

For File
—

MIR/6/4/9

(on TCC headed note paper)

EVENT: MERCY UNION INAUGURATION

VENUE: NATIONAL BASKETBALL ARENA, TALLAGHT

DATE: JULY 14th

**CELEBRATION: 11.30a.m. - 4.30p.m.
(Highlight 11.30a.m. - 1.00p.m.
Mass 3.00p.m. - 4.30p.m.)**

A PRESS DESK WILL BE STAFFED FROM 10.30a.m.

PRESS PACKS WILL BE AVAILABLE

We regret that due to security arrangements identification may be requested.

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

EMBARGO: THURSDAY 14th, 11.30a.m.

MERCY SISTERS UNITE

The largest meeting of Religious Sisters ever to take place in Ireland was on July 14th. 2600 Mercy Sisters came together at the National Basketball arena in Tallaght, Dublin to form one Mercy Union of the Sisters in Ireland and South Africa.

Catherine McAuley now called 'Venerable' founded the Mercy congregation in 1831 to serve the disadvantaged poor of the time. Hundreds of Mercy convents were set up over the years in every town and county in Ireland and in 55 countries abroad. The followers of Catherine now number 3,615 in Ireland, approximately 16,000 worldwide. They respond to a wide range of local needs in education, medical and social care, and pastoral work. Up to now, each diocesan group was administered separately.

If every village in Ireland has its own ethos and tradition, it is no surprise that each Mercy group in the country had its own heritage and values. Seven years ago the idea of a Mercy Union first emerged. Over hundreds of meetings at every level, a common vision for the Mercy Sisters in Ireland and South Africa gradually emerged.

The commitment to union had to be agreed by every Mercy convent in Ireland, then it had to be set up in legislation and finally approved by the Holy See. The Tallaght meeting was the result of a consensus, sometimes painful, that the needs of the Irish and South African churches were best served by a strong Mercy Union.

Present at the ceremony were representatives of Mercy Sisters from the United Kingdom, USA, New Zealand, the Phillipines, Latin America, Canada, and many African countries. Laity closely associated with the work of the Mercy Sisters in Ireland and South Africa were also present.

The Tallaght ceremony of union was a creative celebration in music, song, dance and reflection. These captured the huge variety of Mercy work and expressed its hopes for the future.

The Declaration read by the Sisters, expressed their commitment to solidarity with the most vulnerable in society. They promised to work as bridge-builders respecting the dignity of all. The Declaration confirmed the Congregation's corporate thrust toward those who are weak and marginalised.

The Declaration stated (full text)

"We are Sisters of Mercy
We gather today
To celebrate a creative moment
In our story

We are people who have heard
The same music
Through the call of God
The charism of Catherine
And the lives of Mercy women gone before us

Aware of our own woundedness
And the need for conversion
We draw daily from the wells of God's Mercy

We women of Mercy
Called and gifted by God and each other
Today formalise new bonds
And new relationships among us
Enlivening and strengthening us for mission

Out of the vibrant waters of our time
The pain of humanity calls us
To be bridge-builders in a broken world

And so
We commit ourselves anew
To serve the poor, sick and needy
To work for justice and peace
And to further the dream of God in our world"

(end of full declaration)

Concurrent with this major development for the Irish Sisters, Mercy Congregations world wide are collaborating to establish a Mercy Centre in Baggott St., Dublin, the site of Catherine McAuley's first House of Mercy. This centre will be officially opened later in July.

After Tallaght 129 elected representatives will meet for a month to implement the union. A major exercise will be the reorganisation of the twenty six diocesan groups into two or more units in the country. Financial, leadership, and complicated administrative issues arising from the union will have to be resolved. The work of the Mercy Sisters will be streamlined taking each local situation into account.

The reading of the Papal Decree of Union and the Mass presided over by Cardinal Cahal Daly was the end of a long process and the beginning of a new life for the Mercy Congregation.