climate Change* Nelleman, Verma & Hislop, 2011. www.unep.org/pdf/rra_gender_screen.pdf

And, here too, drawing on UN Report, [2014], we learn that 27 million persons are trafficked, globally, with an estimated 47% of those being trafficked for sexual exploitation. And while ILO [International Labor Organization] provides statistics on those trafficked into forced labor, stats on those trafficked for sexual exploitation are not easily determined; not surprising, given the covert nature of the sex industry. However, an interrogation of the facts on those trafficked into forced labour yields some facts on the links between climate change and trafficking of persons into the sex industry.

Fact 1: Trafficking of persons *“is one of the fastest growing criminal industries in the world, even though it is illegal in every country.”* ILO, 2012. And again, *“criminal networks, seeking more victims to feed this activity, find fertile ground in populations devastated by some environmental disaster since many teenagers can be tricked with promises of work, while in reality, they become victims of commercial sexual exploitation.”* UNICEF, 2010.

Fact 2: *Of the 20.9 million persons trafficked into forced labor in 2012, 47% were trafficked into sexual exploitation - UN Secretary General’s Report, 02 2012.* From this, we may deduce that of the 27 million persons trafficked into forced labor, globally, in 2016, almost 13 million have been trafficked into sexual exploitation. What, then, is sexual exploitation?

“Often called ‘sexual slavery,’ sexual exploitation may include not only prostitution, but also other roles in the ‘sexploitation’ industry such as massage parlors, fetish clubs, strip clubs, phone sex operations, exotic dancing clubs, the production of pornography for the photo, video and film markets and even the marketing of child ‘brides.’ In all instances, victims are often coerced, cajoled, threatened, tricked, or simply forced... and end up in a situation where they are no longer in control.” www.fightslaverynow.org

Global warming and extreme poverty - frequently referred to as ‘the perfect storm’ - places families at increased risk of sex trafficking. In a story for Reuters, Aditya Ghosh reports,

“Parents are very easily misled by traffickers and agents who lurk around promising a fantastic life in the cities.” Ghosh, 05 2015.

Similarly, Kevin Bales, primary author of *The Global Slavery Index Report* and cofounder of the movement, Free the Slaves, has this to say:

“I can’t find evidence of traffickers swooping in hours after a cyclone, but I can find evidence of families pushed from their homes, land and possessions lost, and becoming refugees ... and in that very vulnerable state, falling prey to the blandishments of traffickers.”
www.fightagainstslavery.org.

Thirty years or so ago, some members of our Mercy Family trod the flinty trail of the prophetic, calling us to heed the cry of an earth community, wounded and exploited by its own inhabitants. In time, the Mercy Family, as a whole, reinvigorated its mission by making a commitment to collaborate with those of like-minded views in addressing the issues of Climate Change and Children Trafficked into Prostitution, in the Hotel Sector. The journey in ‘fleshing out’ that dual commitment may be represented by the four-fold process of AWARE, ADVOCATE, ACTION and REFLECTIVE ACTION.

“The fierce urgency of now compels us to act.” M. Robinson Foundation: Climate Change.

The Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy is made up of seven Provinces, four of which are in Ireland. Sisters in these four provinces identified sex trafficking as an important justice issue. This led to the formation of the MECPATHS project. As part of this, the Western Province works towards ending child prostitution and trafficking in the hospitality sector in Ireland. The Campaign, MECPATHS, seeks to engage the tourist industry in raising awareness of child sexual exploitation by enlisting the aid of hotels to educate and train their staff, to be alert for, and know how to report, suspicious activities. Further to its engagement in the MECPATHS campaign, the Western Province has made a commitment to engage in business only with those hotels that have, themselves, positively engaged with the MECPATHS campaign.

With regard to awareness at local community level, the drama *Diablo* on Human Trafficking, written and produced by Patricia Downey, and presented by *Spanner in the Works Theatre Company*, Belfast, was promoted and presented at five venues: Castlebar Linenhall Theatre, GMIT, Athlone, Longford and Carrick-on-Shannon. There was also a campaign of awareness-raising in schools at senior post primary, community and third level. A facilitated comparative research project on Human Trafficking with three European countries was carried out in the GMIT, Castlebar.

MECPATHS works in conjunction with the other member congregations of the Mercy International Association (MIA), which is the overall body of the Mercy Order. MIA runs an office at the United Nations. Our Mercy presence at this global

forum brings the human story to the forefront in their advocacy work, taking the grass-roots experience to the table of policy making.

The stages of AWARE - ADVOCATE - ACTION are not sequential in nature. In fact, there is a sense in which all three stages can, at times, run concurrently. In this sense, we are in the AWARENESS stage, once again, in that we are conscious - some of us, perhaps, more so, due to the call from Pope Francis - of the responsibility to act such that we become up-builders, as opposed to destroyers, of the planet that is our common home.

Human Trafficking Action in the Western Province

*“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.”*

The Circle of Mercy, Jeannette Goglia rsm

The Sisters of Mercy Western Province, in collaboration with their lay colleagues and associates, work at many levels and in diverse ways to respond with compassion to the *Cry of the Earth* and the *Cry of the Poor*. Today we are all too familiar with television images of the destruction of the earth and as our awareness deepens regarding the profound connection between human suffering and ecological suffering we are listening with a new intensity. Today, the human cry comes to us with screams of terror and trauma and one area of urgent concern for us is that of human trafficking. The suffering of women, children and the men who are exploited by human traffickers, resulting in loss of freedom, physical and sexual abuse, is now a globalised reality. Human trafficking, for the most part, is an invisible tragedy. It is well documented that the trafficker’s annual profits amount to \$32 billion. It is the second biggest source of ‘illicit’ profits for criminals following the drug trade.

The encyclical from Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, points to the critical relationship between poverty, in all its shapes, and the fragile planet, Earth. Pope Francis emphasises again the interconnections that weave into one, all aspects of creation and he gives renewed emphasis to the fact that the world’s problems cannot be analysed or explained in isolation. Therefore, when we address the crisis of human trafficking it is in the overall context of poverty, the ways in which vulnerable people, without home, money, voice or bread are lured into the halls of exploitation, greed and abuse.

MECPATHS – Mercy Efforts to Counter Child Prostitution and Trafficking in the Hospitality Sector – is an effort by the Sisters of Mercy to counter human trafficking.

The campaign is one of two ongoing projects initiated in 2013 by the Sisters of Mercy in Ireland and linked to Mercy Global Action.

The aim of the campaign:

- To raise awareness of child sexual exploitation in the hospitality sector
- To support hotels in its prevention by providing training and information on the MECPATHS *Protocol of Best Practice*

The MECPATHS team is comprised of three Sisters from each of the four Mercy Provinces in Ireland, together with a Campaign Manager and Co-ordinator. They have the full support of the Irish Hotels Federation (IHF), and the Congregation of Religious of Ireland (CORI).

The Sisters network with Government Departments and key NGOs like APT (Act to Prevent Trafficking), CRA (Children's Rights Alliance), Ruhama, Bernardos, the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit of the Ministry of Justice and GNID (Garda National Immigration Bureau). All of these are very supportive and have been actively involved in our training to-date.

The education of people in all age groups and across a wide variety of community sectors is, we believe, a major forward step in the prevention of human trafficking and its dreadful consequences on the human person. Due to its hidden nature and the use of modern technology many who accept that trafficking happens have difficulty acknowledging it as a local issue, happening right before our eyes. The reality is, however, that human trafficking is on our doorstep and cries out for our awareness and response. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* says:

"When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of the human person, this includes those trafficked, it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected."

Here in the Western Province of Mercy Sisters the MECPATHS Campaign has been rolled out by a voluntary team of three sisters. The focus to date has been:

- Raising awareness of human trafficking in the hotels of the west on Ireland
- Bringing the awareness of the campaign to local community groups, service providers and the HSE (Health Service Executive)
- Organising the production of a drama, *Diablo*, on human trafficking for adults and running a parallel awareness programme on anti-human trafficking in secondary schools and third level colleges
- The training of youth leaders/workers
- Networking with other groups, e.g. Invisible Traffick, Justice Committee (Mercy WP); HSE

It is clear to us that networking and collaboration is the most effective way to address this issue, not just for prevention but for advocacy work and communication of the message to entire communities. Our Mercy presence at the United Nations brings the human story to the forefront and in our advocacy work there we are taking the grassroots experience to the table of policy making.

In the spirit of our foundress, Catherine McAuley, and the words of the Gospel we continue to put our trust in Divine Providence, steering ahead, planting the seeds of awareness and hoping some seeds will bring forth hope and relief from suffering for the people who cry out to us.

Margaret Killoran, Margaret Tiernan and Meta Reid

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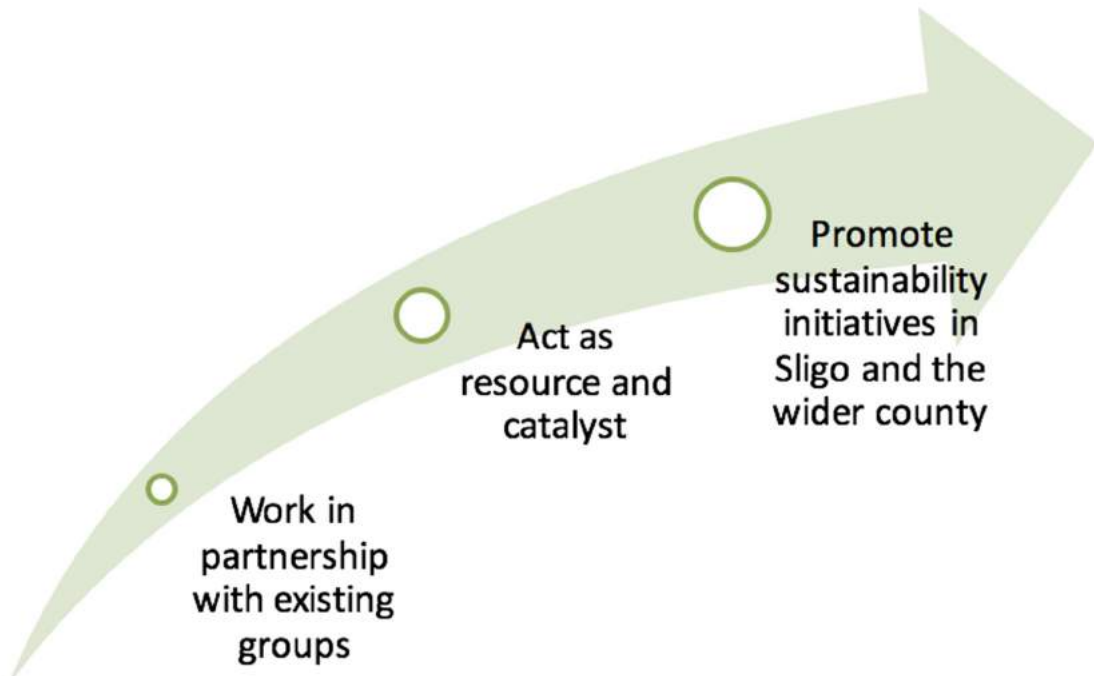


Chapter Ten
Transition Town Sligo

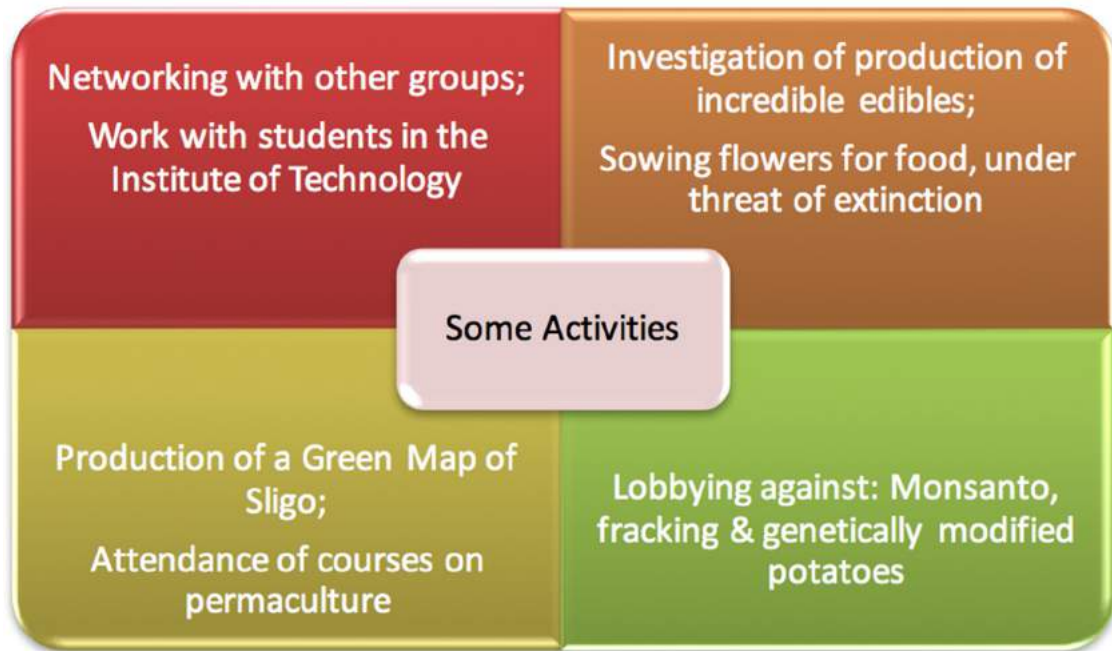


Transition Town Sligo

In 2010, a small group held our first Transition Town meeting in the Mercy community house, Bethany, Sligo. The Transition Town Movement is a grassroots movement that seeks to build resilience in response to peak oil, climate change and economic instability. The movement was started by Bob Hopkins in 2004 in Kinsale, Ireland and since then has spread throughout the world.



Having worked on our vision and philosophy we set about a number of activities.



Kathleen Glennon





Chapter Eleven

Provincial Stewardship: Buildings and Ethical Investments

"We have very little time left. We are the last generation to be able to do something about climate, and the first generation to understand how serious it is."

Mary Robinson at Davos

Western Provincial Stewardship of Ethical Investments

Sisters in the Western Province are conscious of how the assets we hold in trust are invested. Each community submits its financial statement on a quarterly basis, to ensure transparency. Those who work in our Stewardship Offices endeavour to honour values of eco-justice, equity and the interconnectedness of all life. Our financial advisers, L&P, ensure that our investments are ethical. Throughout our portfolio we are tax compliant; our finances are audited on an annual basis; and some examples of the creative initiatives L&P make on our behalf are outlined in this chapter.

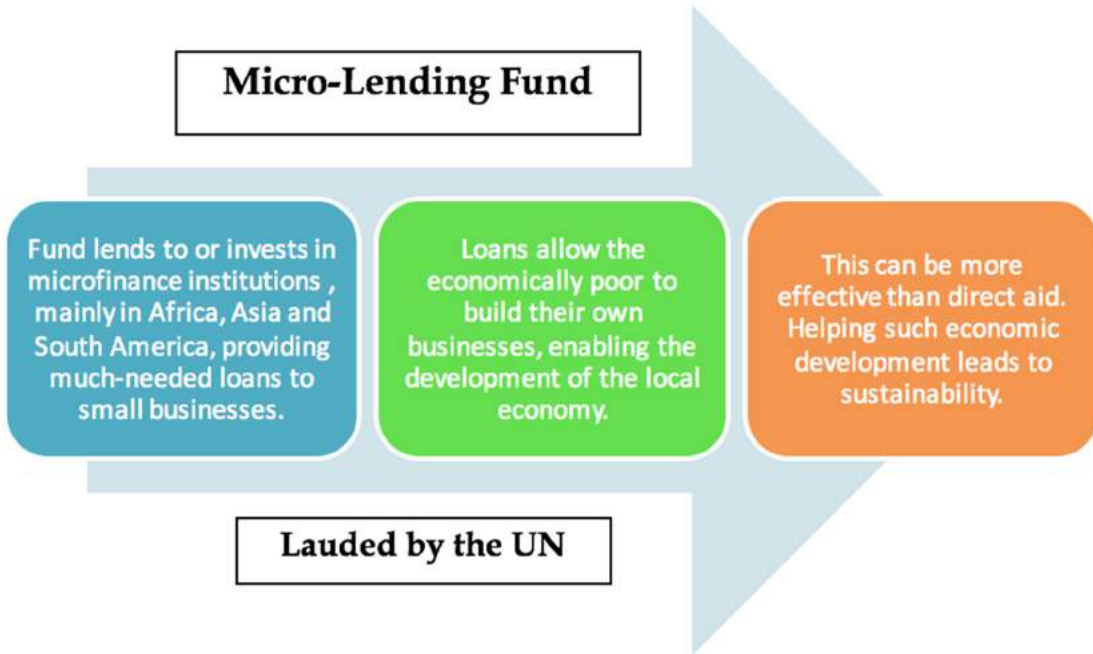


Alternative Investments

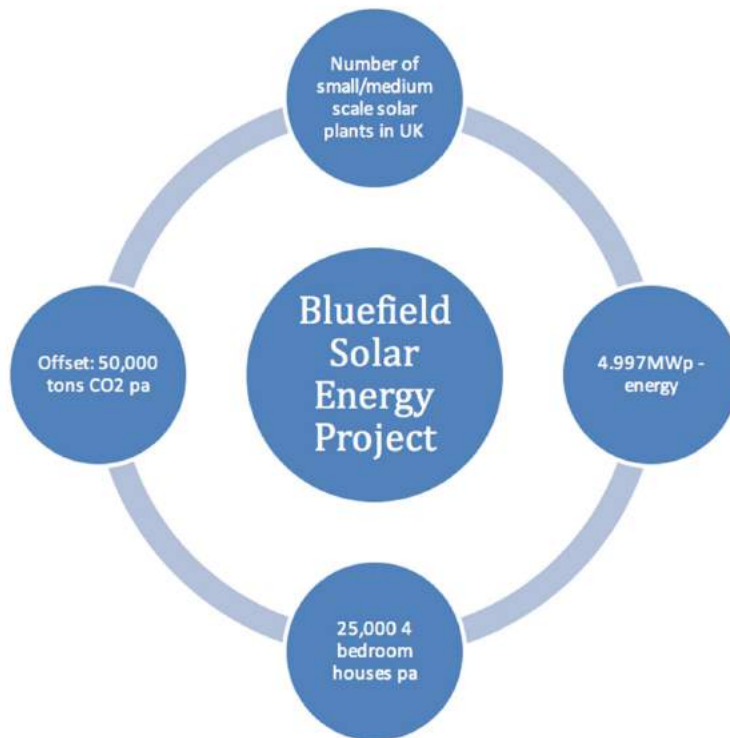
- Micro-Lending fund
- Venture Capital fund (economic growth and job creation)
- Currency fund
- Not equities or bonds

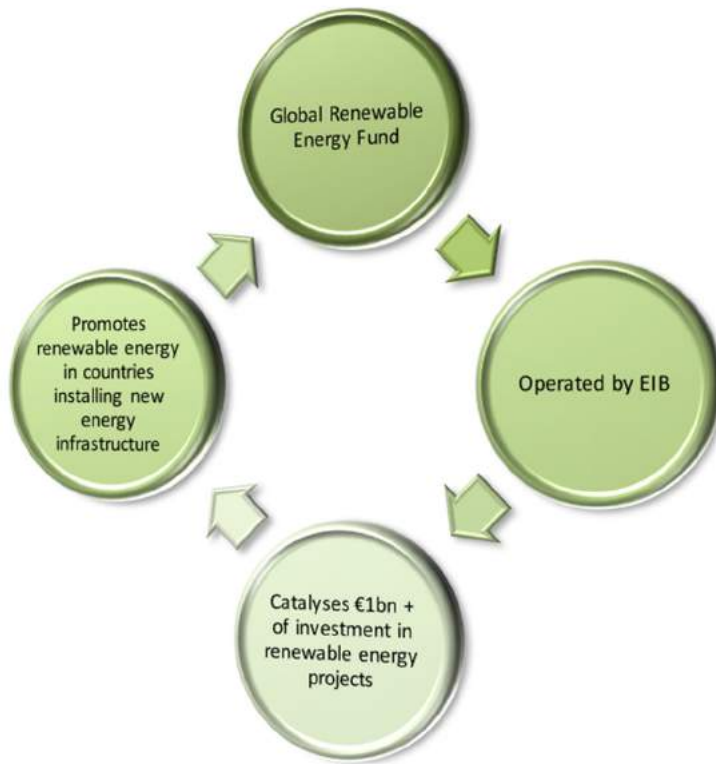
Energy Initiatives

- Forestry (3 Investments)
- Solar Energy
- Green (Sustainable) Property
- Renewable Energy Fund



Some Other Provincial Investments:





Examples of Some Projects



Durrants Farm, Isle of Wight.



Wind farm in South Africa.



Hydro Power Plant in India.



Nua Light technology in action.

New Buildings

We are moving towards sustainability in any new buildings and refurbishment of existing buildings in the Province.

Teaghlach Mhuire, Galway (see photo montage on the following pages) was the first non-domestic A-rated building in the country.







Other new buildings:

Cnoc Mhuire, Galway:

Solar panels
High A-rated insulation
Heat recovery ventilation
Gas boiler - which has the least carbon emissions

Stella Maria, Galway:

Solar panels
A-rated building
Rainwater harvesting system
Gas boilers
Heat recovery ventilation

Refurbished buildings:

Longford Convent:

Solar panels
Air to water heat pumps – more efficient
Heat recovery ventilation

Church View, Claremorris:

Solar panels
Gas boilers

St Vincent's Newtownsmith, Galway:

Solar panels
Heat recovery ventilation
Gas boilers
Dry lined



The newly refurbished Longford Convent welcomes the warmth of the sun.



Seal of approval from Sustainable Energy Ireland for Belmullet community house, bought in 2006.



Mary Lou Haverty, Bernadette Hoban and Canice Burns who lived in Belmullet.



Boiler for Geothermal System of heating the house.

Part Three: Growth Nourishing Body, Soul and Spirit

“A long time ago there was a great fire in the forest that covered our Earth. Everyone tried to escape the devastation. The owl Tecolotl was running when he noticed a small bird hurrying back and forth between the river and the fire.

This Quetzal bird was picking up small drops of water in its beak. Tecolotl owl questioned her, pleading that the fire was too big and she could achieve nothing by her efforts. Quetzal bird stopped for a moment and answered, “I am doing the best I can with what I have.”

It is remembered that a long time ago, the forests that covered the Earth were saved from a great fire by a small Quetzal bird, an owl, and many other animals and people, who went together to put out the flames.”

Abridged version of a traditional Aztec story.

Chapter Twelve
Holistic Therapies



Holistic Therapies



Stellaria

This chapter recognises some of the holistic therapies our sisters share both with each other and in the wider community. In reaching out to heal others in creative ways, they are one with the loving universe, which cares for all. This cannot be an exhaustive list, but it endeavours to give some examples of how different sisters hear the call to be healers, responding in a variety of ways. It begins with a reflection from Elizabeth McNamee, who has gifted this publication with many of her photographs. The beauty revealed through this generous contribution is introduced here.

Nature Photography

Growing up on a farm led me to a great interest in the beauty and cycle of nature. Our two-mile walk to and from school, with shortcuts through the fields, were opportunities to (among other things) search for birds' nests in spring and to enjoy the perfection of the delicate dew-covered spiders' webs on the bushes and rushes on a September morning.

During my college years the microscopes in the Botany Department of UCD opened up a new world of beauty that I hadn't imagined before. I discovered the incredible beauty of the detailed anatomic structure of leaves, stems and roots. Even moulds and fungi that I had previously dismissed as uninteresting and even ugly were lovely when magnified. I often thought 'if only one could capture this beauty.'

Many, many years later I got a small 4 MP Canon Ixus that had a macro setting and with help and encouragement of the Clondalkin Camera Club I learned how to capture a miniscule bit of the incredible beauty of nature. The natural world is transformed when one looks at it through the lens of a camera. Actually no, it is the person looking through the lens that is transformed. The person begins to see what was waiting there all the time - and that is a real thrill! I have sometimes spent nearly two hours photographing a single flower from different angles and in different light and it seemed like ten minutes. It is, perhaps, a bit like listening to a symphony - it lifts the soul.

One doesn't need an expensive DSLR camera with, perhaps, an equally expensive macro lens. A good compact camera with an inbuilt macro lens will do quite well. I try to capture the beauty I see. Others with more skill will produce more beautiful photographs. The magnificence of nature is there for anyone and everyone to enjoy and protect. I believe in sharing my photographs with people who will help others to enjoy the beauty of nature and to be grateful to the creator.

Among my pictures is my favourite flower, the stellaria (pictured on page 138). This beautiful flower grows in out-of-the-way places and one could walk by without seeing it. To the naked eye it is only just a very small white flower but it is utterly perfect when photographed with a macro lens.



Elizabeth Mc Namee

As awareness of the oneness of creation rises, awareness of the human family also takes on a new perspective. If any part of creation is in need, all of creation suffers. The next contributions centre on Mercy response to perceived needs. The desire to address any area of need is a desire to bring all to the fullness of life.

Vita House Family Centre, Roscommon

As we are all too aware, from the moment we breathe the first breath of life we belong to a family: we are a father or mother, son or daughter, brother or sister, aunt or uncle, niece or nephew – we are one or all of these at any given time. Our introduction to and growth in human development takes place in that unique setting where, ideally, and, for the vast majority of people, the quality of care experienced in family is unequalled elsewhere; it is synonymous with our sense of belonging and with home.

Home and family are neither concepts nor places; home and family are states of mind, where self-definition begins; the mix of time and space and smell, wherein each of us first realises that each is an original.

Mediation, reconciliation and restoration in and for families were always important values but in 1993, when Vita House began, they were not talked about out in the open and certainly not over the airwaves. However, for a quite some time now, these needs are openly on many families' agendas and continue to challenge the most resourceful of families and the services a family centre such as ours can offer them and all families.

Over the years, Vita House has been at the cutting edge, responding to societal changes directly or indirectly, for families and their children, whatever their stage in the family life-cycle. Our services have always sought to be accessible, flexible, versatile, client-centred and response-specific; for example, someone could phone up and be seen in a crisis situation without an appointment or all the red tape that we associate with state services, such as the HSE. This is an aspect of the uniqueness and cost-effectiveness of the service Vita House has always offered. Immediate preference is given to the disadvantaged, and they frequently find it more difficult to access professional services elsewhere. They include low-income families, lone parent families, persons and families experiencing sexual abuse, domestic violence, travellers and vulnerable families.

As well as responding to the social changes in families, Vita House has always been proactive in prevention as well as cure. Programmes offered cover a broad spectrum such as adult education, a multitude of enrichment programmes and workshops,

bullying and suicide prevention, mindfulness, outreach to those on the margins along the lines of community development principles and in more recent years, complementary therapies and support to families affected by cancer.

Nor is Vita House a stranger to the plight of migrants and other nationalities of which a number have presented at our door over the years, not least a sizeable Brazilian community. Vita House continues to be at the cutting edge, enabling their transition into a new society and culture, especially the most vulnerable among them such as the undocumented, those with little or no English and those presenting with family issues.

The purpose and mission of Vita House was and is essentially about creating the circumstances and the opportunities where good relationships can occur, develop and flourish, whether with oneself, with one another or with one's Creator, through a comprehensive range of programmes. It is about welcoming all regardless of race, colour, creed, sexual orientation or social status. One of our aims is to avoid some of the negative images to which institutional religion can unfortunately fall prey and thus the clear purpose is to avoid any hint of indoctrination and, instead, to focus on caring, supporting and celebrating. Part of the dream of Vita House was to have a Healing Garden, as nature is recognised as a source of new life. This was opened in September 2016, along with a newly refurbished Complementary Therapy Room. A friendly relationship with the natural world is seen as important and the lighting on approach to the building and in the garden is solar powered.



Mary Lee

Just as there is no blue print for any new initiative, neither is there a blueprint for accompanying people with psychological trauma. What I hoped for all along was, and is, that in some way, we can transform the world in which we find ourselves. A phrase from Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem *The Windhover* addressed to Christ, comes to mind: "Underneath him steady air." I can really identify with this phrase. I felt that 'power,' that 'steady air' so often over the years, not least when experiencing much challenge around our dream to build a much needed extension. That 'power,' that 'steady air' enabled me to take the initial steps with courage and hope. When we begin to act a new consciousness awakens and, as well as talking the talk, we have to walk the walk. But without companions and colleagues on the journey, sometimes the talk would get too tiring and the walk too exhausting.

Mary Lee

Cúram Family Centre, Claremorris, Mayo

Cúram Family Centre was established in 1989 and has since been delivering many vital services and supports to the local community. It provides a caring and confidential environment where individuals, families and groups can empower themselves through education, training and various supports. The main areas of work are: Counselling, Family Support and Adult Education.



One of the Mercy Sisters working there is **Martina Barrett**. She worked for a few years in Education Ministry in Ireland and USA. She moved from that into Family Ministry having trained in psychology and family therapy. Following a period in Provincial Leadership she trained in meridian energy therapies to enhance her skills for ministry in Cúram Family Centre.



Martina Barrett

Many Sisters in the Western Province have re-trained in different therapies, as a way to address needs in creative ways. Some of these are represented here. Again, the inspiring vision is that the call to fullness of life, when responded to in any particular manner, will affect the whole web of life. Holistic therapies include dance, music, art, drama, healing touch, massage and reflexology.

As some are represented here, we know that many cannot be contained in word or image because they consist of following the spirit of Catherine McAuley. She said: "There are things the poor prize more highly than gold though they cost the donor nothing: the kind word, the gentle compassionate look and the patient hearing of sorrows." These loving deeds might not ever be recognised because they are wrapped in myriad disguises, such as in a natural outreach to the stranger at the door, the manner a meal is presented, the way care is given to the sick, sympathy extended to the bereaved... We believe that no deed goes unnoticed in the precious web of life; they are what Wordsworth called, "little, nameless, unremembered, acts of kindness and of love."

Spiritual Vital Development – VitalDanza

I feel blessed to have discovered that I have been on a dancing journey home to wholeness/self/essence/spirit/love since before I was born. This I realised while living among indigenous people first in Mexico and then in Perú twenty-four years ago.

For indigenous people the earth is always related to as ‘Mother’ – a mother who nurtures, cherishes, loves and sustains us her children. She is a mother who breathes, has a heartbeat that still beats and pulses with life as she continues to live and dance in the heart of all creation - you and me and all life. We as human beings are inextricably related to all other life forms within an interrelated and interconnected web that is part of the Divine’s Dance of Life.

All life is sacred and is always included in the indigenous way of life and expressed through their dancing rituals. Having had the privilege of participating in some of those enriching rituals I soon experienced within me an embodying spiritual reality that could not be put into words – it was something I had been searching for. I discovered that I had found a way to transcend the mundane reality of cultural systems and embark on the journey to centre/essence/God. Coming from a culture highly influenced by dominant hierarchal control I now found myself desperately desiring to shed the ‘flaky skin’ effects of the Irish patriarchal system and to enter headlong into the humaneness, beauty and sacredness of life. It took some years to break through that shell I had securely built around me and ‘allow’ the true ‘Catherine’ to emerge again.

When I discovered ‘Biodanza’ in Perú I experienced all my life’s experiences coming together in One Great Dance of Life – ‘Biodanza.’ This new awakening seemed to dance through my body fluidly like a golden shimmering liquid that seemed to restore my body back to its pureness. With time, I became involved in Vital Dance/ Movement of Life – VitalDanza, created by Patricia Martello and Matteo Di Matteo from Argentina.

In VitalDanza we connect with that vital energy that permeates all life – that sacred presence/spirit/essence/infinite intelligence. We dance the Dances of the Four Elements – Earth, Air, Fire and Water to help re-awaken our connection with our own earthiness, lightness of being, passion and zest for life, and fluidity and life-flow. Dancing the four elements takes you on a spiral path to the place of transcendence – a place of stillness. In this space we are connected with all creation, all life forms and species, and share in our one essence. When we dance our Breathing Dance we breathe the same breath of life as every leaf, flower, animal, fish, bird, insect, earth, rock, etc. – we breathe life together as we live together as one universal community.



Catherine Mc Inerney

We dance to connect with oneself, the other, family, community and nature and we unite in that universal circle dance of oneness with all our ancestors and spirit friends – here we can experience our connection with the Spirit of all life. Our oneness in the Great Dance of Life tells us that a sustainable future is possible, one in which everyone and everything lives in peace and harmony. Together in VitalDanza we will co-create a world that dances its way to paradise – *“The paradise of the here and now, now or never,”* says Patricia Martello, creator of VitalDanza.

*“Don’t say, ‘Yes’
Just take my hand and dance with me.”*

Oriah Mountain Dreamer

Catherine Mc Inerney is a qualified VitalDanza Facilitator and Tutor. She brought VitalDanza to Ireland and is Director of the only VitalDanza Training School in Ireland. VitalDanza has spread throughout the world... the vital energy of life!

Catherine Mc Inerney

Music Therapy

Music Therapy is another holistic medium that is offered by **Evelyn Horan**, one of our sisters in the Western Province. Music therapy is a holistic health profession in which music is used within a therapeutic relationship. It addresses the emotional, cognitive and social needs of individuals. After assessing the strengths and needs of each client the music therapist provides the necessary treatment including creating, singing, moving and /or listening to music.



Through musical involvement in the therapeutic context, clients' abilities are strengthened and may be transferred to other areas of their lives. Music therapy also provides avenues for communication, which may be helpful for people who find it difficult to express themselves in words.

*"Many say that life entered the human body by the help of music,
but the truth is that life itself is music."*

Hazrat Inayatkhan

Evelyn Horan, who comes from the musical enclave of Gurteen, Co Sligo, is from a musical family. Music is in Evelyn's bones and she sees it as a means towards healing and wholeness. She has a background in education ministry and spent 11 years in pastoral ministry in Perú. From there, she trained in music therapy in New York University. Developing her skills, she is now a Fellow of Guided Imagery and Music. Evelyn does not remain solely in academia and has reached out through the NGO, Spirasi, in ministry to asylum seekers, tortured in their home countries. She is also greatly involved with people who have special needs, mainly through the Faith and Light organisation.

*"Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast,
to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak."*

William Congreve

As Evelyn reaches out to those in need, she believes that music can do just this, reaching into areas of inner pain and salving the soul. For her, musical cadences emerge from the natural world and can lead us as human family into a recovery of harmonious relationship with Earth.

Art Therapy

Art Therapy is another creative medium that is used by two Western Province sisters – **Anne Farragher and Phyllis Surlis**.

Anne Farragher had taught art at Secondary School level before doing further training in art therapy. She worked in the Galway Hospice for ten years, considering them some of the best years of her life. While there, in art therapy she accompanied people on their journeys at a sacred time of their lives. Through their art work they had an opportunity to express their feelings and dialogue about their lives; all of which helped them to live life as fully as possible for as long as possible. Her room was almost an extension of the garden and so nature was very much

part of this therapy. Anne recently transferred ministry within the province to work in leadership with one of our communities. Art is still central to her being as she continues to recognise its therapeutic value.



Anne Farragher at work in the Galway Hospice.



Phyllis Surlis is another art therapist.
Her work is seen here and on the following page,
where she combines recycling with sharing her skills with others.





Angela Bracken

Drama Therapy

Drama Therapy is offered by **Angela Bracken**. One definition of it is as follows:
“Dramatherapy is the intentional and systematic use of drama and theatre processes to achieve healthy psychological growth and change. Action methods, spontaneous and dramatic play, drama games, mime, movement, voice, role-play, scripts, masks, myths and stories, metaphor and symbolism are used to enable clients to express, experience and explore relevant issues.”

While the primary emphasis is on the experience of the group or individual in a safe space and with clear and agreed boundaries, drama is a performance art and clients may choose to perform for an audience who take on the role of ‘active witnesses’ to dramatic presentation.

Angela is a retired primary teacher and dramatherapist who worked clinically from 1993 – 2009. Since 2009, she has worked voluntarily as a creative drama facilitator in a DEIS school with children ranging in age from 4 to 13 years. Her facilitation is informed by her previous dramatherapy experience. As Shakespeare said: *“There’s language in her eye, her cheek, her lip. Nay, her foot speaks!”*

She tunes into the wide variety of moods, feelings, energies, exuberance, extroversion, introversion, non-verbal signalling of the children with whom she works. Sessions structures are simple – warm-up, core and closure and, in general, action packed, as the children develop a wide repertoire of core drama skills and behaviours.

She has consciously tried to include the concept of Care of the Universe in some of her sessions, to support the school's excellent on-going eco-awareness programme. She finds a therapeutic storymaking structure she has developed and used over the years is ideal for this purpose. The children imagine a Landscape/Environment element; a dwelling within this landscape; character/s who inhabit it; problem/s that may arise and what may happen to make matters worse; who might be the helper/rescuer who arrives on scene; what action is taken and what is resolution/ending. Children create their stories in small groups, dramatise them and present to their peers. Feedback and reflection time are included also.

For example, one particular story centred on a group of animals who came to the local county councillor with their complaints about how their habitat was being threatened by humans who were dumping litter. One of the baby animals was almost choked by a plastic bag and Mother Squirrel gave a graphic description of the incident and 'laid it on the line' for the authorities, in no uncertain terms!!! She finished her tirade by saying, *"It wasn't kids that were to blame. It was the grown ups who dunnit!"* A court case ensued and justice prevailed. All the adults were ordered to purchase 'litter pickers' and clear all the debris and litter. The animals were requested to supervise proceedings and Mrs Squirrel was asked to present a report on the clean-up to the judge – or there would be severe consequences for the adult miscreants!!!

Angela keeps the poet Kathleen Raine's words in mind:

*"For earth's days and nights are breaking over me.
The tides and sands are running through me,
And I have only two hands and a heart to hold the desert and the sea."*

Sr Marie Cox's lovely song *Eagle Fly* is a favourite with the children especially the lines:

*"Standing on the threshold of a brand new dawn.
A world in which our children may grow wiser.
Skies of blue, waters clear and grass so green.
Our earth will be healed, this is our dream."*

Many sessions end with the children all joining hands for a special circle dance to the music of the *Universal Song*. Will the memories of these drama sessions sow some seeds of ecological awareness into the future? Angela hopes they will have been encouraged to ...

*“...Close your eyes and listen with your heart; we will all stand strong.
When we all sing a universal song, there’s a voice inside of everyone.
It’s a language of love for one and all, when we all sing a universal song...”*

Reflexology

Reflexology, another holistic therapy, is offered by **Kathleen Conneally**. It is described as a zone therapy, used in the clearing of blockages and toxins, through the application of pressure on energy points in the feet. This ancient Eastern method identifies the feet as a replica of the whole body. It might be seen further as a replica of the body of Earth, with healing at one level spreading to healing at another.



Kathleen Conneally is seen above in the Avalon Centre in Sligo.

Massage Therapy

Massage Therapy is literally a hands-on way of ministering to others, using the sacred art of touch. As we are all part of the web of life, our very bodies – temples of the Holy Spirit – are in communion with the whole. This is a blessed ministry that



Mary Forde shares with others. In this picture, we see her preparing to offer her services at the Star of the Sea Retreat Centre. Many appreciate this body work as an accompaniment to time in retreat. Mary is one of several of our sisters, who are trained in massage therapy. There is an interchange of trust and respect between the giver and receiver. Some use massage in conjunction with other therapies.

Workshop Way - Small Efforts Towards Building a Better World

Having retired from the formal classroom, I find myself reflecting on what, if any, contribution I may have made to the lives of 'my' students, as they engaged with the process of discovering and exploring what living as a human being involves. *The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS)* are the 17 steps to a better world that the UN are focusing on for the next 15 years. Step 3 stood out for me: "*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.*"

I taught in San Diego California from 1982–1990 and had the blessing of meeting Sr Jackie Bennet OP, who introduced me to the revolutionary classroom management programme called *Workshop Way*. This facilitates the students in exploring in an intentional and concrete way, issues such as freedom and boundaries, negotiation and cooperation, accountability and responsibility, while working on the usual subjects. I continued using *Workshop Way* in my Irish classroom until I moved into Special Education in 2001.

The students with whom I worked in Special Education had moderate to severe intellectual disability. These students also learned skills to help them *access the best quality of life available*. I am now a volunteer in the Galway Hospice Foundation and visit Renmore parishioners in the various nursing homes. Being aware of and vigilant in the exercise of respect, sensitivity, encouragement of self-esteem and appreciation of the individuality of each person continues to be paramount.

I hope and pray that my efforts in education have helped some students to live a happier life and that their experience in a *Workshop Way* classroom will have sustained them through the difficult times in their journey through life.



Ann O'Shaughnessy

Zone Therapy

Zone Therapy - The purpose of this ancient, Eastern, holistic therapy is to clear energy blockages. Energy points are pressed, relaxing the body and releasing energy from relevant points. Thus, the receiver can spend energy to build up. **Gemma Cunningham** spent many years in Perú. Having explored that part of the world, she turned her attention to Zone Therapy. She works out of Claremorris.



Chapter Thirteen

Galilee Community

"The first thing that came to mind as I looked at planet Earth, floating in the vastness of space was its incredible beauty, a blue and white jewel suspended against a velvet black sky... the presence of divinity became palpable and I knew that life in the universe was not just an accident based on random processes."

Astronaut Edgar D Mitchell



Galilee Community, Boyle

Galilee Community is a sacred space where people are welcome to come apart to rest body and spirit. Galilee has a resident community of four Mercy sisters who pray and take responsibility for the ministry of Galilee. It developed as a result of meeting with groups of people and asking what would meet their deepest need and yearning at the time. Many shared their need to have a space where both body and spirit could be nurtured. They especially mentioned the healing they found in nature.



WB Yeats, wrote his poem, *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, not too far from here. In it he describes his desire to experience peace of spirit in a tranquil place. The prayer of this community is that those who come will find peace, healing and renewal. Galilee is for everyone who needs a little time away from the busyness of life and is in search of inner peace.

The mission statement addresses this idea of Galilee Community as a place of hospitality where people can come to seek solitude and relaxation in nature. Its therapeutic landscape is a source of rejuvenation, revitalisation and regeneration

for many people. Being nurtured alone enables people to blossom in their local community.

Inspired by the Gospel and the charism of Catherine McAuley, the Galilee Community provides a Sacred Space in an environment of hospitality and respect where people can seek transformation through prayer, reflection and community lived in reverent relationship with all of creation.

Galilee was chosen as the name because it is surrounded by two beautiful lakes, Lough Key and Lough Arrow. Galilee was the place where Jesus did much of his ministry. He met people there and responded to their needs. After the resurrection Jesus went before them into Galilee, where he met a group of disciples who were experiencing a sense of loss. They had disappointed the one they loved and followed for three years. Galilee became the place of healing and new beginnings. The hope is that those who come to Galilee Community will find relaxation and renewal.



The welcoming entrance to Galilee is colourful.



One view from the grounds.

Pope Francis speaks of the earth as *“our common home and like a sister with whom we share life and a mother who opens her arms to embrace us.”* In the early days of the establishment of Galilee Community speakers gave presentations on *The New Cosmology*, *Care of the Earth* and *The Value of Herbs and Their Use in Healing of Physical Ailments*.



This beautiful banner welcomes people to the inner sanctum.

A *Be the Change* symposium was launched in Galilee on Saturday, 9 May 2009. The hope was to awaken in those attending an interest to work together to bring about an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling and a socially just human presence on the earth. The programme was repeated on three occasions, was well attended and people planned for follow-up in their own homes and places of work. The community has been very moved and motivated by the Pope Francis encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. They have taken the document seriously and are making connections with it in all of the retreats, presentations and prayer that take place in Galilee. They are using the encyclical with a Mercy Associate group. Through the use of presentations, reflection and discussion they are encouraged to live it out seriously and to plan some action, even on a small scale.

A meditation garden is enjoyed by visitors and those making days of retreat. Prayer Walking, Seasonal Walking and Seasonal Prayer Services were introduced. Sometimes the busyness in our society calls on us to slow down, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Prayer walking lets us keep moving on the outside, while letting us slow down on the inside. It is a way of stepping in and out of the ongoing prayer of creation. Those involved with the experience find it very healing, a new way to pray and enjoyable. It also brings to mind Kierkegaard's philosophy: *"Above all do not lose your desire to walk. Every day I walk myself into a state of well-being, and walk away from illness. I have walked myself into my best thoughts, and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it."*



An annual Dawn Mass is celebrated every Easter Sunday morning.

Mae McManus and Olive Flanagan



Winter Robin



Waterfall

A close-up photograph of a damselfly nymph resting on a vibrant green leaf. The nymph's body is primarily red with black segments and a black head. Its four transparent wings are spread out, showing a delicate network of veins. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blur of green and brown tones.

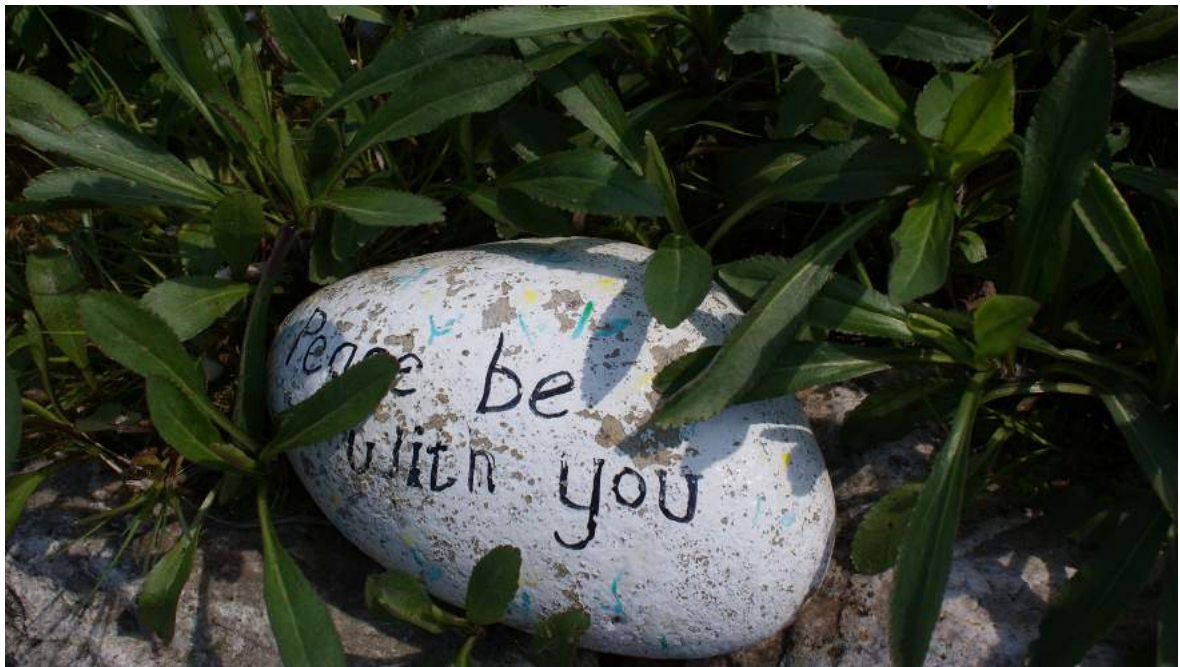
Chapter Fourteen

Peace Garden

"I dream of giving birth to a child who will ask, 'Mother, what was war?'"

Eve Merriam, poet and writer

Peace Garden, Mullaghmore, Sligo



It is often difficult to determine the seminal moment of an idea, who first gave breath to it and when. So it is with the idea of a peace garden in Mullaghmore.

Beside the convent in Mullaghmore there was, through many ages, an enclosed vegetable garden, carefully cultivated and providing vegetables and fruit for the house. Eventually, due to over-cultivation, the garden lay fallow.

Following the refurbishment of the convent as a retreat and conference centre in 1998, efforts were made to recreate a garden in the enclosed space but the capital to design and lay an herbaceous garden was not available. In its new state, an area behind the Peace Garden is home to four thriving bee hives, 'buzzing with divinity.'



A Bee Speaks

*Humans, can you not hear
The wail of my weeping?*



*I, an eighty million year old species,
Have accompanied you
From your beginning,
Bringing joy to your palate,
Sweetness to your relationships,
Healing to your joints
And what do you give
Me in return?
Toxic chemicals to poison me!*



*Are you so desensitized
That you cannot feel my pain?
I pollinate your plants,
Your flowers, your nuts,
Your fruit and vegetables,
Making your world
An orchard of abundance.
And you pump pollutants,
Pesticides and noxious waste
Into the atmosphere:
Thereby killing me, your friend,
Buzzing with divinity.*



*Myopic morons, are you blind
To the horror of your actions?
I, a vital link in the food chain,
May soon disappear
Taking with me species
Of plants and animal. Einstein predicted that
If I become extinct,*

*You will be wiped out too.
With my dying breath I plead
Before it is too late
Humans, take heed!*



Poem by Kathleen Glennon

The first decade of the new millennium brought changes. Access to capital funding was available. The thirtieth anniversary of the Mountbatten and Maxwell assassinations was reached. The long-term trusteeship by the Sisters of Mercy of the Retreat and Conference Centre came into question. Eventually, from the confluence of all of these realities, the idea of the Peace Garden was formed.

A Peace Garden, for the people of Mullaghmore and visitors to the area, would be a fitting memorial to all who died in violent circumstances and would be a fitting gift from the Sisters of Mercy to the area in which they served from 1929. Through the Board of Management of the Retreat and Conference Centre application was made to the Sligo Leader Partnership for funding. The Sisters of Mercy were the source of raising the matching funds. Eventually, sufficient capital of a considerable amount was in place to get all the construction work and planting done.

The garden was designed as an herbaceous garden for full bloom in July and August, with gravel pathways, a water feature and private secluded seating areas. While fully enclosed, the garden area allows from its highest border a view of the sea and mountains outside. Gardener Patrick Oates is seen in the picture collage below.



While we all share the cosmic garden of creation, and feel the awe and excitement of the immense universe, we still need the personal space which we can encompass and understand. The Peace Garden is a space which feeds our senses, puts us in touch with the personal and leads us to our inner space, the inner garden where we walk with the Creator and where we find fundamental peace and communion with all of life.

2008 was a significant year in the history of the Retreat and Conference Centre at Mullaghmore. The peace garden was officially opened in 2008 by Minister Pat Carey, Bishop Christopher Jones of Elphin diocese and Reverend Noel Regan of the Church of Ireland. The thirtieth anniversary of the 1978 assassinations was commemorated at the Retreat and Conference Centre. All looked forward to a peaceful future and shared dream.

Seven years later, the visit to the peace garden by the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall, Prince Charles and Camilla, signalled further, a desire to move on and create new and peaceful relationships of mutual understanding and respect.

Over the years, many people from near and far continue to visit the garden and express their appreciation of the beautiful facility at the heart of Mullaghmore. Due to our not having sufficient personnel to manage the retreat centre, it has been handed over to the Elphin Diocese. Sister Kathleen Rooney, who spent many years in the education ministry in Kenya, is the director there.



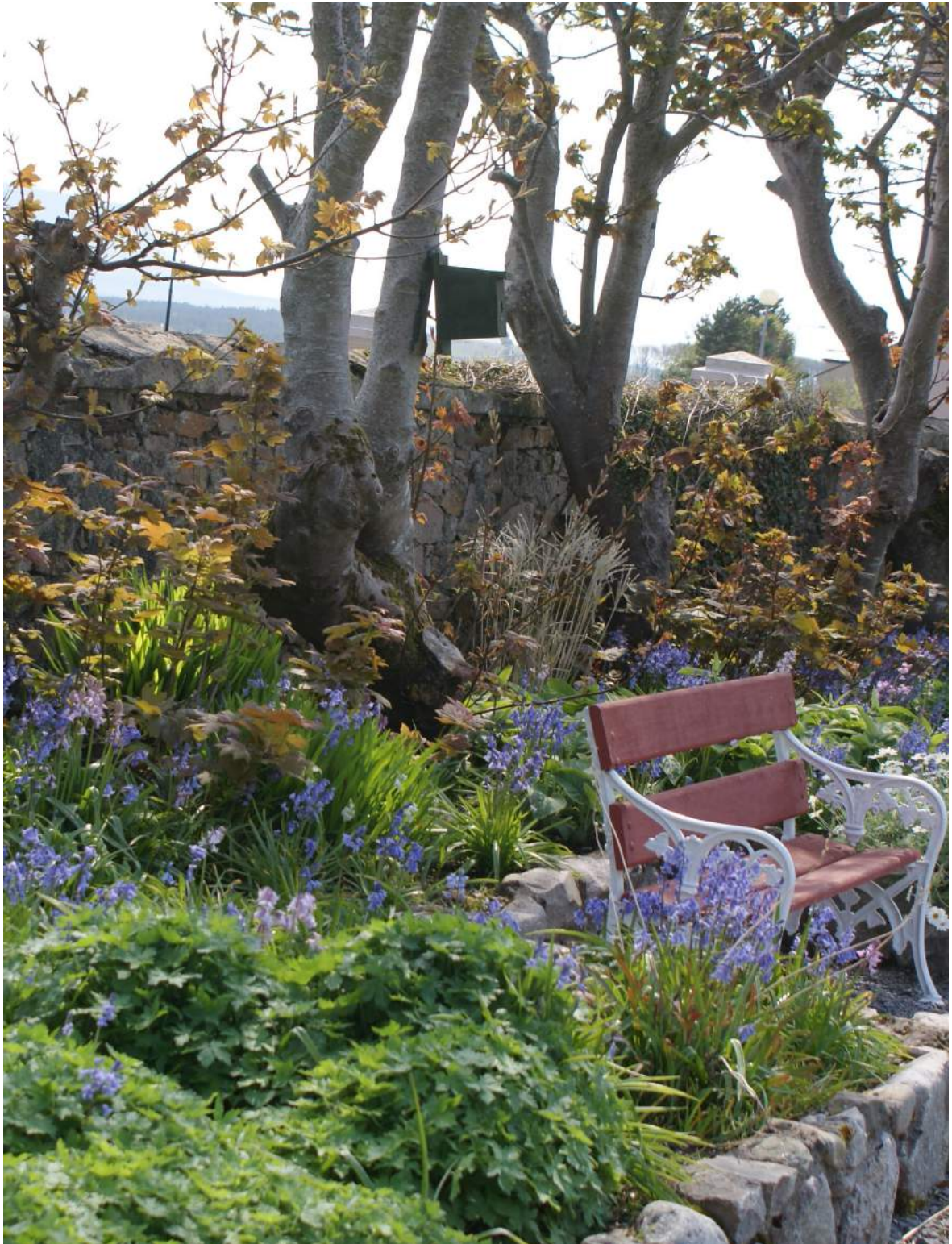
Kathleen Rooney in her office.

A ceremony to mark this next step began in the Peace Garden and a stone to recognise the long-standing relationship with the area is in place in the garden.



Plaque in the garden to mark the handing over of the Retreat Centre to the Elphin Diocese.

Patricia Kelly



Peace Garden

A photograph of a garden path. The path is made of light-colored gravel and is flanked by low, neatly trimmed green hedges. In the background, there are several dark metal arches supported by trees. The scene is filled with lush greenery and some flowers, including purple and red blooms. The lighting is soft, suggesting an overcast day. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

Chapter Fifteen

Hope House

*"God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change,
the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference."*

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971)

The Garden of Hope

Hope House is an affordable addiction centre which produces exceptional results using a research based approach. Hope House has a 20-year track record in successfully treating alcohol, drugs, gambling and other dependencies in a warm, welcoming therapeutic environment. Treatment consists of an initial four-week residential period enhanced by two years of continuing care with weekly support groups in a number of locations nationwide. It is one of Ireland's leading addiction treatment centres and is proud of its international accreditation from CHKS, an international healthcare accreditation body. Situated in the quiet village of Foxford, Co Mayo, on the banks of the river Moy in the west of Ireland, Hope House provides a welcoming, warm, comfortable and therapeutic home away from home where recovery begins.

Hope House was founded by two Mercy Sisters, Attracta Canny and Dolores Duggan and the seed capital for the facility was provided by the Mercy Sisters, Western Provence. Dolores and Attracta saw the need for such a place, in their earlier ministries as teachers and social workers. Their experience showed that there was a need to help people and families, whose lives were affected by addiction.

The garden at Hope House is private to residents and their families. It was originally designed by Attracta and Dolores with the specific intention to welcome, attract and encourage wild birds, bees and butterflies, therefore creating a healing environment to help people on their journey of recovery from addiction. Residents are encouraged to spend reflective time there and to develop their gardening skills as they may wish.

It stands on an acre of land. It is a serene and peaceful environment, where nature has clothed herself with some of her most beautiful garments. This makes it a relaxing place for the families of residents, when they visit the centre.

The garden is a place full of colour and beauty. Birdsong filters in through the trees. The dawn chorus erupts at daybreak as magical trilling thrushes sing their joy, often accompanied by the bobbing robins, lilting an age-old melody. Buzzing bees surf the open spaces from flower to flower, seeking pollen. The grass always seems to whisper as it blows in the gentle breeze.

The garden is ever changing. In wintertime, the sun illuminates the intricate spider webs that cling to the frosted branches. The brave snowdrops pop their tiny heads through the shadows and the daffodils surprise the dark ground, heralding the arrival of spring, as the garden awakes from its winter slumber.

Summer sees the garden lit by colour and welcomes the scents of roses wafting through the still, calm air as the sunlight highlights the magnolias, Japanese maples and cherry trees. Butterflies flutter through the air with their velvet wings, in search of their much-loved Buddleia.

The fiery brilliance of the Schumacher tree heralds the arrival of autumn as the garden palette transforms to rich tones of copper and gold. Our magnificent garden is a haven where mindfulness becomes the norm. It is where residents and staff linger and experience the true wonder of nature. It is a space where we come to respect and care for the environment, where we experience a sense of wonder and awe. There, we draw on nature's healing balm, where we well up in an attitude of gratitude to God for these wonderful gifts.



Hope House



Hope House Garden

Part Four: Harvesting the Fruit

*"Whenever food is thrown out,
it is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor."*

Laudato Si'

Chapter Sixteen

Vita Mercy Partnership

*“When we abuse the planet we primarily victimise the poor,
to whom we, as Sisters of Mercy, have a special mission.”*

Congregational Policy for Ecological Responsibility



Vita Mercy Partnership

“We commit ourselves to share generously. We will support and resource discerned ministry needs at congregational, provincial and local levels. We will heighten our awareness that our lifestyle choices contribute to extreme poverty.”

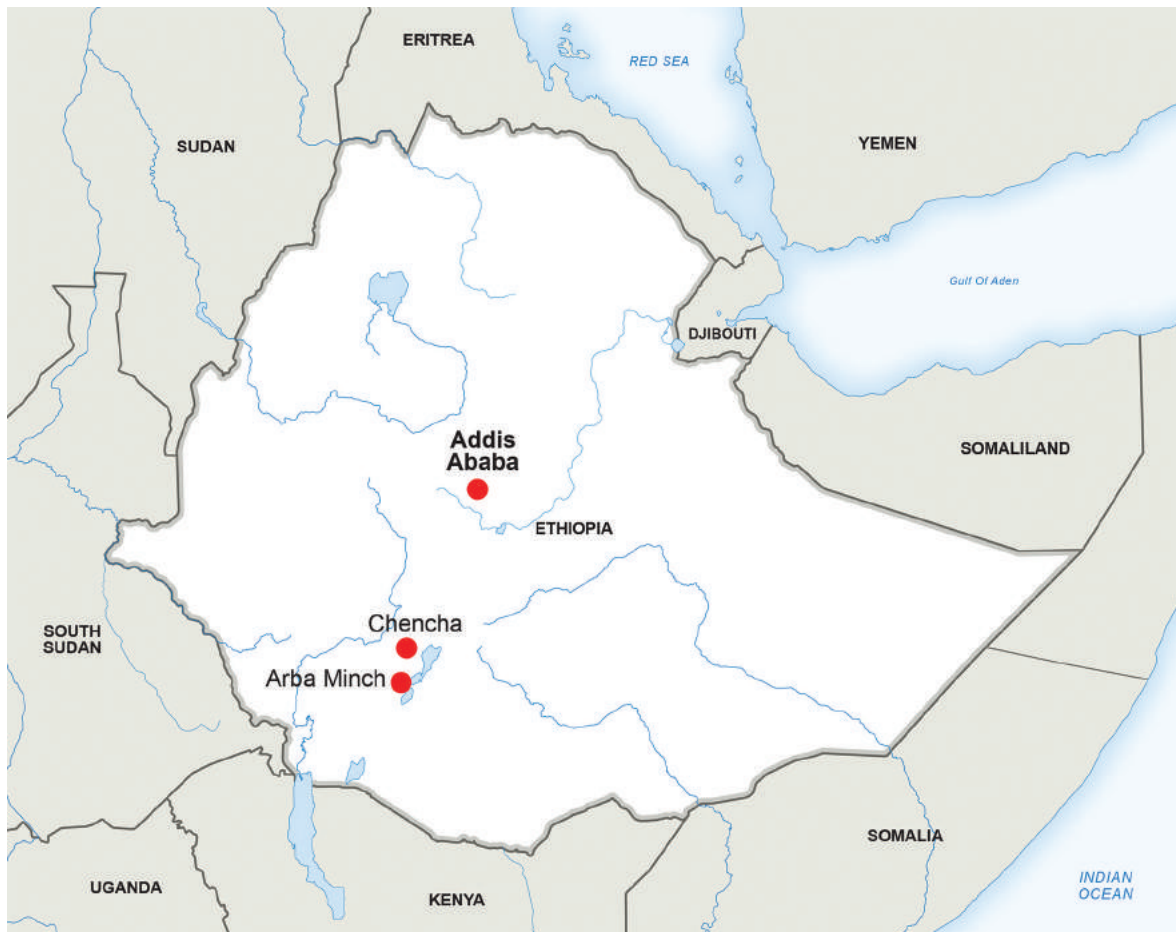
Western Province Chapter Directive 2007

Guided by the Chapter Directive 2007, the Provincial Leadership Team set up a Working Group in 2008 to research and identify areas of extreme poverty for a provincial response and to engage membership and other in this process. Sisters volunteered for this group and six sisters were chosen to:



While the Mercy Sisters of the Western Province are working among the poor in the developing world for many years, the Working Group decided after much prayer and discernment that a specific project should be identified that would involve membership in a new way. The approach to development of the well-known Non-Government Organisations was examined and a less well-known NGO – VITA – was

chosen as a partner. The values of this organisation appealed to the Working Group as being very much in tune with our Mercy values, i.e. empowerment, sustainability and interconnectedness. The next step was to make contact with Vita and to arrange a meeting. This took place at *Cúram* in Claremorris, Co Mayo in 2009. It was a very positive and informative meeting. The CEO of Vita, John Weakliam, gave an account of the work of the organisation in the Horn of Africa, which is one of the poorest regions of the world, i.e. the countries of Ethiopia and Eritrea.



Ethiopia has a population of c.90 million people. It has a high dependence on rain-fed subsistence agriculture with erratic rainfall due to climate change. Due to population pressure and land fragmentation, food poverty in rural areas is particularly prevalent. There is high unemployment, a low level of literacy and limited access to health and education services especially in southern Ethiopia. When this picture was presented to the Western Province it was agreed to sponsor a project identified by Vita in the south of the country. The area chosen was Chench, which soon became a household word around the Province! A Memorandum of Understanding was drawn up and signed by both sides on 29 Oct 2009.



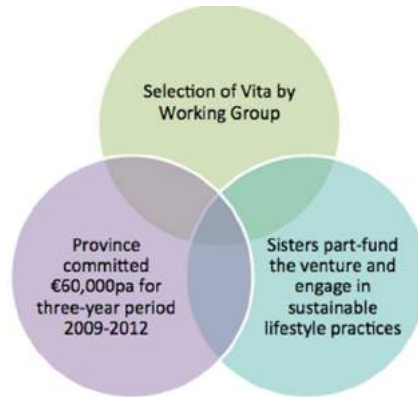
Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding in 2009.

L-R: Kathleen Conneally, Martina Barrett, Margaret Farrell, Angela Forde, Áine Mc Garty, Mary Walshe, Kathleen Glennon, Bernadette McKenna, Juliet Walsh, Mary Concannon, Patricia Fahy;
 Seated: Elizabeth Manning (Provincial Leader) and John Weakliam (CEO of Vita).

This MoU between the parties is hereby signed on the 27th Day of Nov 2009.

<p>Name: <u>ELIZABETH MANNING</u></p> <p>Designation: <u>PROVINCIAL</u></p> <p>Signature: _____</p> <p><u>Elizabeth Manning Sr</u> On Behalf of: Sisters of Mercy</p> <p>Date: <u>27th November '09</u></p>	<p>Name: <u>JOHN WEAKLIAM</u></p> <p>Designation: <u>CEO</u></p> <p>Signature: <u>[Handwritten Signature]</u></p> <p>On Behalf of: Vita</p> <p>Date: <u>27/11/2009</u></p>
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Original Document.



The agreement was that the Mercy Sisters of the Western Province would contribute €60,000 per annum for 3 years. Part of this money is gathered by personal contributions made by sisters, from their personal allowances.

This contribution enables Vita to carry out projects like community-led total sanitation, the building of more fuel-efficient stoves, the provision of seedlings for the planting of trees, the introduction of better seed potato which has given the people more food security.

Chencha is now the Potato Centre of Excellence in Ethiopia. This was launched in Dublin in June 2012. Members of the Working Group were invited to be present:



Vita Potato Centre of Excellence launch June 2012.

L-R: Asfaw Mekuria, Vita Ethiopian Country Director; John Weakliam, CEO Vita; Patricia Fahy, Mercy Provincial Working Group; Lela-Alem Gebreyohannes Tedla, H. E. Ethiopian Ambassador to Ireland; Juliet Walsh, Mercy Provincial Working Group; Tilahun Kebebe, Gama Gofa Zone Chief Administrator and Yenenesh Gebresilase, PhD candidate Vita/Teagasc Wageningen partnership.

Vita's *modus operandi* is to enable people to become the agents of their own development, not depending on handouts.



L-R: Maureen O'Dea (Board of Vita), Mary Walsh (Provincial Leadership Team) and John Weakliam (CEO of Vita) renew the Memorandum of Understanding in Ballinasloe, 2012.



Standing l-r: Áine Mc Garty, Kathleen Glennon, Mary Concannon, Kathleen Conneally, Martina Barrett (PLT), Patricia Fahy, Juliet Walsh.
Seated l-r: Maureen O'Dea, Mary Walsh (PLT) and John Weakliam (CEO Vita), as the Memorandum of Understanding was renewed in 2012.



L-R: Patricia Fahy, John Weakliam, Mary Doherty, Kathleen Glennon, Áine Mc Garty, Loreto Hogge, John Gilliland, Margaret Tiernan, at a meeting to prepare the Memorandum of Understanding, 2014–18.



2014-18 Memorandum Signing.
L-R: Ciara Feehely, John Weakliam, Mary Glynn, Caitlín Conneely, John Gilliland, Margaret Tiernan, Juliet Walsh, Loreto Hogge, Breege Donohoe.



Patricia Fahy, Oliver Ryan, Juliet Walsh and Deirdre Ruane sharing engira bread and vegetables during their visit to the project in Ethiopia in 2010.

Together we are beating hunger and climate change in Ethiopia

"The Sisters of Mercy recognise that equitable partnership with farmers is the next generation model of development for poor farm families"

Sr Loreto Hogge
Sisters of Mercy, Western Province.

"My partnership with Vita and the Sisters of Mercy allows me to become a successful business man, and my profits will educate my children"

Helato
Potato farmer, Chench, Ethiopia.

Sisters of Mercy
Hermanas de la Misericordia

Vita, the Sisters of Mercy, rural families in Ethiopia and our partners collaborate to deliver high value programmes to the world's poorest people. The end result is sustainable, successful families that no longer depend on aid and have viable futures.

Vita
Fighting hunger and climate change in Africa

What impact is this project having on our lifestyle choices? The Working Group has raised much awareness in the Province. One topic was that of water and they designed, printed and circulated a flyer on this vital issue:

"I only want to be a drop of clear water through which God's love could shine."

Mother Teresa of Calcutta



Commissioned April 11,th 2008, we have had five meetings and two days of facilitation. We are struggling to discern how best to move forward. We hope to share the result of our discernment with you later on in the term. Meanwhile as a response to this directive we invite you to focus on how

Our lifestyle choices contribute to extreme poverty

We begin by focussing on

WATER

and its

CONSERVATION.

[Photographs: Elizabeth McNamee, Gerry Ryder and Suzanne Ryder]

Mystery bubbles

In a nearby stream,

On the verge of heaven,

We are cradled

In a glorious Godlike dream!

From "Tea is the Bog," Kathleen Glannon

We commit ourselves to share generously. We will support and resource discerned ministry needs at Congregational, Provincial, and Local levels. We will heighten our awareness that our lifestyles choices contribute to extreme poverty.

Working Group:

- Juliet Walshe • Patricia Fahy •
- Kathleen Conneally • Áine McGarty •
- Mary Concannon • Kathleen Glennon •

WATER

- 1.2 billion people, about 1/3 of the world's population have no access to clean water.
- If the present trend continues in 20 years 2/3 of the population will not have sufficient
- Every 3 seconds a person dies due to lack of pure water
- Only 2.5% of the waters of the world are fresh water and 1% of the world's water is drinkable
- World wide the demand for water is increasing dramatically because of population growth, industrialisation, and especially irrigation
- It takes:
 - 400,000 litres of water to manufacture 1 car
 - 2,000 litres to produce 1 glass of brandy
 - 42,500 litres to produce 1 kilo of beef
- The recommended amount of water needed by each person is around 50 litres by day. The average person in the USA uses 600 litres
- Europeans use 250-300 litres
- Approximately 25% of bottles water is merely tap water
- There are huge profits on bottles water with major environmental costs

Plastics comprise more than 25% of the volume of materials sent to landfills every year

The World is running out of water.

What can we do?

It doesn't have to cost us money to make a difference; all it takes is a small change in the way we do everyday activities in the home and in the garden. It is surprising to know that the average daily water consumption per person in Ireland is over 148 litres! We can reduce the amount we use quite simply by following these straightforward tips. Water is precious, let us conserve it. How?

1. Fix leaking taps as soon as you notice them.
2. Avoid leaving the tap running while brushing your teeth.
3. Use a basin to rinse/clean your fruit and vegetables.
4. Fill the kettle with enough for your needs, not to the brim.
5. A 5-minute shower uses 30 litres of water; a bath uses 80 litres.
6. Use your Dishwasher and Washing machine only when they are full.
7. Collect rainwater. It is excellent for your plants.
8. Use a watering can instead of a hose when watering plants.
9. When cleaning windows or washing a car, use a bucket and sponge instead of a hose.
10. Keep a jug of water in the fridge and have a cool drink when you need it.
11. Know how to turn off your water supply in the event of a pipe burst.
12. Putting a full, sealed bottle of water in the toilet cistern reduces the flush by the same volume.

N.B. Great amounts of energy are used to transport, heat and treat water, using up our fossil fuels and contributing to air pollution.

Reflecting on the commitment of our Congregational Chapter [see statement] at our Provincial Chapter in January 2007, we came up with the following Directive: Directive 3

We commit ourselves to share generously. We will support and resource discerned ministry needs at Congregational, Provincial, and Local levels. We will heighten our awareness that our lifestyles choices contribute to extreme poverty.

PLT will set up a Working Group to:

- Research and identify areas of extreme poverty for a provincial response
- Engage membership and others in this process.
- Collaborate with relevant groups.
- Implement, manage and evaluate.

At the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto in 2003 Archbishop Rendo Martino argued that

'The water concern of the poor must become the concern of all in a perspective of solidarity.'

Vita
Fighting hunger and climate change in Africa

Our association with Vita has heightened our awareness of the living conditions of our fellow men and women in the developing world and also how we have contributed to this situation by our lavish lifestyles. We have been encouraged to look at our behaviour and attitudes as we enjoy all the advantages of living in the developed world. In our communities we endeavour to reduce, reuse, repair and recycle as our Policy for Ecological Responsibility encourages us to do. In our contacts with the wider community we try to promote this message in an effort to protect and conserve our environment for future generations.

As we study the encyclical of Pope Francis *Laudato Si'* we realise how urgent it is to do what we can to protect our common home.

Together, Vita and the Sisters of Mercy Western Province are committed to challenging unsustainable behaviour via the Green Impact Fund both globally and closer to home. Through the Vita Green Impact Fund and the Sustainable Livelihoods Programme, the Sisters of Mercy are providing examples and solutions that enable organisations and individuals to deliver change in a positive and informed manner.

Patricia Fahy

Story of Visit to the Project in 2014

In July 2014, two sisters, Loreto Hogge and Mary Doherty, made a visit to the partnership project which had since been scaled up and known as the Gama Gofa Green Zone Project. They were fortunate to be in the country at that time of year to witness the country's two growing seasons. Some families were harvesting their crops while others were preparing the ground for the next planting season. For ten days, Mary and Loreto lived with the people in Arba Minch and travelled each morning to the sites of the project. They ate their food, walked their hillsides and gave a helping hand with harvesting of the potato and barley crops.

They visited the work places where pottery making, weaving and cooking stove-making industries were well established and had become a source of income for families. Households had benefitted by having water pumps sunk. This enabled them to have easy access to water and made it possible for them to grow and maintain their own vegetables and sell the surplus in the local market. The use of cooking stoves had reduced the amount of fuel needed for cooking and also reduced eye disease and infection caused by smoke from open fires. Community-led projects were evident everywhere but most especially on the hillsides where areas had been given over to tree planting, designed to prevent erosion and in time to be a source of fuel.



The visitors harvesting potatoes!



It was also the end of the school year. Parents proudly showed the sisters their children's excellent school reports. The parents were now able to afford to educate their children. This was yet another positive outcome of the project. They also observed that, due to satellite communication, access to information via IT was also possible even in this remote area of Ethiopia. This enables people to access learning and communication.

Though it was gratifying to see how much the project was helping the people, there was the heartbreak at seeing the poverty, the drudgery and the primitive methods of farming and working, in general. It was the dearest wish of the sisters to do something more for the local community. On completing their visit to the project sites they travelled north to Addis Ababa where they met with the Vita Ethiopian Country Director, Asfaw Mekuria. There, they presented their recommendations – sixteen in all – to the Country Director and staff, many of which have since been implemented.

The warmth and hospitality of the Ethiopian people are very special. This hospitality is evident in every town and village where all guests and visitors are offered freshly brewed coffee. In appreciation of Mary's and Loreto's visit the director presented them with two beautiful works of art, which captured this very special characteristic of Ethiopian culture.

On returning home, they presented their findings to the Western Province. The members were so touched by the report that they agreed to renew the partnership from 2014 – 2018.

Loreto Hogge and Mary Doherty



2014 signing: John Weakliam, CEO Vita with Sister Caitlín Conneely, Provincial Leader, Western Province.

A Perspective from Vita

The Sisters of Mercy Western Province and Vita have a longstanding partnership based on a mutual concern for the integrity of God’s creation, and a determination to mitigate the impacts of climate change through sustainable living and livelihoods. Before 2015, the partnership concentrated mainly on Ethiopia, where climate change is causing tremendous hardship.

Together, the Sisters of Mercy Western Province and Vita are driving the development of a Green Impact Fund that delivers food, energy and water security to households, and particularly women and children, in southern Ethiopia through the creation of Green Zones that combat the effects of climate change.

However, in 2015, while signing a new Memorandum of Understanding, the Sisters of Mercy and Vita recognised that much could be achieved by also focussing their efforts inwards towards an Irish audience. They jointly devised a development education initiative known as *The Sustainable Living And Climate Justice Programme*, which strongly reflects the *Sisters of Mercy Policy for Ecological Responsibility*.

Starting with a pilot programme which had two strands, sustainable living and climate change, they targeted a number of interested organisations (i.e. Active Retirement, *Macra na Feirme*, *Foróige*, etc.) in the west of Ireland. The sustainable living element of the programme aimed to empower people to adapt their lifestyles, use natural resources more responsibly and cause less environmental damage for future generations to deal with. The climate change element emphasised justice and aimed to effectively join the dots between our own behaviour in Ireland and the consequences for those in sub-Saharan Africa.

The approach being taken will increase awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live. The objective is to engage people in analysis, reflection and action for local and global citizenship and participation. It is about supporting people in understanding the nuances around climate change and sustainable living, while acting to transform the social, cultural, political and economic structures which affect their lives and others at personal, community, national and international levels.

The programme is acting as a catalyst to enable participating organisations to separately and collectively use existing resources and capacity to raise consciousness and responsibility around climate justice and sustainable living. The pilot phase of the programme was a success, with two workshops, which were well attended by representatives from across the voluntary sector in Ireland. Additional workshops will be delivered into the future.

The national sustainable development programme dovetails very naturally with the Vita Green Impact Fund. This sustainable, innovative, next generation model of development provides investors with an opportunity to have a tremendous life-transforming impact on 200,000 people while removing 420,000 tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere. Through the Green Impact Fund congregations, companies and organisations can address their social responsibility and bring new capital into the development sector. They will subscribe through grants as well as loans to be repaid by sale of carbon credits generated by fuel saving cooking stoves, solar lighting and water borehol

The Sisters of Mercy Western Province are developing awareness in Irish and international constituencies of their role and responsibility with regard to climate change. They do this by promoting the Green Impact Fund to peer groups and principals both in Ireland and abroad. They are demonstrating leadership in bringing sustainable solutions 'on the ground' for women in their homes that combat economic and climate injustice.

Ciara Feehely



Aberesh, a single mother of six, and Shuluku, her youngest, both live in Doko Yoyery. Supported by Vita, she is one of the most successful potato farmers in the project. She now has a second store for her burgeoning crop of potatoes.



Amarech and her husband Tesfe.



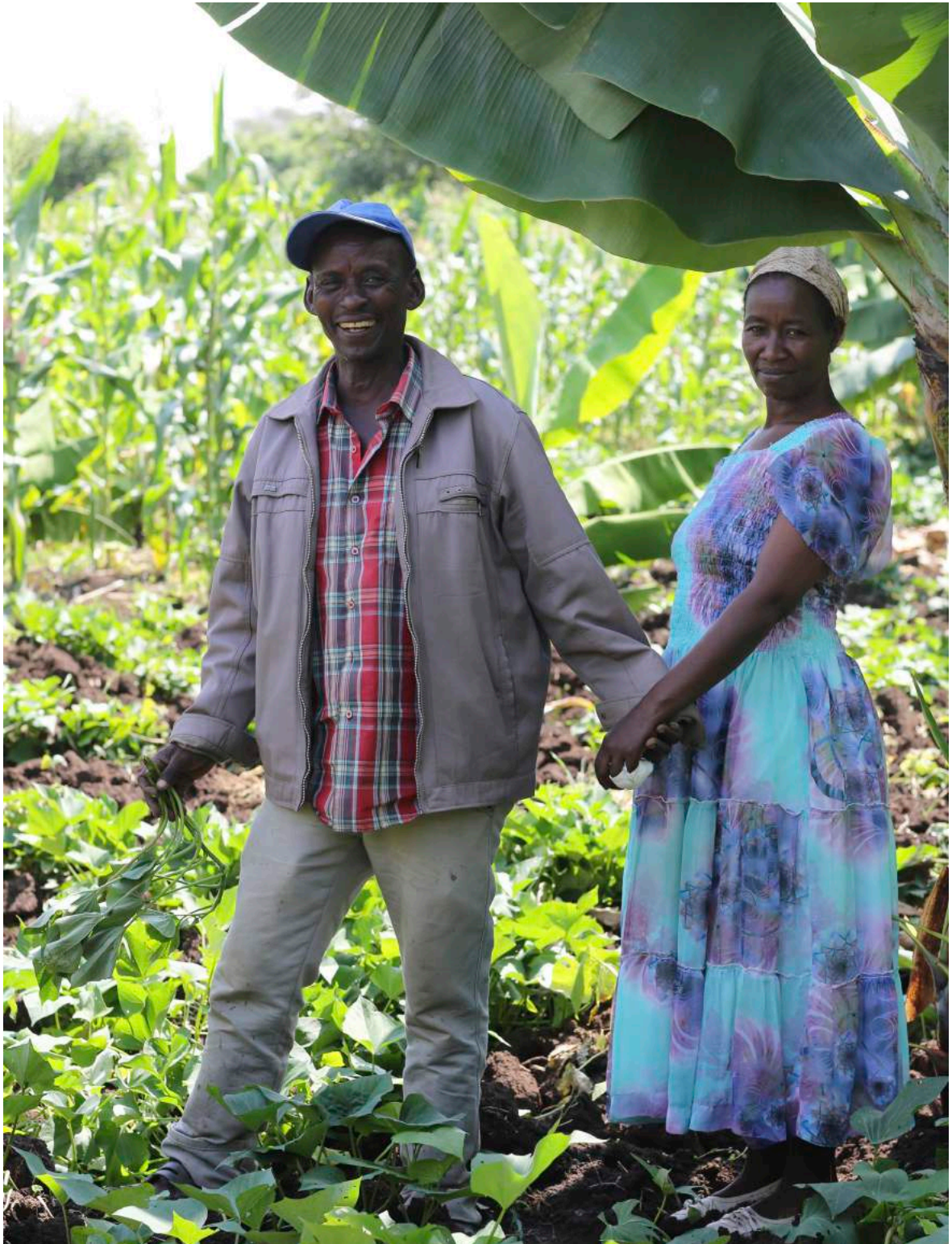
Lelashe in her field of beet.



Serawit, with her little boy, admires a cabbage from her crop.



Serawit roasts some grain on her new, improved stove.



Shegate and Oyesse harvesting more than smiles!

Chapter Seventeen

Mercy International Reflection Process

*"If we are humble and sincere God will finish in us the work He has begun.
He never refuses His grace to those who ask it."*

Catherine McAuley

*"This is what the Lord asks of us
to act justly, to love tenderly and
to walk humbly with our God."*

Micah 6: 8



Mercy International Reflection Process

MIRP

The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor



MERCY INTERNATIONAL REFLECTION PROCESS

Flaming the Fire of Mercy: Creation Waiting in Eager Longing

The Mercy International Reflection Process is an initiative begun in 2015 with the purpose of uniting Mercy Sisters around the world in reflection, leading to action. It provides a range of resources and invites Mercy communities to ponder the global issues of our day, as we listen again to the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor. MIRP invites us to join with all Mercy Sisters, everywhere, as we embrace the Jubilee Year of Mercy in gratitude, hope and new vision. The theme for this process, *The Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor*, penetrates to the heart of our charism and enshrines our primary focus.

The process is in four stages.

Stage One: The Story. This is a time to tell stories and recall experiences. There are personal stories, national stories, international stories that open our senses to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.

Stage Two: The Broader Context. This is a time to explore the theme in a broader context. There are causes we must face, and consequences we must own. Who is getting richer and who is getting poorer?

Stage Three: Wisdom Traditions. This is a time to read and reflect on the wisdom of our tradition using a selection of relevant texts – Biblical, especially Gospel texts, writings of Catherine McAuley, current theological insights, emerging ecological wisdom, etc. Through this time of reading and reflecting we are invited to begin to identify the new vision that is awakening within us.

Stage Four: Action. This is a time to ask – *What are we being called to do differently or how are we being called to live differently as a result of our prayer and reflection? What can we do locally and how and when will we evaluate such action?*

Through the Mercy International Reflection Process, the following issues have been identified in the Western Province:

Athlone Cois Abhann: Homelessness, climate change and its effects experienced in local areas by severe flooding.

Athlone Dún Mhuire: **Group A:** Water and flooding in Athlone area
Group B: Homelessness
Group C: Waste

Ballinasloe: We will research and study ways and means that will enable us to be Advocates for the vulnerable elderly and persons with special needs.

Boyle: Displaced People

Ballymote: Homelessness

Castlebar Cluster A: Árd Bhríde: **Group 1:** Domestic Waste
Group 2: Interconnectedness

Castlebar Cluster B: Doing what we can at household level, composting, gardening...

Drumshambo, Newtownforbes, Mohill: Displaced people

Edgeworthstown: Refugees and human trafficking

Foxford, Ballina, Bellmullet: To enjoy being in solidarity with all our Mercy Sisters all over the world as we raise our own awareness of the connection between care of the earth and care of the poor.

Galway Stella Maria: Water and homelessness

Galway Teaghlach Mhuire: Homelessness, in particular the new homeless in Galway.

Longford: **Group A:** Water
Group B: Sustainable Living
Group C: Throw-Away-Culture

Loughrea: Flooding

Roscommon: Homeless; care of the earth; flooding in the Athlone area; water

preservation and drainage. As a community to feed into the bigger picture, raising awareness on climate change and justice, being advocates on behalf of those suffering the effects of flooding, lobbying local TDs and Councillors.

Sligo Cluster A: Use of scarce resources - water, fuel, etc.

Sligo Cluster B: Homelessness

Tuam: Homelessness, flooding, refugees.



Front l-r: Bernadette O'Grady, Kathleen Hunt, Mary Groarke, Mary Teresa O'Reilly, Margaret Mary Dempsey, Back l-r: Immaculata Brady, Kathleen Friel.



Ballymote, Co Sligo - Reflecting on the underlying causes and broader contexts in which the group's focal issue - Homelessness - plays out locally, nationally, and globally.



Front l-r: Eileen Walsh, Breda Fadden, Enda O'Donnell, Bríd Scully, Back row: Áine Barrins, Helen Diviney, Evelyn Horan.



Front l-r: Dolores Duggan, Mary-Lou Haverty, Canice Burns, Rita Conway. Back l-r: Bridie Hoban, Attracta Canny, Margaret McHale, Bernie Hoban.



Mohill Cluster - Back l-r: Mary Reynolds, Veronica Jones, Mary Doherty, Marie Reilly, Nora Keenan. Front l-r: Martina Sheridan, Freda Kenny, Helen Keegan, Michelle Gorham.



Maura Walsh looks over the shoulders of Teresa Sheeran, Francesca McGuire and Mairéad O'Keeffe in Dún Mhuire, Athlone.

Westport Mercy Sisters ask the question: "How can we help to raise awareness about the critical issue of 'climate change' at local level?"

Kathleen Friel tells the story:

As we progressed with the process on this topic we heard of other local groups who are very aware that 'Climate Change' is a key challenge that requires urgent action. Our wish is to work towards Westport becoming a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable place in which to live and work. As one way towards raising awareness and achieving this - introducing the parish to the project of becoming an Eco-Congregation was on our agenda. A network of representatives from a number of environmental groups came together and decided to form an Eco-Congregation Committee. Members from our cluster attended this meeting and have now become part of the project.

The combined focus has been to raise awareness of the issue of climate change and to highlight how the community can take action. Looking at lifestyle choices is central to this. We have shared resources from the Mercy International Reflection Process and together organised events in the parish to raise awareness and provide education about Climate Change and Care of our Common Home.



Westport has demonstrated very well over the years the benefits of team work and volunteering. We believe that to truly create positive change, we must work together. It is in the spirit of this ethos that many environmental events and initiatives are now taking place in our parish. Fr Seán McDonagh (Columban priest) was invited for an evening to launch an awareness campaign on the topic of climate change. He gave an excellent presentation using *Laudato Si'* as the context. Over 80 people attended. To mark Tierra Sagrada (Sacred Earth) on June 12 some members organised a tree trail around the Mall in the town. Prior to this, one of the parishioners had researched the names of each tree and labelled them. We had great fun as there was a questionnaire prepared and the challenge was to discover how many trees we could name. We learned a lot from this experience and became very aware of the variety and number of trees along the beautiful river that runs through our town. An Eco Ramble/Reflection in the Sacred Heart School's beautiful grounds was organised by Marie Lane (school catechist) to mark International Environmental Day. Members from the parish eco-congregation participated in this event.

Some Members of the Eco-Committee attended the 3rd Annual International Human Rights Lecture (June 25th) in the Mary Robinson Centre in Ballina. The invited guest speakers were Ms Hina Jilani from Pakistan, and Mary Robinson – both members of The Elders, the group of independent global leaders working together for peace and human rights, founded by Nelson Mandela and Richard Branson. In their excellent presentations the link between climate justice and human rights was made very well. Other events are being planned. Weekly reminders in our parish newsletter about simple lifestyle choices guide us to take some small but very significant actions that make a difference to our environment. During Mass a prayer of the faithful related to the care of our common home is included each Sunday. Many interesting, challenging and even controversial conversations happen as a result!

On one occasion, there was an email from a visiting couple, who attended Mass in Westport. They saw a poster in the church about the Eco-Congregation and were very interested to find out more. They wish to start this in their own parish. The chairperson of the Westport Eco-Congregation committee will now share further with them what steps they can take to move forward with their plans.

Kathleen Friel

Conclusion

On the final day of COP21 Paris 2015 a banner, flying over the heads of the joyful crowds caught my eye. It read “*Paris Climate deal won’t save the planet; the rest is up to us.*” It was the caption of the group 360.org. The stories in the chapters of this book are accounts of the actions and choices that the Mercy Sisters in the Western Province and their Mercy partners are now making to respond to the cry of the earth, the cry of the poor. In each of these stories there is a similarity to the story of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:29-37 in that:

- i) a need beckons – a person is wounded
- ii) compassion is felt – the Samaritan is moved with compassion
- iii) action is taken – the Samaritan bandages the wounds
- iv) others are involved in the action – the Samaritan networks with the innkeeper

The significant influences which bring the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor to our awareness are:

- a) The ongoing formation programmes provided in the Western Province.
- b) The Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy Policy for Ecological Responsibility 2010.
- c) The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) drawn up in 2009 when the Mercy Sisters became partners with Vita, in a community-led Green Zone Project to provide sustainable livelihoods for the women and families of the Gama Gofa Zone in southern Ethiopia.
- d) Personal reflection.

The findings, the insights gained from these inputs raised our awareness of the interdependence of all life and the consequent effect on our lifestyle choices regarding climate change. We realised that the need to act for climate justice by managing and reducing our carbon footprint is now no longer an option.

Originally, the stories in this book were written to support an application for the prestigious honour of an Eco-Congregation Award, for which the CEO of Vita, Mr John Weakliam, nominated the Mercy Sisters, Western Province. The independently assessed Eco-Congregation Award is designed to affirm good practice in environmental stewardship and help churches and communities witness to the importance of caring for God’s creation.

When Vita was identified as a partner for Mercy it was as much for the values shared by both groups as for the practical issues that both parties were happy to work together. In the seven years of the partnership a positive mutual influence has developed, especially a mutual commitment to live in a more environmentally sustainable way. It was the recognition of this commitment which led Vita to make the nomination.

The Quaker ecologist and broadcaster, Dr Alastair McIntosh, speaking at a Caring for Creation event in Belfast in 2014 described an eco-congregation: *"To be an eco-congregation is about far more than just natural environment in a narrow sense. To be an eco-congregation is to be involved in the oikos – the same Greek word that gives us ecology, ecumenical, economics and it means the household. It doesn't mean 'the household' in a narrow domestic sense or even in the sense of the whole world: it means our positioning in the household of the whole of creation, our positioning in the cosmos."*

Just when the compilers of this book – *The Vita and Life Style Choices Group*, (Margaret Tiernan, Áine Mc Garty, Loreto Hogge, Kathleen Glennon, Patricia Fahy and Mary Doherty) thought that they had received all the stories, a final entry arrived on the editor's desk. Its title was *The Mercy International Reflection Process (MIRP)*. It is a story that connects the Mercy family worldwide. The reflection process is especially relevant, as its purpose is to discern globally a shared response to the cry of the earth.

The reality that Mercy Sisters in 44 countries world-wide are simultaneously engaged in this kind of reflective process could only be attributed to the hand of God. That this should be our focus during *The Jubilee Year of Mercy* is equally relevant. Let us then progress, nurturing God's mercy in our hearts and in our universe as we try to respond to the challenges and issues that the new cosmology and its link to eco-justice are manifesting in our Mercy communities and networks today.

Acknowledgements

Our central indebtedness in this venture is to our beautiful Universe as it unfolds its story. We have been led in this project by the mysterious Spirit that guides Creation, knowing that we are beholden to her, for our every breath. The beating heart of this publication is the life we share as Sisters of Mercy. *Buíochas le Dia.*

This book is dedicated to our members, as we partake in some small way in a sustainable way of life, whether it be in a visible project, or in the simple lifestyle choices we make every day. We hold this book as an acknowledgement of who we profess to be and as inspiration for the sustainability of every form of life. *Go gcuire Dia and Muire beannacht ar ár gcuid oibre.*

We, the members of the *Vita and Lifestyles Choices Group*, wish to thank all of our Sisters in the Western Province, who have contributed to the creation of this practical resource, which would not have been possible without your co-operation in sending us your stories and your pictures. We thank in a special way the Sisters of Árd Bhríde, Castlebar, for the hospitable space they provide when we hold our meetings. *Nár laga Dia sibh.*

A special word of thanks to all our photographers for their exquisite photographs; images that reveal some of the natural wonder of our planet and act as foil within the book; Suzanne Ryder for her editorial skills, time and patience; Liamy Mac Nally, our publisher, who shared his time and expertise most generously with us. His quiet, reflective presence opened insightful questions that revealed to us the soul part of our journey. Thanks to Pat Tracey, our graphic designer, for his meticulous attention to detail and his imaginative, creative skills. *Gnúis Dé go bhfeicimís.*

We thank especially our *Provincial Leadership Team* for their generous sponsorship of this publication, which we hope will encourage us all to continue to live and act responsibly to ensure the harmony and sustainability of God's creation. *Go gcuire Día ar ár leas sinn.*

"The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole..."

Pope Benedict XVI



The Members of the Vita and Lifestyle Choices Working Group
Margaret Tiernan, Áine Mc Garty, Patricia Fahy, Kathleen Glennon, Loreto Hogge, Mary Doherty.

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All Ireland Pollinator Plan, www.biodiversityireland.ie

An Gáirdín, angairdin1@gmail.com

Drama *Diablo*, www.spannerintheworks.org email: patriciadowney@talk21.com

Galilee Community, www.galilee.ie

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Justice Desk, Nora Burke, nomburke@eircom.net

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Vita, Irish NGO, www.vita.ie

A Prayer For Our Earth

(Laudato Si')

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,

help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives,

that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts

of those who look only for gain

at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,

to be filled with awe and contemplation,

to recognize that we are profoundly united

with every creature

as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.

Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle

for justice, love and peace.

Amen.

Sisters of Mercy Western Province



The Universe Story reveals the sacred origins of life. It has touched the hearts of the Mercy Sisters of the Western Province, as they have grown in awareness that we are all part of one wondrous mystery. This book tells some of their story, as they attempt to live in a more reverential manner with all creation. The Mercy Sisters of the Western Province were nominated for an Eco-Congregation award by the NGO, Vita, whose principal work is in Ethiopia and Eritrea. There, they are in partnership with the local people, as they seek to develop sustainable green livelihoods. Mercy Sisters' partnership with Vita since 2009, in the Gama Gofa Zone in the Southern Highlands of Ethiopia, hopes to address the effects of extreme poverty and climate change.

CPR

