



"Tracing the Mercy Footprint"

**Report on Mercy Ministry 2009-2019
by
Mercy Mission & Development Office**

October 2020

Report on Mercy Ministry

2009-2019

<i>Table of Contents</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	3
Nigeria	6
Zambia	15
Kenya	30
Peru	39
South Africa	46
Appendix	59



INTRODUCTION

What will Mercy leave behind?

At a workshop in South Africa some years ago this question caused raised eyebrows on the part of some of the sisters present. Perhaps it was heard as a challenge. Perhaps as an invitation to pause and reflect.

Whether challenge or invitation, this question seemed particularly relevant when reporting on ministry for 2019 as the landscape of the Mercy presence evolves yet again, and the countries where sisters are in active ministry become fewer. As of 2020, M&D will continue to support sisters in Kenya, Peru and South Africa. For whatever reason, this seemed an opportune moment to look back at the Mercy footprint both where Mercy has been and where Mercy still continues today.

Some of you may recall the Mercy M & E (Monitoring & Evaluation) Manual produced in 2010. A quote from that literature states: *"Irrespective of the local differences or operational choices, there are over-arching priorities which characterise the Mercy approach to ministry. Intrinsic to all our development efforts must be that the ethos of Mercy is prevalent and evident in all programmes and activities. For membership this is the starting and finishing point of our reason for being where we are."*

And so the scene is set.

Context

In an article entitled "Leaving a Mercy footprint", written in February 2015 by M&D, we were invited to consider how the presence of Mercy could or would be recorded.

"So when the question - what does Mercy leave behind? - arises, as it does sometimes in discussion, what might be the answer? Tangibles such as schools and other buildings are certainly concrete evidence that Mercy has passed this way. Perhaps those coming after will look at the roll call of past students and clients, past patients and graduates for whom Mercy has meant some kind of turning point in their lives. Whether that was being able to read for the first time as an adult, setting up their own small or not so small business, watching their child graduate with an honours degree – in all these scenarios and more, the Mercy footprint may be visible."

Several factors come into play when we are talking about long-term presence on the ground. One very obvious aspect that unfortunately we can do little without is, of course, funding. With the best will in the world, there is little that can be achieved without financial support. Sources of funding can be formal in the shape of donors or government entities, and much closer to home - networks of friends, parishes and communities. Through the M&D office the channel of any funding follows the official route - either through the Congregational Solidarity Fund or through Misesan Cara. It seemed only reasonable to include some indication of the level of financial aid which has enabled just some of the activities over the ten year period, and Appendix I details the levels of funding from the afore-mentioned formal sources.

Another consideration when talking about the footprint left behind, is that while planning and preparation for the handing on of ministry responsibility can be meticulous and well thought-out, once we are no longer in control, no longer making the decisions, ultimately what happens to that ministry is in someone else's hands.

There are no guarantees that it will continue and this is a reality which cannot be easy for any ministry manager to accept.

Finally, how to talk of ministry without mentioning that which holds it together? The glue of ministry as it were - community. Here perhaps it is worth recalling an article written earlier this year after an M&D visit to Kenya in 2019:

"As I made my way around the Province, a guest of the sisters in some of the more remote locations – Lodwar, Lokori, Chepareria, Nuu – I could not fail to notice what could perhaps be described as the sense of family in all the houses I visited. More accurately I am sure this could and should be given its name of - community. How is this observed? Well, in the nature of exchanges, in the unspoken familiarity and the give and take of choices made and decision taken, in the awareness each of the other.

This time around it was the life of the community which added yet another dimension to my experience of Mercy. So while the focus of my work and my time on the ground may usually be the ministries and what they accomplish, this time around it was the sincerity, the solidarity of the communities I found which will fuel my efforts for the foreseeable future. It was during this visit that I realised just how central to the Mercy presence is the ministry of Community."

(Extract from M&D Article Mercy Alive January 2020)

Let us begin by reflecting on ministry in those places where Mercy is no longer physically present before we look at the other countries where Mercy continues to be a physical reality...

NIGERIA

The Mercy Story in Nigeria spans fifty years and was celebrated in 2019 with an acknowledgement of the breadth of that presence :

"We remember with gratitude the founding Sisters of the communities in Lagos, Minna and Yola who travelled from Ballyshannon, Bessbrook, Derry, Dungannon, Dundalk, Strabane, Dungarvan and Waterford city, in response to the call to minister in Nigeria. "

(Prayers of the Faithful, Mass of Thanksgiving, March 2019)

Context

In the words of a sister who worked in Nigeria from 2008 until 2016, *"Mercy is not reducible to any of its works, as Mercy is a question of the heart. I ask myself -*

"Was I merciful ?"

The context within which Mercy ministry continued for so many years in Nigeria presented its own set of challenges. In addition to the distances to be travelled, external factors affected the fragile state of peace particularly in some parts of the country. One sister shared her experience in 2015: *"The challenge was... to keep going in spite of the insurgency. Even though the insurgents did not reach Yola en masse we did have 4 suicide bombings in Yola between August and November. Many were killed and injured. This has engendered fear and a sense of insecurity which still exists."*

During the period 2015-16, thousands of IDPs (Internally Displaced Person) flooded the Diocese and as many as 6,000 occupied the Diocesan compounds for months on end. That same year there were further problems: *"In parts of the country there was avian flu and we had to stop our poultry production for months for safety reasons. This meant we had no chickens for sale at Christmas, a high point for sales. How do we become sustainable in these circumstances?"*

Ministry of Community Development

❖ Wauru Jabbe Community Development Programme

Community development was (and still is) at the core of the ministry which was begun in Wauru Jabbe. As the sister who set up the programme, Sr. Kathleen (Agnes) Hannon explained: *"The core value of this programme is in its ecumenical nature. The fact that Christians and Muslims come together to share their concerns and discuss their priorities is the "glue" that will keep this community together when external factors threaten the existence of the different programme activities. Local Government and Religious Leaders of all Faiths value the community having programmes which give people a 'second chance', where people sit and learn together irrespective of their beliefs or background."*

All involved in the project live within the poverty bracket and are from within communities which have little or no access to either healthcare or education. The current state of emergency/crisis affecting this part of Nigeria as a whole has an inevitable impact on the villages within the Diocese of Yola, creating tensions and testing the fragile unity and peace which has kept this programme running since 2010. It is the coming together to consider and plan for some positive steps which provided the foundation for initiatives to continue in the long term. By its very existence the programme is providing an opportunity, a reason for different faiths to look beyond their differences and work as a community." (Sr. Kathleen Hannon 2014)



Sr. Kathleen Hannon documenting progress...

Recent input from Mr Al-Amin Sahabo, Community Facilitator in Yola Diocese, made it absolutely clear just how much impact the programme had and is still having. He cites the adult literacy component which benefited, in particular, women, not only because they are now able to read, write and take a more active part in what is happening within the community, but also because they now have the confidence to set up their own businesses and manage their own lives. Other "knock-on" effects have been a more active participation in and understanding of the education of their own children as well as greater harmony within the community, when dialogue rather than violence is used to heal community conflicts and resolve land disputes.

When referring to the impact of Mercy efforts Mr Al-Amin uses the word "resilience". It is clear that what was begun by the sisters of Mercy has taken root and while on the surface, the programmes may have been intended to reduce hunger and poverty and enhance educational levels, the overwhelming sense is that the community's ability to recover from adversity, from attacks such as those perpetrated by Boko Haram in 2015-16, has been irreversibly enhanced.



The observations of a visitor to the Wauru Jabbe programme leave no doubt as to the way in which the community embraced the opportunities being offered: *“Recently on a visit to an Adult Literacy Centre established by Sr. Kathleen Hannon, it was deeply moving to meet young and not so young women and hear their stories. They come to the Centre because they are committed to learning reading, writing and arithmetic; these basic skills which have been denied to millions of people, especially women. It is marvellous that so many women are prepared to walk to this Centre daily in the sweltering heat of the Yola sun. Here, they sit and struggle to learn the Hausa or English alphabet and numbers. These are not skills that can be developed in one great burst of effort. They require patience, persistence and a constant renewal of motivation on the part of the learners and their tutors. Given the harshness of the climate and the normal struggles of life, it takes grit and endurance to commit to daily lessons.”*

Thanks again to Mr Al-Amin we know also that a second programme entitled “Strengthening Citizens Engagement in Electoral Process”, more familiarly referred to as 'SCEEP', was the response initiated by Mercy to change the narrative of a country steeped in corruption and ineffective government and promote democratic governance and active political participation. The values reflected within this programme enshrine the right of every person to have a voice in how they are governed, to build accountable institutions which serve the needs of the community and are responsible to the rule of law. As recently as 2019 and as a result of these efforts, the government supported a skills acquisition training programme for young people within Adamawa state which provided both training and the equipment necessary to start up their own activities within the Yola community. At the same time the Disability Rights and Inclusive Development programme was also started which not only ensures the inclusion of people with disabilities within government policy and programmes but also provides technical and financial assistance to these same members of the community.

Computer literacy continues to be an integral part of the Wauru Jabbe programmes today. Graduates of the programme can be found in many institutions and organisations - some of them at state level.



In the words of Mr Al-Amin, *"The over-arching spirit which drives and sustains the programmes in Wauru Jabbe today is tolerance and the promotion of a peaceful co-existence between faiths. One example has been the formation of the Christian and Muslim Youth Foundation which has been expanded to State level. It is within this atmosphere of mutual respect that the communities are able to discuss such sensitive issues as religious freedom, discrimination and rumour-mongering which leads to violence."*

❖ **Sabon Rayuwa Centre for Ecology, Cosmology and Cultural Learning**

"Agriculture needs to be seen as a way of life with the capacity to sustain future generations while protecting and enhancing the environment" (Sr. Maire McGann RIP)

This ministry established in 2002 continues today under the auspices of the Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) of Yola Diocese. It was the passionate commitment of Sr Maire McGann to the work and the ethos of Sabon Rayuwa Ecological Learning Centre that ensured the ideals and the learning underpinning the ministry would last beyond her lifetime.

Information provided by Sylvanus Ddegwa, manager of the Centre today, indicates that throughout the year, 3 to 6 month industrial attachments are organised for Diploma/degree course college students, while government-sponsored training programmes on subjects such as crop farming are also a regular feature of the curriculum offered.

At a broader level the Centre's sustainable agricultural activities continue, despite challenges faced in maintaining stock levels of fish and poultry and adequate supplies of seeds. Sabon Rayuwa has become a source of expertise for the local community as well as being able to provide organically grown food.



Current trainees, when interviewed, had this to say about the Centre:

Mr. Ajiya Andaniche *"I love this centre, it has changed my thinking towards the environment and way of life also"*.

Ms. Fatima Ganghayatu *"it shows us a picture of how to take care of the earth and how to leave a clean, safe and habitable environment for all living things"*.

Mr. Abdulmalik *"it encourages stability towards constant use of conventional farming system ; organic farming has proved to be more effective than others"*

Mr. Simon Peter Dauda *"this centre teaches, educates and creates awareness about the environmental sustainability as well as self-reliance"*.

The reactions of these trainees seem to echo the words of Sr. Maire McGann (RIP) who in 2013 shared the following: *"We hope that the staff will continue to grow in ownership of the programme and deepen their conviction re the necessity of it for the future of the planet. We hope to be able to continue to spread our message and train people in healthy and environmentally sustainable ways of living."*

Ministry of Education

❖ Rahama Centre

At Rahama Centre whose founding principle was based on the promotion of the dignity of women, and where Mercy ministered until 2018, women have been and continue to be given the opportunity of learning both the Hausa (dialect) and English language as well as knitting, sewing and typing.

Like the other ministries in Yola, Rahama in 2014-15 was impacted by the influx of people fleeing from Boko Haram.

As Sr. Goretti Kelleher wrote at the time: *"The IDP women became more at home during 2015 ...and they were very proud of the baby layettes and shawls they machine knitted for the children. The majority of them went back to their villages in July 2015. The following month a new group of 700 IDP families who came back from Cameroon were brought to the camp on St Theresa's compound because their village continued to be over-run by Boko Haram."*

Now under the direction of Yola Diocese (the Justice, Peace and Development Commission), the Centre today provides a safe space for women not just to improve their understanding of language but also to find confidence. Current enrolment numbers are about 100 between the two literacy classes, with English being the chosen option of the majority.



❖ **Schools: St. Theresa's , Yola and St. Peter's, Minna**

With a Mercy sister on staff at **St. Theresa's School** in Yola from 2008 until 2016, time and attention was paid to ensuring that appropriate systems and structures were in place, all intended to encourage good practice in the delivery of quality education. To facilitate this some of the initiatives taken were:

- Formulation of a safeguarding policy based on the Mercy Ethos
- Circulation of a Safeguarding Policy Statement written for the school and extended to the Diocese.
- Development of a template for lesson planning, report books and assessment forms.
- Building of team-work through regular meetings.
- Employment of teaching assistants with clear definition of their roles.
- Installation of a solar power system for the computer room, equipping of the computer room, science room and the crèche.
- The setting up of a gratuity scheme for all permanent staff.
- The daily provision of breakfast for pupils and staff.
- The securing of the School Registration Certificate from the Ministry of Education.

Like the other ministries in Yola the school also accommodated the influx of IDPs who flooded the Diocesan compound next to the school during the time of the Boko Harem insurgency in 2015/2016.



Sr. Margaret Slattery in class at St. Theresa's

From reports received the school has continued to flourish with some adjustments made to staff workloads and timetables. A few members of staff since left the school, and more recently, the headmistress Sr. Bernice (Our Lady of Fatima Sisters) was transferred. A recent development has been the introduction of after-school study in 2018 when fees were increased.

❖ **St Peter's, Minna**

During the period under review Sr. Agnes Crowley was principle of St Peter's primary school from 2009 until 2013 when the involvement of Mercy came to an end. During that time the greatest achievement was the formation of a Development Committee which was entrusted with deciding on the prioritisation of school needs and promotion of parental contribution to the school running. Post the departure of the Mercy sisters, the school continued under the Diocesan umbrella while the Committee continues to fulfill the function of ensuring that the best interests of the student population and the teaching staff are safeguarded.

In the words of the celebrant at the Mass of Thanksgiving for Mercy's 50 years in Nigeria: *"...we gather to celebrate the seeds of God's word sown by the Sisters of Mercy in Nigerian soil since 1969, and in gratitude for all that has come to harvest. We gather too in hope that what has been handed on as seed will bear abundant fruit in the years ahead."*

ZAMBIA

In 2009 the over-arching goal of Mercy in Zambia was expressed as *“to empower people to claim their own dignity and improve the quality of their lives”* This remained the underlying theme for the next ten years.

Mercy was on the ground in Zambia for a period of 40 years. During that time 44 sisters have been engaged in ministry - pastoral, educational, healthcare and others.

The physical presence of Mercy came to an end in December 2019. Inevitably the memory of all that Mercy was and all that Mercy brought, continues - doubtless in the hearts and minds of the communities of which Mercy sisters were a part, but also in tangible and continuing activities. Some of them are documented here.

But first, an expression of the breadth of the ministry that was Mercy by a sister arriving to join the community in 2011: *“What stood out for me was the sheer magnitude of the ministries in which the sisters were involved namely, Education (very broad range from early childhood, primary, special education, employment of teachers, monetary support for students to avail of post primary and university training, literacy programmes, and finally, fees to families to ensure children could attend school) Health Care, Pastoral Care, Youth Ministry, Prayer Ministry, Parish Ministry, Food programmes, Prison Ministry, Support to families in need and help to women to start a small business. The sisters also offered employment to people in their ministries and homes.”* (Sr Nollaig O'Horo)

Context

At the beginning of this reporting period (2009) there is little doubt that the AIDS/HIV pandemic was a major contributing factor to the level and nature of the needs of the local community. The impact not only on health but consequently income levels of families determined the focus of Mercy support for a number of years. Even when healthcare programmes became more accessible and families learned coping mechanisms, other external factors such as famine caused by drought conditions, particularly during 2017, added to the challenges being faced and necessitated the involvement of the sisters in the distribution of foodstuff and seeds for planting.

Within this changing scenario however, the main thrust of Mercy Ministries in Zambia was unchanged: the empowerment of women and families. At the same time there was special emphasis on the education of the child at all levels, particularly those most in need, as education was understood to be the gateway to a better future and a way of breaking the cycle of poverty.

Inevitably, when entrusting the continuation of ministry to others and leaving the place that has been home for so many years, questions can crowd the mind. As one sister wrote " *Well-intended aid from abroad ultimately causes dependence, destabilisation and debilitations. Believing we have done our best - with the little we have - and knowing what we know today, we question ourselves on what we might have done differently. Have we done too much ? Too little? Have we done any harm ?*" (Sr Mary Cudden)

Ministry of Education

❖ Luse Family Centre and the Lifestart Programme



The origins of the Lifestart programme in Mazabuka are to be found in what was the pandemic of the time - HIV/AIDS. The community recognised that the priority need was for a program to help parents/guardians in rearing children in the 0 – 5 age bracket. The building which housed the programme was ready for occupancy in January 2010 under the name "Luse Family Centre" with not only Lifestart available but also Rainbow counselling sessions for children coping with death/loss/grief, a Literacy programme and a Library facility which was open to the surrounding community.

Family Visitors (who earned the nickname "the ladies on the purple bicycles") delivered the programme in 15 compounds of Mazabuka town. Not only children but also the broader community benefited, cementing friendships and creating bonds among all tribes and religions. During this period about 400 families were involved, with parents learning skills which would encourage confidence in the individual child and unity among the family unit. From Lifestart it then seemed a natural follow-on to begin a pre-school which bridged the gap for 5 year olds and their entrance to primary school at the age of 7.

When it came time to transfer responsibility for the programme to another congregation, Diocesan authorities were fully involved in what was called the transitional strategy. Part of that strategy was a year-long mentoring by Sr. Mary Cudden of the incoming Management Team, as well as putting in place the mechanisms which would ensure that the relationship with the Lifestart organisation in Ireland would continue.



Sr Mary Cudden and staff

Sr. Victoria Doroba (Srs. of Charity of Ottawa), the current Lifestart Coordinator, describes the programme as "fully alive and vibrant." Today 391 families and 433 children are actively engaged in Lifestart and demand for expansion of the programme is constant, given that only 40% of the total number of compounds in Mazabuka are involved. Performance in school by the children from Luse Family Centre is rated consistently higher than those who did not take part in the programme. Eight years since Sr. Mary Cudden handed over, the lives of many children and their families continue to be enhanced so that parents are empowered to ensure that children reach their full potential.



❖ Flamboyant School for children with Special Needs



Out of the many years of cooperation with the Mazabuka Association for people with special needs, a purpose-built school was built in 2013. Up till then, classes for the children had been held within the premises of Mazabuka Basic school - they had been considered, as it were, an adjunct to the local school with little or no provision made for the particular needs of these pupils. With a donation secured from Misesan Cara for the construction of a dedicated structure, other donors soon followed. The first classroom block allowed the children to transfer to their new facility in October 2013 with the official opening in March 2014. Local support by the Mazabuka Association was and continues to be invaluable, but would the school now be the learning centre for 97 students if Mercy had not made the connection? If sisters such as Sr. Andrea Hogan and Sr. Nollaig O'Horo had not worked tirelessly to champion the cause of these children so often overlooked?

The current principal of the school, Mr. Cledwyn Humoonga, provided an update on where the school is at today: *“Before the Sisters left we had 16 teachers and 89 learners. We now have 19 teachers with a student intake of 97. We also have 19 learners on the waiting list. The school has also developed its self- sustaining activities. We now have poultry, orchards and a garden and we are planning to do fish-farming. All these activities are aimed at helping to generate income as well as providing life skills to our learners. The school has established an employment placement program for would-be graduating learners. We have identified companies and institutions where the owners have agreed with the school on what they expect from our learners before they are offered employment. This has brought a lot of awareness to the local community on the value of education for learners with special educational needs.”*



The Brothers of Charity (Belgium) are now the Managing Agents , having taken responsibility for the school in 2019, once a house was built with funding secured through Ireland. The school is now a recognised, grant-aided Special School under the Diocese of Monze with teachers' salaries paid by the Ministry of Education. A recent development is the recommendation by the Ministry of Education that a Grade 9 class for hearing impaired children be started.

A report by a consultant (Kevin Carroll), on behalf of Irish Aid in 2015 found that: *"This is an impressive school providing education for children with special needs, a particularly disadvantaged group in Zambia. There are no other special needs schools in the locality. This is a clearly relevant intervention. Apart from providing access to education, attendance at school delivers many other unquantifiable benefits for children with special needs, such as socialisation and a sense of belonging (which is often denied them in local communities), improved self-esteem and potential for a level of independence in the future. A number of respondents commented on how the presence of a special needs school and the work done by the local association for the disabled has helped to generate more awareness and understanding of disability in the local community."*

❖ **Education and Support Programme for Teachers**

While in 2009 ARVs were available in Zambia and people were coping better, the consequences of the AIDS Pandemic were damaging and traumatic. Many children were cared for by their grandmothers with the loss of significant numbers of professional people which greatly impacted teaching, nursing and other professions.

Through sponsorship from San Antonio USA the Sisters of Mercy were able to empower many young, trained teachers, who were not deployed by the Government, to teach in the schools. Capacity building for untrained teachers was organized and those who performed well went to Teacher Training College. Later, they were placed in remote areas where it was obvious that there was a great need to reduce the burden of teachers in overcrowded classrooms. This was not just about the placement of a young teacher in a rural setting but building a network, promoting solidarity and above all, promoting the vital role played by committed teachers in maintaining quality educational standards. Funding was not limited to teaching posts but also enabled the construction of staff houses and classrooms as well as the installation of solar energy which transformed these rural schools.

To give a sense of the breadth of this programme, activity ongoing in 2010 was recorded as follows:

The ministry manager (Sr. Celestine Daly), has two ex-teachers on staff who are responsible for the selection and subsequent administration of teaching placements. Direct beneficiaries are:

- ◇ 38 teachers deployed in 30 different schools
- ◇ 100 children sponsored in 25 schools
- ◇ feeding programmes in 3 urban and 7 rural schools

For the duration of Mercy involvement until 2019, the Education and Support programme had always maintained close ties with the Charles Lwanga Training College under Jesuit direction, and it therefore made sense that when the time came for Mercy to leave the ministry in other hands, the Jesuits with the necessary expertise, would administer the programme. Today it continues to run under the Diocesan umbrella, with faith formation an integral component of the programme which continues to be administered by the two ex-teachers recruited by Mercy.

In 2018 the President of Zambia conferred Sr. Celestine Daly with the President's Insignia of Honour in recognition of "her outstanding contribution to the quality of life in Zambia".

❖ Nchete House

The need to provide an opportunity for women to realise their potential was recognised and then addressed by Nchete House which was set up in 1998. It became a hub of training and resources offering courses in leadership, adult literacy, tailoring skills and counselling. To give a sense of the impact, participants in training organised for women was reported as 122 in tailoring in the period 2011-2014 and 457 in literacy between 2002 and 2015. Faith development programmes were also paramount in the work of the Centre.

In 2016 management of Nchete House was placed in the hands of the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood and courses in tailoring and design continue today with these skills still very much in demand. Rental income is generated by external organisations holding their own courses, and is further boosted by the catering section and by the sale of garden produce.

An external review carried out in 2013 clearly documents the reasons why the services provided by Nchete House would continue well into the future. *"In talking with the Director and Staff, it was evident that working at Nchete was not just a 'job' for them, where they earned an income, but a place where their sense of caring for self, the other and the place itself was being deepened each day."*



Some of the positives recorded about the Centre were:

- *The commitment of staff especially the volunteer literacy teachers, who were not only interested in teaching to read and write, but also in building up the self esteem and confidence of the women.*
- *The resources and supportive environment within Nchete House.*
- *The motivation within the women themselves to want to be more involved means that Nchete House is a vital resource for the empowerment of women and making the church's social teaching a lived reality in the Diocese of Monze, especially in Mazabuka Parish. The centre provides a range of services that enable the spiritual, social and economic empowerment of women while offering the women opportunities to identify their own interests and needs, enabling them to respond to those needs in ways that improve their standard and quality of life.*

❖ **Community Schools**

St. Patricks and St Clements both started out as community (basic) schools. In 2010 the two schools with a combined student population of 1490, were being supported by Mercy for the feeding programme and salary support for some junior staff members.

During the time of Mercy presence on the ground, they were developed to become the grant-aided schools that they are today. St Patrick's is now an established secondary school with its own Board of Management under the Diocese of Monze. St Clements has the same structure with the Ministry of Education responsible for staff salaries while retaining the status of "Basic School". Many children were sponsored for further education during the time of Mercy involvement.

At a ceremony in 2014 the Secretary General of the Irish Embassy, David Cooney, expressed happiness at the transformation of the school which had begun as Ndeke Community School in 1995 with 72 pupils and was now St Patricks, offering learning opportunities from grades 2 to 10 with 832 pupils.

"This building marks the final transition of a school which started in 1995 with 72 children learning under a tree with no chalk, desks, books or pencils, to a modern well equipped secondary school. The history of the school is a humbling story of quiet persistence and community collaboration, borne quite simply of a hunger for education."

❖ Sponsorships

School infrastructure and teacher support aside, yet another focus for Mercy during this period was the sponsorship of students. Those in the community with whom Mercy came into contact - many of them widows - were just not in the position of being able to pay secondary school fees particularly as many of the institutions were boarding schools.

As one sister remarked "This is where Mercy shines. We had the opportunity to become the keys that unlocked the door that opened up and allowed access to further education to so many young people. They became Teachers, Doctors, Nurses, Engineers, Police men and women, full members of society. They then in turn are the ones, because of the opportunity they received, to support others and give them a chance and an opportunity to have a good life."

As an indication of the level of commitment to this ministry, it is perhaps worth noting that in 2009, 350 students were being sponsored at 50 different schools. And while the numbers might have decreased during the ten years it is also true that up until 2019 young people were still being given that chance, that freedom to become the best that they could be.

An extract from a 2012 report illustrates the impact of this support:

- *One young man Eric, sponsored by Mercy who did his Grade 12 in the most dire conditions – without food, bedding, etc. –came out with 13 points which enable him to go to University and do any course of his choice.*
- *Nellia –a double orphan -now in her second year in Nursing school has successfully passed her exam and is continuing her course.*
- *Mubita, a final student, will qualify in May in Environmental Science and because there is a great scarcity in this area, will be employed without difficulty and then be able to help his siblings who are younger than himself.*

Would it even be possible today to put a figure on the number of doctors, teachers, tailors and seamstresses, caregivers, business-owners, and so on who are able to live independent lives and decide their own future ?

Ministry of Healthcare

Healthcare for Mercy in Zambia meant a focus on palliative care services at parish level and other activities targeting HIV+ clients. The Home based care programme in Magoye parish functioned as an outreach referral programme for the local hospital. Caregivers were trained to be able to provide care and treatment to those suffering at home from cancer and related issues. Sr Andrea Hogan coordinated the activities until such times as the caregivers who varied in number over the years (in 2016 they were 16, increasing in 2018 to 24), were able to administer the programme by themselves. Additional support was provided through an income generating project which saw a hammer mill being used for maize grinding, the proceeds from which continue to be used today to cover the programme running costs. From 2017 onwards the Mercy role was limited to a supportive one only, helping to buy medicines and available to give advice only when requested. At that time beneficiaries were recorded as : 14 Palliative Care patients, 60 Older People and 12 sick children. It was during this time that strong links were forged with the Development of Palliative Care Team at Mazabuka Hospital, a relationship which endures today and which is a major factor in ensuring the long-term efficacy of the programme.

Another HIV care programme based at Assumption parish had been administered by a sister from the Kenyan Province - Sr Jacinta Mwende - from 2009 until mid 2012. At one time 820 HIV+ clients were under care, with capacity building for the care-givers and clients aiming at self reliance a major component of the programme. Four outstations ran outreach services with income-generating activities for many of the clients. Before the sister returned to Kenya, in collaboration with the parish priest, a new coordinator was trained and responsibility for the continuation of activities entrusted to the parish.

Pastoral Ministry

One of the ministries of a more pastoral nature centred around working with St Bhakita's Association at Assumption Parish in Mazabuka. Here young men/boys were provided with employment through projects run by the Association and financed by an Italian NGO known as ABC Zambia. Some of those projects were : a primary school, a bakery, a computer training unit, a farm, a youth centre, and simple living accommodation centre for about 30 vulnerable, young boys known as the Ark Project. Dependent as this work was on external financial support, most of the activities came to an end in 2015 although Mazabuka parish did assume responsibility for some of them like the bakery and the school. As documented by Sr Mary de Larcy, manager of the ministry at the time, success stories are many, such as the young man who developed a community farm based on his experience of the Association and another who built a music and art centre in Mazabuka.

Yet another form of pastoral ministry was offered through scripture sharing. *"My Scripture room was a safe place for women/men to come to chat, to laugh and to cry."* explained Sr. Terry Rogers, responsible for giving guided retreats and the preparation of Sunday readings. Twice-yearly retreats were offered to the broader parish community and were consistently booked out after two days ! These retreats continue today, led by six people trained during the time of Mercy. Scripture was also shared as part of the formation programme of the Christian Brothers and this is ongoing today post the departure of the ministry manager in 2017.

Family Ministry

All the sisters in Zambia were at different levels engaged in this ministry. This was all about providing basic assistance to those who would otherwise have had no means of day to day survival. As Sr. Terry Rogers recounts: *"Normally I had from 10 to 12 widowed ladies who were left with no income after the death of their husbands. Rather than giving hand-outs I helped the ladies to start up a small business in the market with the agreement that at some stage they would repay a percentage so I was able to help others. The Solidarity Fund and the Mercy Ministry Fund supported this programme."*

A recent update shared by Sr. Terry tells us that: *"The ladies I helped to set up business continue to have their stalls in the market selling kapenta rice, mealie meal, beans etc."*



Sr. Celestine during food distribution

Another story from that ministry underlines the effort made to avoid creating any dependency: *"By providing families with land rental, seed and fertilizer they are enabled to be self-sufficient. By working on the land they get a sense of ownership and take pride in being able to provide for themselves and so their quality of life is greatly enhanced. The students who visit during holidays show a growing self-confidence and express a desire to get a job either in the market or in the shops in town, which in turn will provide some pocket money for necessities."*

As recently as 2018 efforts continued - particularly at the time famine hit the country when food relief and help with the planting of maize was provided for up to 35 families.

At the beginning of the *Zambian story* on page 16, reference was made to "*the sheer magnitude of the ministries*" on the ground. While it would be well nigh impossible to do justice to the breadth of effort and commitment of the sisters who ministered there, perhaps some sense of the drive and determination they had to do all that was possible to make the lives of the *Zambian people* just that little bit better, has been documented here.

KENYA

Mercy ministry in Kenya has perhaps a different profile compared to ministry in some other countries. While elsewhere, ministries either transition to a different ownership or are phased out, the lifetime of ministries in Kenya is not wholly dependent upon the availability of sisters but rather is guided by the strategic vision at leadership level.

Context

In 2009 statistics showed that one in ten Kenyans was going hungry due to droughts and/or famine. While Kenya, since 2009, has made significant political, structural and economic reforms (including the passage of a new constitution in 2010 and the swearing-in of President Kenyatta for a second and final five-year term in 2017), nationwide progress would still not be seen to have advanced at the same pace for all its citizens. It is true that in 2019 Kenya was seen as one of the fastest growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa and almost everyone in every pocket of the country now has a smart phone, but recent statistics tell another story in which around 37 per cent of the population still live below the international poverty threshold of US\$1.90 a day. In a survey conducted by the Central Bank of Kenya and the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), 51 per cent of the population reported that their financial status worsened in 2019. Many Kenyans continue to have difficulty meeting their day-to-day needs.



It is within this context that Mercy in Kenya is engaged in a broad range of ministries from formal education to skills training in the most rural of locations and from HIV/AIDS programmes in the slums of Nairobi to vaccination campaigns in remote outstations.

Ministry of Education

In common with the other countries where Mercy is present, considerable emphasis is consistently placed not only on delivering education but also on enabling access to education by those who otherwise could not afford it. In a report of 2018 produced by the Provincial Projects Office, it emerged that a total number of 173 students had been sponsored over the years between 2013 to 2018 in different learning institutions scattered across Kenya - 41 institutions in 2013, a number which dropped to five in 2018. This is in addition to the sponsorship programme administered at Mukuru Promotion Centre which in 2019 ensured access to education by a total of 277 young people in 92 different institutions.

During the period under review, two schools moved out of Mercy management (Huruma secondary school and Our Lady of Mercy South B) and into government responsibility although strong links continue to exist with them through the Mercy Education Office which plays a pivotal role in providing training and support for a total of 14 different schools.

Another major role in Education is provided by the ongoing programmes at Mukuru Promotion Centre where 4 primary and 1 secondary school with a current total student population of 6,500 at primary level and 400 recorded at secondary, is up from the 4900 in primary education and 200 in secondary during 2012. In addition to formal education provided on site, learning opportunities are also provided for street boys (approximately 50 in any one year) as well as for around 80 children with special needs at the Songa Mbele Centre (with recent reports indicating a waiting list of 100 children). This latter target group is also the focus of current fundraising efforts for a multi-storey educational facility planned to accommodate the increasing demand for this specialised service.

Informal education has been an ongoing focus of Mercy attention at Lokori where literacy classes for shepherd boys and girls as well as those who dropped out of formal education take place at night. This is in addition to the nursery school at this Mercy Centre where 160 infants have the opportunity of beginning their journey of learning while being assured of breakfast and lunch as an added incentive for attendance.

Ministry of Skills Training

A number of Skills training centres continue to offer different learning opportunities from Nuu and Ngutaani to Chepareria and Miguta as well as at the afore-mentioned Mukuru Promotion Centre where a skills training college offers eight different courses in subjects such as art & craft, plumbing & masonry, garment making for a student intake of 214.



Most of the skills training centres have been operational for a significant length of time - Mercy Training College in Miguta for example has produced almost 2,000 secretaries in its more than fifty years of existence while Chepareria graduates are far in excess of 1500 during its almost 20 years of operation. A recent drop in enrolments at Our Lady of Mercy Training College at Chepareria however, reflects the changing policy of government with more students opting for formal education rather than take the more practical route through skills training.

The continuing challenge for these skills training institutions is ensuring that the nature of the skill being delivered is relevant and that the qualifications are those which will prepare the young trainees for the job market. Ministries for example, like Miguta and Ngutaani. With secretarial/office skills the exclusive focus of the curriculum at Miguta, demand for secretaries has seen a recent decline. This is the opposite experience of Ngutaani where classes for these skills are full to overflowing while training facilities for skills struggle to fill the classrooms. Efforts continue to be made at Nuu VTC to make the curriculum on offer one that attracts enough students so that the Centre is viable.

Ministry of Healthcare

❖ Facilities with Focus on the HIV/AIDS Pandemic

As in other countries where Mercy is present, the works of Mercy were made available to many people living with HIV/AIDS during the period 2009-2019. Often these services were accessed by the most marginalized who would inevitably have been left behind were it not for the compassionate presence of the sisters.

In the five different healthcare locations in the Province, services such as Voluntary counselling and testing (VCT), Antiretroviral provision (ARVs), nutrition and feeding services, youth programmes, income generating activities, mother and child healthcare, etc., were provided to an estimated total client number of 168,376 over ten years. Broadly speaking, the results of those efforts are evidenced today by:

- An enhanced awareness of the infection.
- A reduction of social stigma.
- Improved living standards.
- The empowerment of many, especially women, to find their rightful place in the community/society.
- A prolonged life expectancy.

One of those locations - **the Mater CCC (Comprehensive Care Clinic) programme**, which was established in 2006 to provide care and support for HIV+ clients, has seen its client register grow from 1800 in 2009 to over double that number, 3861, at the end of 2019.

The ministry manager in place in 2009 expressed the mission of the programme as follows: *“Mater CCC offers vulnerable people who often have been rejected by their community a place where they can be reassured, accepted and cared for. Watching people like R. move from despair to hope, from fear to acceptance and new life is a deeply rewarding and privileged place for me to minister”*

The Mater Hospital Comprehensive Care Clinic has been able to support HIV Prevention Care and Treatment services for clients enrolled within the clinic through partnerships with donor funded organizations. As Sr. Brigid Marnane, currently in charge at Mater CCC stated: *"...we were alive to the Gospel mandate to provide compassionate care and, following in the footsteps of Catherine our Foundress, to give special attention to those in need. We knew that because of the nature of HIV/Aids our intervention would be long term not short term."* Over the years, other components have been added to the core programme such as livelihood programmes, school fee support, elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV and most recently, support to survivors of gender/sex-based violence.



In the remote location of **Lodwar** the role of Mercy, which up until 2012 encompassed the coordination of all healthcare activities, now focuses on the HIV/AIDS programme which ensures that appropriate support is provided to HIV+ clients in programmes targeting the most vulnerable. In addition to treatment and counselling, other components include: table banking, supervision of services to AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and prison clients. The number of positive clients registered on the programme has remained more or less stable - around 2,200 while the number of sites where Mercy carries out supervision has increased from 11 in 2012 to the current 13.

Other Healthcare Facilities

❖ Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Mutomo

The guiding principle of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital is about ensuring people are able to access health services when they need them. There is little doubt that over the last ten years there has been significant service expansion , as well as a strengthening of staff capacity. That said, Management do all they can so that healthcare remains affordable, having adopted the principle that care is never denied because of financial inaccessibility . Hospital services have also been enhanced through outreach programmes and the establishment of a satellite clinic 50kms from the main hospital. Another mechanism which has supported their declared mission is facilitation of the enrolment of needy families with the national insurance scheme which means they can access healthcare when needed.

Other developments which have taken place during this time are the construction of the Mother of Mercy Funeral Home within hospital grounds, ensuring at all times appropriate care for and dignity of the deceased. Many of the initiatives are managed in conjunction with the Catholic Medical Mission Board (CMMB), e.g. a volunteer programme, a residency programme and a partnership programme on Mothers and Children. There is a vibrant team of Mercy associates supporting the works of mercy in the hospital and in the community which consider them as bringing hope for the future.



A recent major development has been the construction of Our lady of Lourdes College of Health Sciences which accepted its first intake of students in 2017 ushering in a new era for the hospital.



Now with its own nursing school, it can provide opportunities for local families, not only to access improved health systems, but also to find job security without having to migrate to urban centres. The first graduation of nurses will take place (Covid permitting) in 2021.

Meanwhile greater emphasis is being placed on financial sustainability. Income generating activities are being planned which will ensure that the hospital can manage its own operational costs without support. This will guarantee the long-term viability of Mutomo Hospital for years to come.

❖ **Lokori PHC**

In Turkana East where Lokori lies (a very remote location reached by a very inhospitable road - M&D), there is still a large community of semi-settled and nomadic pastoralists who move from place to place, depending on the season, and can only be reached through mobile outreach clinics for immunizations and ante natal care. Lokori PHC also runs a Comprehensive Care Clinic for People living with HIV/AIDS and TB and supports those in poor general condition as well as the youth and adolescents who might be orphaned or vulnerable. Total number of HIV Clients currently on care is 174 (51 male; 98 female; 13 male children and 12 Female children). Recent plans focus on improving access to income through activities such as bakery and poultry rearing.

❖ **Makadara Dispensary**

At the Makadara dispensary which is located not far from the Mukuru slums, HIV+ clients (which latest figures show at well over 700), receive regular treatment and support. For many years the dispensary was able to operate in a manner that proved both cost-efficient and sustainable. More recently however, increasing competition from other facilities nearby is presenting the dispensary with significant challenges as to its long-term viability.

❖ **Mary Immaculate Clinic (MIC)**

Within the Mukuru Promotion Centre (MPC), care is provided at its Clinic and through its community based healthcare (CBHC) programme. In 2012 the Annual Report shows that 23,396 clients were seen at the clinic with a further 12,115 supported by the CBHC programme. The most recent reporting for 2019 records a total of 16,500 patients seen throughout the year while the social services component of MPC addressed a broad range of needs, from the provision of medical care to family visits to emergency food for a monthly average of 1400 clients. This service is just part of the remit of the 11 social workers on staff at MPC.

A Misesan Cara report in 2018 confirmed the efficacy of the services being provided through the CBHC programme:

"The project has had significant impact on the reduction of malnutrition and communicable diseases by conducting medical camps; providing health checks at primary schools and conducting home visits which provided some continuity of care through adopting a referral system. The focus and efforts to provide services to the poorest and the most marginalized within the community was obvious based upon the low user fees and outreach efforts."



PERU

"The biggest problem is the attitude that human life and creation do not count in the eyes of those who crave economic gain. Multinational companies are particularly at fault. And thus Peru finds itself powerless, with few people who work to defend life, especially the life of the most poor that are thrown off their land to make way for the big companies."

Sr. Aurea Soldàn Santiago - 2009

Towards the beginning of this reporting period, during a strategic planning exercise, the sisters articulated their identity as follows: *"We are a community made up of sisters from different cultures and origins, who work as a team and live out the pastoral proposals of the Latin American Church and the Congregation in collaboration with other identities who promote human integration and care of all of creation."*

Context

As in all countries where the divide between the have and the have-nots grows increasingly more obvious, but at the same time inexplicably more challenging to resolve, it is the strength of the people themselves to endure and ultimately to survive which provides the backdrop to Mercy ministry efforts.

Peru today may be defined a "developing country" but this should not underestimate the challenges it continues to face in terms of poor educational infrastructure, significant economic inequalities among the regions and a continuing uphill struggle against the tide of environmental issues which has at times threatened to overwhelm the Peruvian people. Never was this more apparent than during the flooding of 2017 which saw devastating mudslides wreak havoc in the lives of the local communities (estimated at half a million people affected). One of the areas most impacted (Trujillo) is the location of much of current Mercy ministry activity.

Ministry of Education

One of the sisters shared the principle of Mercy even-handedness in enabling school attendance: *“Although a good deal has changed in this field there are still parents who come down from the Sierra (mountain area) with the attitude that it is not necessary to send their daughters to school. After all, they will only be cooking and doing housework!! So we still had several instances of this to contend with. We took a firm stand, “If the girls don’t go to school, no help for boys”. (Sr Immaculata Murphy)*

Like all other countries where Mercy is present, ministries in Peru want to respond to needs in education while also targeting certain vulnerable groups often neglected by government and other national bodies. This is nowhere more evident than in the constancy of focus by the sisters in Peru on the provision of scholarships.

❖ Scholarships

During the ten years that is the remit of this report, scholarships have always featured in the support offered by every sister in ministry. The breadth of this support was not limited to secondary and/or third level institutions but extended to younger children unable to attend school without uniforms, shoes and writing materials. In any one year, upwards of 100 families were helped so that the child (children) might access education. As an example of the sisters' commitment to this kind of support, reporting in 2015 indicated that young men and women were assisted at the following levels:

12 for Primary School Teaching
26 for secondary school Teaching
4 at Pre-University Level
16 in Third Level Education

1 in Special Needs Training
1 Training in Accelerated Education and
2 Training as Nursery School Teachers

Total: 62

For young people seeking assistance to continue their studies, support has been made available to enable the broadest spectrum of subjects to be pursued. From taxi-drivers to civil engineers, from nurses and doctors to accountants and lawyers, this ministry has helped not just to produce the next generation of professionals, but ensure that these same professionals are committed to the good of the broader community as much as they are to their career. As one sister wrote: *"J. says that one of his expectations in the future is to be a great professional and specialize in Neurosurgery; she wants to work in a public hospital to help the poorest people."*

Other educational supports over the years include the building of a library which, as might be expected, would of necessity include the guaranteed services of a librarian. Great emphasis has been placed, particularly in recent years, on reading - with a mechanism employed to encourage the practice particularly among children in the 5-8 age bracket. As games are also available, the stipulation was put in place that to be able to access a game, a book must first be read. Most of the reading takes place in the library - indeed a tally kept by the librarian and documented by the ministry manager for a five month period in 2016 shows that 6,198 books were read by 2,816 borrowers. Yet another form of very tangible assistance was enabled through the programme called **"Send a child to school"** for which a 2016 report documents the results as 227 children helped; 171 uniforms purchased; 172 pairs of shoes made; 720 copybooks distributed. The level of detail provided at the time was an indication of the level of attention paid by the ministry manager (Sr. Immaculata Murphy) to the activities.



Not content however with enabling attendance at school and conscious of the dynamic prevalent in many households with both parents (if available) working all day, this focus on education was extended to-after school programmes which in 2016 for example saw 200 children (6 to 12 years olds) receiving a meal and looked after by 27 care mothers until parents returned from work. The continuing need for this kind of support has meant that the most recent reports indicate three additional care centres will soon be set up.

The presence of two sisters on staff at two schools providing not only RE but, at a broader level, a source of support and counselling, as well as organising workshops for the students with a focus on learning alternatives to aggression. As Sr. Angelika Gonzàlez explained: ***“Adolescents need to be heard not judged.”***

Education in the form of skills training is provided through CETPRO- a technical school which offers a range of skills from bakery and textiles to craft-making, shoemaking and IT. Enrolment in 2016 showed that a total of 440 students were in attendance. More recent reports indicate that CETPRO's curriculum continues to ensure its relevancy to employment opportunities and caters for young students from third grade of secondary school upwards, as well as for adults who want to learn technical skills they can put into practice at home. On offer are courses in Computing, Cosmetology, Cooking, Prints, Crafts, Leather and Footwear, Bakery and Pastry, Sportswear and Textile Manufacturing. A significant number of scholarships are covered by the Good Shepherd Ministry, an organization of Saint Joan of Arc Parish in Boca Raton, Florida.

CETPRO



❖ **Climate Change/Care of the Earth**

Much time and energy is given by the sisters to raising awareness on care of the earth. One obvious source of inspiration are the teachings of Laudato Si. All ages are included in this awareness-raising although there is a particular focus on teachers (at primary school level) so that the seed might be planted early. Particular issues apart from the limited knowledge of climate change, is the scarcity of water and the fact of it being a finite resource. Another key item on the agenda is educating the communities on the indiscriminate use of plastic. One positive note of recent times is that awareness of these issues seems to be greater among young people.

Ministry of Social Services

❖ **El Milagro Prison**

A constant throughout this ten year period has been the programme running in the women's prison, El Milagro, The support offered to the approximately 200 female inmates extends beyond the provision of skills training (dress- making and crafts), the organising of sports activities, to encompass psychological therapy and free legal aid provided by upwards of 30 volunteers.



Sr. Juanita Cueva Rios during an event at the Prison

Hundreds of women have benefited from this ministry which wants, above all, to ensure their re-integration into the family and the broader community and to encourage them, in the words of one recent workshop, in their *"Seeking and Finding Peace."* In recent times working within the prison environment has become increasingly more challenging with additional restrictions on external inputs and visitor presence. It is to be hoped however that the volunteer network will be able to continue the work begun and continue bringing some light into the future of these women who pay a harsh price for their mistakes.

❖ **Sal y Luz Centre**

Under the Social Services umbrella sits also the "Sal y Luz del Mundo" centre which offers hope to men and women trying to take their lives back from years of addiction. A safe place to stay, professional therapy and constant encouragement are integral to this three-phased programme beginning with the Welcome which continues into the Community phase finally ending with Re-Integration. The ministry managed by Sr. Calixta Rodríguez Briceño began almost thirty years ago and has witnessed the rehabilitation of hundreds of clients in that time. Efforts to generate income for the Centre include a guinea pig breeding project.



Pastoral Ministry

In Peru as in all other Mercy countries pastoral ministry is intrinsic to the work of all the sisters. It encompasses every branch of their activities. From teaching in the schools to coordinating with the council of a pastoral centre to working with children and with the parents of these children to bring peace and reconciliation to the families. As one sister said: *"Together we share various activities looking for signs of hope and recognizing the presence of a Merciful God who is close and who accompanies His people and invites us to care and be responsible for creation."*

SOUTH AFRICA

During 2010-2012 when significant emphasis was being placed on strategic planning, the province defined its overarching objective as :

"To achieve economic justice for all".

There is little doubt that this continues to underpin Mercy efforts today.

Context

In the ten-year period under review the fortunes of South Africa - or the "rainbow nation" as it is sometimes referred to, have perhaps not enjoyed the success hoped for by so many. The democratically elected leadership which wants to encourage reconciliation and to redress social imbalances has not been able, until now, to turn around an economy which continues to struggle. This has resulted in unemployment figures on the rise, a level of government support which does not match the rising demands of the population and consequently an increase in the number of citizens needing help with the basic necessities of life. Other factors such as severe drought conditions in 2015/16 and again in 2018, significantly impacted the living conditions of those without access to stable incomes.

It is within this context that many of the Mercy ministries such as the feeding programmes, food gardens and homeless shelters became and remain an ever more vital lifeline for those in need.

Ministry of Education

While the breadth of ministry undertaken in South Africa is wide-ranging it is, without doubt, education which has continued to be the major focus of attention and resources to the present day.

Today nine schools remain under the Mercy umbrella with the Mercy ethos firmly at the centre of school administration and activities. Standards within and results achieved by the cohort of Mercy schools are testament to the foundations laid by the sisters. Regular reporting by the lay principals of the schools provide ample evidence today of the continuing importance attributed to the ethos and values integral to the school traditions.

During the period 2009-19 only one school - Tsogo High School in Mmakau, established in 1977, moved into lay management in 2011 with the Good Shepherd sisters from Zambia assuming an oversight role

In documenting the Mercy educational presence over the years, a snapshot taken at the end of 2011 showed a school presence which can be summarised as follows:

Total staff number of Staff:
173 female
23 male
(196 total)

A total of 3,811 learners in attendance at 9 schools

At parents' meetings 85% of parents attended during the first six months of the year a number which increased to 92% by the year end.

While student numbers at those schools are slightly higher today (3,896), regular contributions by the schools in sharing their perspectives and experience are testament to the continuing emphasis on Mercy values and principles.

- *"We are passionate about the long and Irish history of Mercy Education and seek to embody the principles of Catherine McAuley in all aspects of the school environment".*
- *"Our academic programme is challenging and creative, designed to foster intellectual curiosity and Mercy principles."*
- *"In 2019 the establishment of an Ethics and Ethos Committee in the school to look at various aspects such as academics, culture, sport and spiritual well-being of teachers and learners to ensure that we are aligned with the Mercy ethos"*
- *"The importance of the school as a compass, morale booster and safe haven for staff, learners and parents as a teacher of moral values, ethics and education... The school helps the students to make sense of the world particularly when parents are absent."*

Mural celebrating 90 years



For the purposes of this report several of the school principals were invited to articulate what, for them, constitutes the essence of Mercy in the schools today:

According to Mr Ross Davis of McAuley House School: *"The way we are different is how we live our faith and live our ethos. It is not just a statement on a badge or a document. The care we have for each child's physical and emotional needs . We have a "food store" to send food home for those that have none, in the same way that uniforms, stationery and textbooks are provided to families that have none. All our staff care for pupils and will go the extra mile ; attendance at important family functions is a common occurrence for staff.*

Often, when interviewing prospective parents, they comment that they are attracted to the school because they have seen how our children behave in public places.

What will remain with the students after they leave will be, we hope, that they don't feel self-entitled. They have a voice in the world and a spiritual awareness, whatever their faith as well as a tolerance for other people's beliefs and lives."

Mrs Janet Beckworth, Principal of Iona Convent Primary School summarises the perspective of staff members :

How do you know this is a Mercy school ?

- It feels like a family who care for one another and the children we teach.
- Staff members look out for one another.
- Staff members care deeply for the children they teach.
- We are able to instill Christian values in the children.
- For many children school is the only 'safe' place.
- Visitors to our school always comment on how well-behaved and well-mannered the children are.

What stays with a Mercy school learner after school/education is completed?

- ✿ The morals and ethics taught at school have a positive effect on the outlook and lifestyle of the learners.
- ✿ They are usually more motivated and diligent in their studies.
- ✿ Learners speak highly of the school and their educators.
- ✿ Often, with hindsight, they appreciate what the school and teachers have done for them.

With or without a Mercy presence it is fairly obvious that these institutions will endure. **Why?**

Some of the reasons given:

- ✿ The Schools are where it all began for Mercy in South Africa - they are where the seed was sown.
- ✿ Mercy roots are deeper within the Schools than anywhere else.
- ✿ The standards maintained and the approach adopted towards education directly contribute to a better society within the country as a whole.
- ✿ The Schools operate on the principle of building people rather than structures.

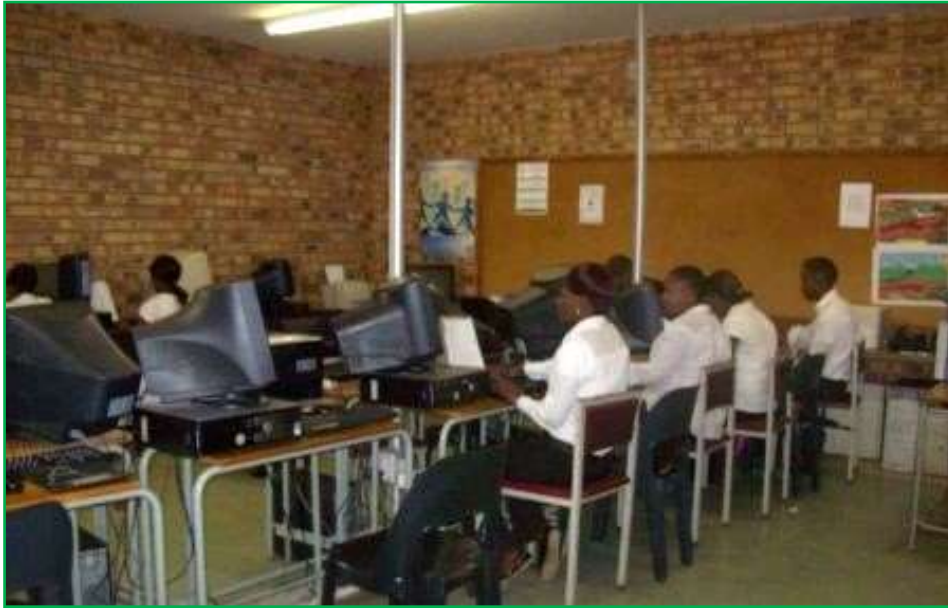
Ministry of Skills Training

Skills training centres have long been and continue to be a significant focus of ministry efforts intended, as they are, to equip as many as possible with the skills needed to live independent lives and contribute to that over-arching goal of economic justice for all.

Over the years some of the Skills training centres have been passed on to other hands, other management.

Mmashiko Adult Education and Skills Training Centre which opened in 1983 and remained under Mercy management until 2010, is now a government-funded entity (re-named Mmakau Community Learning Centre) and by all reports, continues to provide valuable services to the community. Feedback from Ms Joyce Molope , current Manager, who was on staff during the time of Mercy, has confirmed that the Centre today offers training in subjects such as Computing, Baking, Sewing, Bricklaying, Carpentry, Upholstery, and Catering. A Life skills programme is also offered at the centre. The total number of teaching staff is 13 with all salaries paid by the Dept of Education for a student intake of 55.

St Charles Lwanga Skills Training Centre in Orange Farm which opened its doors in 1994 continued as Mercy until 2010 when the Comboni fathers took over responsibility for its running and manage the facility today in conjunction with its Board of Management.



When Mercy came to Winterveldt in 1987 one of the first projects initiated was the establishment of a crèche for the children of the skills trainees. Consistent demand since then for the skills offered has meant that the services of the crèche (now an early learning centre) are as relevant as ever. At the DWT Ntathe Skills training centre itself, to consolidate the link between training and job secure-ment, it was important that the Centre ensure the skills on offer were in line with employment prospects and followed government policies and regulations. This has resulted in the recent conferral of Community College status for Gauteng Province bringing the DWT Ntathe training centre into the network of similar establishments.

A more informal centre for Skills training in Soweto continues to attract interest by the local community, with demand for places far outstripping the capacity. IT classes and sewing classes are the staple curriculum. In 2018 the situation was described by Sr. Marla Yeck, the ministry manager as follows: *"We have a waiting list for the sewing classes that extends beyond eight months. We have had to stop taking names and phone numbers because it is not fair to keep these individuals "waiting their turn".*

Whether as stand-alone programmes or institutions or as a component of a more broad-based ministry, the imparting of skills training continues to be a focus of significant effort and resources.

Ministry of Healthcare

Following close behind education the ministry of healthcare has always occupied significant time and attention on the part of the sisters on the ground.

In line with government policy, healthcare activities tend to operate in partnership with the health authorities and for this reason long-term sustainability is frequently a challenge. Bertoni clinic in Mmakau which had opened in 1987 continued to operate until 2011 when the withdrawal of government funding forced its closure. Another Mercy ministry centred around a dedicated HIV/AIDS programme at Inkanyezi which had been set up by the SACBC (South African Catholic Bishops' Conference). Mercy involvement all but ceased in 2011 and a few years later the programme itself closed down due to lack of funding.

In Winterveldt, Mercy Clinic continued offering the full range of healthcare programmes and support for 27 years until government policy stipulated the opening of its own facility in the same locality and the Clinic ceased operations in 2015. The premises however continue to be used today to house the OVC (Orphans and Vulnerable Children) programme. While originally the focus of this programme was primarily on support of orphans, more recently the role of Mercy within this ministry has broadened, and now encompasses HIV testing, treatment referral and support groups also for the broader community. Documented results in 2019 illustrate this current focus:

- HIV testing of 960 people with 94 positives successfully linked to clinic for treatment.
- 560 defaulters traced and traced/linked back to clinic to be reinitiated.
- 720 engaged into support groups for adherence support.

Ministry of Care for The Most Vulnerable

❖ Mercy House

Victims of trafficking or domestic violence must surely qualify as among the most vulnerable in society. The service delivered by Mercy House in rescuing and providing safe shelter to desperate women has been acknowledged by many as playing a pivotal role in efforts against trafficking and domestic violence.

Excerpt from an M&D Report in 2019

"Time spent at Mercy House confirmed what had been up till now a suspicion, that those engaged in ministry at Mercy House have a tendency to vastly under-rate the significant role they play within the trafficking sector in Gauteng Province. This was borne out by the frequent visits to Mercy House by high ranking officers both of the legal profession (e.g. public prosecutors) and of the police (e.g. Captain of the Hawks - The Hawks are South Africa's Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation which targets organized crime, economic crime, corruption, and other serious crime) all looking for assistance/information from staff there. It continues to be apparent that the work carried out by all concerned has gained a level of credibility which sustains its role as opinion-leader in the sector."

Those in government authority who provide much of the funding to Mercy House have identified what seems to be their main weakness as this excerpt from a Department of Social Development report of February 2018 states:

*"Mercy House is doing a lot of programmes that have an impact on the lives of beneficiaries but it is **under-reported**"*

Two years earlier, in 2016, a visit had been made by Misesan Cara and the findings were unequivocal in appreciating the work being done: *"Mercy House was seen to be serving a very vulnerable group of women with a holistic approach to individual clients' short and long term needs from victims of trafficking wishing to return to their country of origin being assisted as speedily as possible, to others remaining for long periods of time due to the judicial process.*

*The Mercy Sisters' advocacy and engagement with local and regional government, the police force, other NGO's and foreign embassies in relation to human trafficking was commendable. As discussed with Sr. Colleen, the work the Mercy Sisters have undertaken here was **under-reported.**"*

"This important facility has enabled Thai citizens to regain their confidence throughout the transition period before they return to their normal lives." (Pretoria News, June 4th 2018)

Fortunately the impact of Mercy ministry is sometimes recognised and acknowledged as was the case in June 2018 during a meeting between Management and the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Royal Thai Embassy, Paisit Boonparlit, who expressed gratitude for the kindness of Mercy House in the many cases of their compatriots who had been trafficked and abused.



As part of its remit by the Department of Social Development, Mercy House also runs an outreach programme which from 2012 until 2019 was in the community of Erasmus. The eight years invested by Mercy House in working with the community through capacity building, support by social workers from University of Pretoria and some infrastructural improvements have resulted in all targets groups - crèche staff, the elderly, the youth - demonstrating enhanced self-belief. The local people now have the confidence and overall capacity to take responsibility for their decisions and their future. Beginning in 2020 Mercy House has taken on a similar role with a different community in Soshanguve township.

❖ Homeless Shelters and Feeding Programmes

For more than 20 years, Immaculata and Strabane Shelters, and more recently Tudhope refuge for women, have continued to provide vital services for those temporarily unable to live independent lives. When asked to articulate the role of Mercy in one of the shelters, the response left no doubt as to its parameters:

- ✿ **Mercy seeks to help staff develop mercy ethos in the functioning of the project.**
- ✿ **Sisters of Mercy own the building from which the project operates.**
- ✿ **Mercy insures and maintains the building.**
- ✿ **Mercy engages staff and sees to remuneration.**
- ✿ **Mercy purchases stock.**
- ✿ **Mercy owns the vehicle which transports the food, also purchases diesel and maintains the vehicle.**
- ✿ **Mercy engages bookkeeper and auditor.**
- ✿ **Mercy continues to fundraise for the project.**

In short, Mercy is to be found in every aspect and facet of the ministry. Then again, when results such as this are generated: *"Upward of 60 people moved on from the shelters in the course of the year, due mainly to the fact that the services offered at the shelters enabled them to present for job opportunities in a calm and seemly manner and enabled them to move to own accommodation."* What better use of resources?

One shelter resident (Dave) put it another way: *"Among us there are varying levels of poverty and other social challenges and many of us do not identify with the blanket label that society has covered us with."*

Yet another support mechanism is to be found through the food programme in Winterveldt, which distributes parcels on a two-monthly basis and promotes the cultivation of food gardens. The Thusanang Care Programme has been running for more than 20 years with the same two women in charge, helping 800 families through its food distribution with a further 275 assisted through their "doorstep" gardens .



Alongside this nutritional support, between 40 to 50 trainees learn skills in the hope of securing employment. The distribution of food is conducted in an atmosphere that is both enabling and somewhat surprising as witnessed by the M&D coordinator not too long ago: *"You might be forgiven for expecting an air of desperation to colour the proceedings but instead smiles and laughter abound, a song in praise of God's love rings out and applause of welcome for the visitors is spontaneous and heartfelt."* (Excerpt M&D article Mercy Alive Nov 2019)

Yet another ministry which has been on the ground for almost 20 years is the Thabang ka Mmino music project in Soweto which serves as the introduction to music for both primary and secondary school-age children. Weekly classes bring together well over 100 young people and, apart from cultivating musical talent, engages and affirms the participants in a lasting way.

Pastoral Ministry

Like all other countries where Mercy is present, here in South Africa, pastoral ministry is an on-going commitment and encompasses a broad range of interaction with the community from prison visiting to catechetical classes and the bringing together of Mercy Associates.

As the sister engaged in prison ministry articulated recently: *"It is touching to have the privilege of dealing with so many people who find themselves on the margins of society – many because of life situations which had adverse impact on their younger lives."*
(Sr. Rita Carey)

While in at least one parish where the catechetical programme is ongoing with almost 30 active catechists, there is every hope that the commitment and constancy demonstrated by Mercy will continue beyond any Mercy presence.

And the future ? While perhaps not all the ministries which live and breathe Mercy today may withstand the test of time, it is without doubt that the roots, planted by the sisters, are embedded deeply within the minds and hearts of the local communities of which they have been a part for so many years. It is this rather than any quantification or arithmetical calculation which will be the testament to the Mercy presence for a long time to come.

STORIES

How can we talk of Mercy ministry without picking out just a few of the stories which give faces to the many with whom Mercy has come into contact and for whom the presence of Mercy has been life-changing...

As I reflect back over the years in Zambia and what I hope Mercy left behind I think of Maureen. Maureen lived with her Grandmother, mother and two sisters in a remote village about 40 Km south of Mazabuka. She walked many miles to school carrying her shoes so they would last a year or two. When Maureen was 12 years old both her Grandmother and mother died leaving Maureen to fend for herself and her two sisters. She made her way to an aunt in Mazabuka and somehow or other she met a Mercy sister and as she says “my life changed”. She completed Primary School, Secondary School, Catering School, became a cook and was employed by Mercy as a cook. One day Maureen saw an advertisement for Livingstone College in the Daily Post offering places to suitable candidates for the teaching profession. Partly as a joke she applied and was shocked when she was accepted. Every school holiday for years she went to Livingstone and not only passed her exams but secured first place in Mathematics. She is now teaching in a primary school in Mazabuka District. She is also very involved in the Church, teaching children on Saturday mornings, singing in the choir, and many more Church activities. Her wisdom and advice is often sought by her neighbours and to me she is the epitome of a modern Zambian woman.

Hauwa (Hausa for Eve) is a past adult learner of Rahama Women's Centre. She returned there recently to inspire and motivate the present adult learners on International Women's Day. Five years ago as a young wife and mother she came to Rahama Centre, unknown to her husband, as education for women is not accepted by some in the Muslim tradition. Hauwa's only child was in Primary school so she came to the Centre after leaving him at school. Each morning she worked on the fundamentals of language and mathematics learning. With perseverance, hard work and the help of her tutors in three years she succeeded and developed skills in reading, writing and arithmetic to senior primary school level. She was awarded first prize for machine knitting skills at the Centre. All the while she ran her business making "doughnuts". On a stool at the side of a busy street she cooked and sold them to passers-by. This was the beginning of her journey in education and in business.

Today Hauwa runs a thriving catering business. She still does her breakfast doughnuts though not at the roadside. She prepares take-away lunches for various events and recently was awarded a government contract to supply breakfast to pupils and staff of a large government school. The Rahama Centre certificate supported her application. With a steady income she also managed to buy a plot, build her own house and pay for her brother's wedding. A particular point of pride is that she now has her own bank account.

Looking at this elegant successful business woman the present learners at Rahama were re-energised and motivated to keep up their efforts to achieve their own goal. She shared her story of having freed herself from the poverty of illiteracy and the oppression of dependency on others to read and write for her. She pointed out the shame of thumb printing the ballot paper and the bank form. She gave a picture of her struggles as well as her achievements.

Let us applaud the efforts of Hauwa and all adult learners who overcome the many hurdles that they encounter daily to achieve their dream of reading and writing.

Sr. Veronica Quigley shared the story of one young woman who found her way to the Centre at Chepareria:

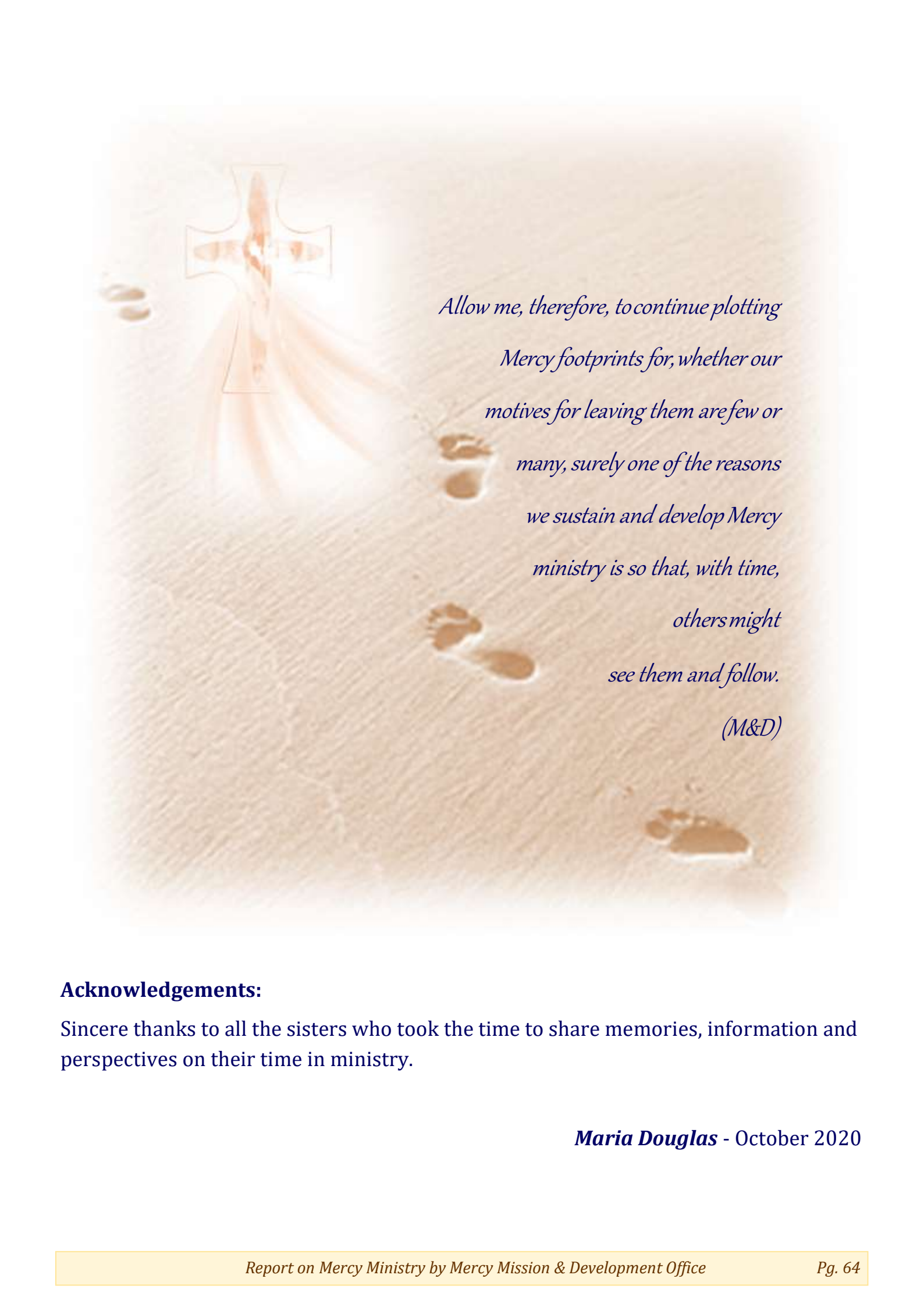
My namesake - a small forlorn girl who came in to my office with nothing but the clothes she was wearing. She had been married off by her father as the seventh wife of a much older man. On Friday she graduated and won a prize for being the best in fashion and design and also in literacy class. In her first year she never went home but stayed in Chepareria with our accounts clerk each holiday. She went home last holiday but learned that her father was planning to marry her off again so she ran back here. Never a shilling was paid for her fees. No family member attended her graduation. She asked me to cut her cake with her. She had made it herself. At least she has learned dressmaking and tailoring to exam level and basic cookery along with learning to read and write in kiswahili.

The story is of Mama Mose. She doesn't mind her real identity being known. She is a friend of the PHC. She lives positively with HIV. Her baby Mose contracted HIV at birth and was mentally challenged. When we met him three years ago, Mose was a sorry sight, very immune compromised and severely malnourished. The mother received health education, testing and counselling and started treatment. She and her baby would have probably died at home, hidden, due to stigma of both HIV and mental illness and with no friends or family and no resources. She embraced her treatment and brought her baby every week for medication, physio/psycho and nutritional support. She testified that we were the family and friends she and Mose did not have. She has become one of our peer/mentor mothers to strengthen and encourage other timid clients who tend to hide from the reality of their conditions.

Her name is Nono admitted to Mercy House in 2017 as a victim of trafficking. She was from a township an hour from Pretoria. She left home as she felt she was not being treated the same way as her other siblings maybe because she had heard from a neighbour that she did not share the same father as the others. She had gone looking for him and the couple at the address she'd been given allowed her to stay for two months but then kicked her out, telling her to go and find her real father. "It broke my heart", Nono said. With nowhere to go and with about R20.00 (euro 2) in her pocket, she took a bus to Pretoria, getting off in Sunnyside, a place known for prostitution. There she met a Nigerian who told her he was looking for a girlfriend. When they reached his flat, she found another South African black girl. She was quickly introduced into drugs and told she had to work the streets. "I had no choice, but to obey the instructions as he threatened to kill me if I refused." Another Nigerian was always watching her and the other girl so she had no freedom of movement. Business was slow and the guy began beating them up for not bringing in more money. No medical treatment. No means of escape. Then there was a police raid. The two women were brought to Mercy House. They testified in court and the two Nigerians were given life sentences. Nono is very proud that she and her friend managed to testify. "I did this not for me only, but for the other victims. This will be a lesson to some of the people who are still thinking of trafficking persons". Nono told the social worker. Nono began giving testimony as a trafficking survivor in workshops and anti-trafficking campaigns. Now Nono has a bubbly one year old girl and is in a steady relationship with the father of her daughter.

And the final word (almost), must go to one sister who seems to sum up so well the imprint left by the Mercy presence:

"Similar stories could be recounted over and over : stories from teachers, nurses, artists, physiotherapists, policemen, who, with encouragement from the Sisters of Mercy, are now serving the people with respect, loyalty and dedication. I would like to think that we would be remembered as sisters with 'a heart for the people' who encouraged them to 'fan into flame' their individual/communal gifts and talents."

A background image of a sandy beach. In the upper left, there is a large, faint cross. A path of footprints leads from the bottom right towards the cross. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

*Allow me, therefore, to continue plotting
Mercy footprints for, whether our
motives for leaving them are few or
many, surely one of the reasons
we sustain and develop Mercy
ministry is so that, with time,
others might
see them and follow.*

(M&D)

Acknowledgements:

Sincere thanks to all the sisters who took the time to share memories, information and perspectives on their time in ministry.

Maria Douglas - October 2020

Funding During the Period 2009-2019

Misean Cara Funding	euro
Kenya	948,135
South Africa	796,069
Nigeria	127,438
Peru	38,000
Zambia	191,619
TOTAL	2,101,061

Solidarity Funding	euro
Kenya	498,640
South Africa	1,217,744
Nigeria	226,917
Peru	334,600
Zambia	276,424
TOTAL	2,454,325