

MERCY MISSION & DEVELOPMENT OFFICE



Annual Report 2018



INTRODUCTION

In this phase of the Congregational presence there are factors, internal and external, which inevitably impact the nature and the breadth of Mercy engagement on the ground.

In the five countries which have featured in the M&D Annual Reports the status of the Mercy presence at the end of 2018 was as follows:

In **South Africa**, given the profile of the sisters and the successful handing over of many ministries to ownership by the local community, the nature of many of the Mercy ministries is gradually becoming more pastorally focused.

Kenya, meanwhile, is continuing on its journey of forming its own Mercy identity and articulating its commitment to addressing local needs.

Mercy ministry in **Nigeria** came to an end after 50 years, with the work which was begun in schools, women's centres, the ecology centre, the ecumenical programme and so many others, carrying on under local ownership.

The Mercy presence in the Mission Area of **Zambia** is in a phase of winding down with the sisters who remain, focused on ensuring that where the need persists the ministry will continue to respond under locally-driven structures.

In **Peru** the community of Peruvian and Irish sisters deliver a broad range of services both pastoral and developmental in nature.

Within our Mercy reporting our focus continues to be on the differences we make - differences which are not always tangible and therefore perhaps more challenging to record. But these differences which cannot be confined to structures that are built or services that are put in place, are those which are the cornerstone of the Mercy- and the Missionary - approach to development.



The work carried out by organisations such as Mísean Cara (the organisation which channels Irish Aid funding to missionary congregations), in articulating the features of this approach allows us to document specific examples, illustrations of how it is implemented by Mercy and through Mercy. Phrases have been extracted from an explanatory document of the Missionary approach, to form an "umbrella" for the stories and the lives affected by the Mercy approach and the Mercy presence.





THE ETHOS OF MERCY

How can we begin to talk about the Mercy/Missionary approach to development without first articulating what is at the heart of all ministry and every interaction with those whom we serve?

FROM THE REPORTS

- ❖ *The staff is introduced to the Mercy ethos and have themselves shown great understanding of the charism and translate it in how they deal with the children, parents and others.*
- ❖ *Regular meetings of the Mercy associates on staff and Mercy sisters were held and these proved very valuable in helping staff maintain a mercy ethos at the shelters.*
- ❖ *The “merciful” approach to our ministry requires education and training of staff, of making them aware of the situation and to have knowledge about current matters. They need to be a presence of love and peace among the people. We need to be steeped in Mercy and know how to integrate it into our work.*
- ❖ *It is my privilege to bring smiles to faces sculpted by years of hardship, toil, poverty which become icons of dignity and peace.*
- ❖ *My ministry in the care centre continues to be very much a ministry of presence. Irrespective of their religious belief it is my experience that they all appreciate a listening ear, a kind word.*
- ❖ *The establishment of the Ethos and Ethics Committee to look at the various aspects of the school in terms of academics, culture, sport and spiritual well-being of teachers and learners so as to align ourselves with the mercy ethos and to ensure that each of us are authentic in our relationship with each other.*
- ❖ *Continue with deepening of the service and spirit of volunteering with the motto “he who does not live to serve does not serve to live” always in the spirit of Catherine we trust in the providence of God to continue with the work now with 30 volunteers added to the ministry.*
- ❖ *Our staff offer holistic compassionate care of clients affected by SGBV – staff willing to go the extra mile.*

- ❖ *The establishment of the Catherine McAuley Society by the learners with one project to provide sandwiches every Tuesday and Thursday for all learners.*
- ❖ *They are looking at providing food parcels to communities in need and visiting our Mercy House for abused women more regularly. All fundraising in the school is taxed at 10% with the money allocated to the society to help the projects.*



MISSIONARIES CAN DRAW ON THE RESOURCES OF THEIR BROADER MISSIONARY COMMUNITIES

One of the strengths of being part of the wider Congregation is having access to the knowledge, the experience and the support of the wider membership not just of Mercy but indeed of other Congregations engaged in similar ministries.

FROM THE REPORTS

- ❖ *She knew she could not face this mammoth task unaided. With the support of her Mercy community of the Northern Province to which she belongs and her fellow religious in Zambia, she began to see a way forward.*
- ❖ *We are trying to have a good relationship with other Mercy Schools both locally and abroad.*



MISSIONARIES ARE NOT AFRAID TO TAKE RISKS IN COMMENCING INTERVENTIONS OR IN FORGING PATHWAYS TO NEW RESPONSES

Surely Mercy efforts in engaging with those caught up in the spiral of human trafficking is an example of risk-taking?

FROM THE REPORTS

- ❖ *Katlego a 16 year old from Lesotho was living with her aunt because her mother had died. The aunt had promised to see that Katlego received a good education. Katlego was sent to school, but at night her aunt forced her to engage in pornographic activity on the internet. Katlego shared this with a friend at school. The friend reported this to the police who removed her from the aunt's house and*

brought her to us at Mercy House. While waiting to testify at the perpetrator's trial she is being prepared for court and learning skills, having found to have a talent for sales which she demonstrated during the crafts markets.



A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

It is generally acknowledged that sisters of Mercy are there "for the long haul." Indeed isn't it a regular feature of ministry life that no sooner has a sister "retired" from one role or commitment than she looks around for the next need or gap to be addressed? The time periods recorded by Mercy reporting only confirm the duration of ministry involvement.

FROM THE REPORTS

- ❖ *On October 24th 2018 the President of Zambia conferred Sr. Celestine Daly with the President's insignia of Honour. In his conferring remarks President Lungu paid tribute to Sr. Celestine's 30 years of service to the educational needs of his nation.*
- ❖ *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 while the parents were in class. Since then the crèche has been a place of joy for their first early learning experience and go on to primary school well equipped for the...*
- ❖ *Reaching and maintaining 95 years of quality education at Iona Convent.*
- ❖ *2018 was the year in which we celebrated 30 years of love and growth among the associates. Some 115 sisters, associates and friends joining in our celebration.*
- ❖ *The involvement of the sisters of Mercy in technical and vocational education in West Pokot has created a hub for knowledge since 2000.*
- ❖ *Makadara Mercy sisters dispensary is a faith-based dispensary and is the first health care facility established in 1958.*
- ❖ *The project provides music and other activities for about 150 children and young people. Every Saturday classes are held for violin, cello flute clarinet trumpet marimba drumming, art and dance. The aim of the project is to develop latent talent of the youth of Soweto and protect them from the lure of drink and drugs. The project has been running 15 years.*



THEY ARE DEEPLY EMBEDDED IN COMMUNITIES THROUGH A STRONG LOCAL PRESENCE

Partly because of the long-term presence among the local community but most especially because of the relationship that is fostered from the outset with local people, Mercy's ties with the community go far beyond the immediate physical needs.

FROM THE REPORTS

- ❖ *After some time at the shelter and with help from the social worker and the manager Violet engaged in the baking and sewing courses and excelled in both. She started selling cakes on the street outside the shelter becoming popular with early morning walkers on their way to work. By the end of the year she had saved sufficient funds to build a make-shift corrugated iron shack in Soweto and moved there with her children. She contacts the manager from time to time and reports that her baking is still a source of income and she has got her life together again.*
- ❖ *We are trying to counter the “Me First” attitude that is prevalent in our society and is filtering down to our children. This is exacerbated by limited parental input into their child’s moral development. We are trying to overcome this with prayer, teaching and parental workshops.*
- ❖ *The ethos and culture sustained by happy customers and word of mouth interaction. Parents bring their own children to Mayfair Convent School because they remember their experiences at the school, historically maintaining standards of education.*



MISSIONARIES SEE AND TREAT INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES AS DIGNIFIED HUMAN BEINGS WITH A WIDE RANGE OF CAPACITIES, NEEDS AND RIGHTS TO BE ADDRESSED

The above might perhaps be stating the obvious but it surely underlines the holistic approach taken by Mercy since first beginning to work and live with the community.

FROM THE REPORTS

- ❖ *Jhomira Cruz Minano 23 years old is a young woman with few economic resources but with many abilities and desires for improvement, her parents do not have a stable job to be able to fully support their daughter's studies, that's why we offer help with the half scholarship to study medicine. She will begin her internship next year. She takes parts in the church as a catechist of the children preparing for first communion and is very generous with her time to serve others. It is that spirit which fuelled her choice of career. The medical course is very demanding and expensive so as well as support from her parents she makes shoes in her spare time to earn money. She hopes to qualify and work in a public hospital so she can help those who have less.*
- ❖ *One day Rocio came to the library accompanied by her father. He waited for her to read her story. When she had finished the librarian offered her a puzzle which they did together. They continued visiting the library together either to read or do a puzzle. So the library can do wonders for parent / child relationships. Like the child who said to her mother – why can't you read me story every night like the librarian does? so Mum began to take home books – not just children's books but books such as "how to be a better parent"*
- ❖ *Mercy provides a warm atmosphere where people feel welcome and cared for and where they are encouraged to seek employment and in time, own their home.*
- ❖ *Omira, son of South African father, Congolese mother arrived at the shelter in 2017 from the province of Mpumalanga. Clearly a bright young man he set himself to find a scholarship for an overseas university. Through diligent and untiring application he used every facility in the library – free Wi-Fi zones to research possibilities. In September Omira received confirmed that he had secured a place at Herriot Watt University in Edinburgh for four year course in actuarial science. We have helped him a little with the airfare and is now completing his first year and looking to secure holiday work. What a great asset.....*



WORKING WITH THE POOREST AND MOST VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Yet another aspect of ministry which might need no emphasis and one we tend to take for granted but is however worth re-stating to remind ourselves of the focus of our ministry.

FROM THE REPORTS

- ❖ *During the year several care mothers became aware that many of the children suffered not only from physical poverty in their families but also from harsh treatment and lack of love of their parents. In many cases there is no father in the home. For this reason it was decided to make every effort to understand the situation of each child, and treat them with love and understanding.*
- ❖ *In the maximum security prison at a celebration for the awarding of certificates, 25 family members attended the occasion – one family had not been to visit their son for 8 years. I phoned to encourage them to attend and it was a very touching experience for all.*
- ❖ *At our school, lunches are provided for those children who cannot afford – books and materials are given – no child is turned away because of poverty, no child is deprived of a trip because of poverty. When parents/guardians die great care is taken to be present to the learners involved and help them through the difficult time.*
- ❖ *Prison ministry is somewhat neglected as a ministry in the Church – it is a privilege to be allowed entry to prisons and to be able to help those imprisoned to have hope for a future.*
- ❖ *Flor is a 50 year old woman. She is an abandoned mother. She has two daughters, who in turn are also single mothers. Flor works at home by hand-baking shoe ornaments. She is in charge of her 93-year-old dad, who suffers from Alzheimer's and her 90-year-old aunt whom she considers her mother because she took care of her as a child. During the year we supported her with the purchase of diapers every month and also a sister sought the support of the Palliative Care Centre. The doctor and his assistant visit their home twice a week to care for the elderly. In December she received me in her home with a beautiful smile and sparkle in her eyes, she told me: "Thank you, sister, your help confirms that I am not alone as before. Now I feel accompanied and strengthened to continue caring for my elders.*



ADVOCATES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE

The Mercy approach is perhaps not a radical stance on issues of conflict and division but rather works from within the community to heal the rifts and differences which contribute to the creation of inequality and the infringement of rights.

FROM THE REPORTS

- ❖ *Kwanele Kwanele campaign where our primary school children join the high school girls in regular silent protests against abuse of women and children.*
- ❖ *Our challenges remain the same: Reconciliation is not a popular ministry – some of the clergy think it is unnecessary. We try to discuss these challenges and spread relevant material as widely as possible.*
- ❖ *Addressing issues of inequality and the rights of marginalised groups, including people with disabilities, people living with HIV & AIDS, orphans and vulnerable children.*
- ❖ *When Ana Cristina was about one year old, it was obvious that her mother did not accept her as she is a child with special needs. We took her to Santo Toribio for physical therapy where “her lovely little girl” was welcomed by therapist, principal and teachers. She began therapy and gradually learned to talk. After a year or so her father said – “Our whole life has changed since Ana Cristina went to Santo Toribio.” It changed because attitudes to her changed. Today she is a lively 5 year old loved and cared for by her mother.*



A FOCUS ON SPIRITUAL AND PSYCHO-SOCIAL RESILIENCE

This encapsulates just one of the aspects of Mercy ministry (in common with other religious congregations) which contributes to the distinction made between the "missionary" approach and the approach taken by those organisations more developmentally-orientated.

FROM THE REPORTS

- ❖ *A special mention should be made of the appointment of a full time social worker at the school. It is clear that more learners are in need of this service. Many of them have difficult home situations and one often wonders how they cope at all.*
- ❖ *The increase in the number of learners applying to our school did give one a feeling that having an open door policy whereby parents, staff and learners can address any issue at hand without fear or favour contributed tremendously to positive-ness and transparent atmosphere at the school.*
- ❖ *This programme helps learners to learn about the facts of life and to deal with their own unresolved issues. They come back wiser and ready to see more clearly about abuse, injustice and care for each other they also learnt to work together. They learn about drugs and the dangers. The Grade7 learners also had a retreat at the end of the year which the school paid for.*
- ❖ *We will continue to develop children who are mindful of others, caring and considerate and who place others before themselves. The Mercy Ethos will continue to be the base that all that happens in the school is always foremost. Above all we want young girls who are beacons of light in society and who lead the way to justice and righteousness in a very difficult world.*
- ❖ *Our social worker and pastoral care coordinator are particularly vulnerable as they have very heavy counselling caseloads which take their toll on their mental and spiritual resources. We are looking at ways to alleviate this stress.*
- ❖ *Our challenge is always helping our learners to interiorise good Christian values in an environment that is threatening and destructive.*
- ❖ *Mercy Lokori Centre endeavours to keep in close contact with the parents so that interest in their children's education will be sustained hence ensuring they stay in school and complete their education.*



ADOPTING AN INSPIRING AND EMPOWERING APPROACH

This is clearly a perception not voiced by Mercy but one voiced by others.

FROM THE REPORTS

- ❖ *Raul 1st year in engineering studies – I wish to express my sincere gratitude to you, a Congregation...for what you have been doing, leaving footprints in different places, for what you give, without asking in return. I participate in one of those aspects that help unselfishly that is education. This is the best inheritance that can be left to a human being.*
- ❖ *When Harriet sought assistance to go to Biomedical college we made her aware of the importance of returning the money when employed. Now she is on the government payroll and on a regular basis money is forwarded to us.*
- ❖ *We will continue to develop children who are mindful of others, caring and considerate and who place others before themselves. The Mercy ethos will continue to be the base that all that happens in the school is always foremost. Above all we want young girls who are beacons of light in society and who lead the way to justice in a very difficult world*
- ❖ *An MIRC young man....will be a peacemaker in life's journey with others. He will seek to live Gospel values through a creative faith response that is actively opposed to those forces which dehumanise.*
- ❖ *She also saw the need for engaging with parents of the children regarding parenting skills, coping methods in dealing with problems arising from living in a violent and disturbed society.*
- ❖ *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. An increasing number of parents look for motivation from the school. Learners being submerged in a world of social media and materialism. The school helps them to make sense of their world especially when the parents are absent.*



AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH, LEAVING OUT NOBODY OUT WHO IS IN NEED

FROM THE REPORTS

- ❖ *We are endeavouring to live out our Constitution Chapter 1 number 3 – “To reach out with courage and compassion to Christ’s suffering members”*
- ❖ *26 learners on full school assistance, 15 on partial assistance for all costs including sometimes transport.*
- ❖ *The staff is encouraged to respect the dignity of all who come to the shelters.*



BEING WELL LINKED IN TO LOCAL STRUCTURES AND AUTHORITIES, WITH RELATIONSHIPS BUILT OVER MANY YEARS

FROM THE REPORTS

- ❖ *The Mercy Vocational training centre is a landmark training establishment responsible for a significant number of students. Most of the tailoring businesses in and around Makutano town are owned by former Mercy VCT students.*
- ❖ *The social worker intern developed a car guarding project in association with the police – 20 graduated at a little function attended by many local business people – at least 12 are still engaged in the work and contributing to their stay at the shelter as well as sending money home for their children while adding mightily to the safety of the business area.*

These extracts from Mercy reporting serve to highlight the many ways in which sisters on the ground bring Mercy to the communities with whom they share their lives. This is however just a fraction of the difference made by the presence of Mercy and the commitment of the sisters who serve in ministry.

Mission and Development Office
May 2019