

“B\ Ringing in the
New Year,
Mercy Style”



Preface

Presented with a theme such as “New Year, New Beginnings”, the permutations might well be endless. This is an invitation to allow oneself to ponder, to dream and to express the emotions, the memories and the personal interpretations of what the New Year might bring. From across the Congregation time and space have been given to doing just that and here we share the contributions.

From the South Central Province

On the first of January 1932 a baby girl was born into the Kennedy family to the delight of my parents Hugh and Margaret. From then on January 1st every year was a special day. Each year was a looking forward and hoping the time would pass quickly until I was a teenager. There was so much to which I looked forward – joining my sisters as a boarder in Doon and meeting new friends. Going to Doon was the first time I left Mum and Dad, my brothers and younger sister and life on a farm. Then the time came when choices had to be made and I had to make decisions. The 1st of January then became a little tense as childhood dreams had to become a reality. I decided I was going to make a difference in the world I lived in.

Life was no longer for play and fun. As the new year of 1950 came I made the decision that changed my life and my dreams. The 1st of January that year came and went bringing with it a little sadness and a little excitement.

*"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood
And I took the road less travelled by
And that has made all the difference"....*

(Robert Frost)

And so the decision to help change the world was mine. Supported by Mum and Dad I became a Sister of Mercy following in the steps of my two older sisters. Now that I am reaching another special 1st of January I am inclined to look back and marvel at all that has been.

I am much at peace and filled with gratitude to the Lord for His care of me over the years. Life is a journey and with God's help and that of my companions I am determined to live each day as it comes; not looking at the future, not looking at the past but living in the now and in the present.

Sr. Pauline Kennedy

From the Region of Peru

Peru is a country with a lot of diversity in customs and traditions. What we are going to share is from the La Libertad Region, located on the north coast of the country, where we live.

New Year is a time of blessing and gratitude to God for all that was and was meant to be during the past year. At the same time, there is a willingness to receive the new year, with much hope and trust in Him.

We are given a new opportunity to strengthen the positives of the year that has passed: the values we practiced, the relationships we shared, the care for creation, etc.

We begin a new journey, looking to yesterday in contemplation and hoping to improve at every level in the coming year: personal, community, ministry and beyond, to the whole Congregation.

It is also an opportunity to thank God, for the gifts of health, community and ministry for this coming year.

How we celebrate New Year:

In community, among ourselves, we celebrate with a simple dinner, always using yellow for the place settings as this is the colour which brings happiness and success for the year ahead.

Some families give each other lentils as they signify the Providence of God, in the hope that daily bread is never lacking.

In the villages it is celebrated with dancing, meetings with friends and a New Year's Eve dinner with the main course of turkey or stuffed chicken.

At midnight "rag dolls" made of old clothes are burned. This means the burning of the old, of that which no longer serves, but instead to wait for and hope for new life. Fireworks used to be set off but this has been banned, because of the environment and the pollution they cause.

Some of our rituals: Doors are opened to let out the year that ends and receive the one that is coming in; twelve grapes are eaten, one for each month of the year; all the lights in the house are turned on to call for abundance and success; many people put on yellow underwear, to attract "good luck and happiness."

Young people go camping on the beaches while families pray in front of the crib and at midnight, hug and wish each other blessings of joy, peace and love.

Mercy Community of Peru

From the Northern Province

As one year ends and we stand on the edge of a new one, I recall the symbol of Janus, the Roman god with two faces, one looking forward and one back, who gives his name to the first month.

Looking back, I'm struck by how quickly time passes, more quickly each year, it seems! I recall the mistakes I made, all the ways in which I failed to live up to my best aspirations, all the people I may have inadvertently hurt or offended. I acknowledge my failures, recognising my own human frailty, and I ask the spirit of God to forgive me and help me to do better in the year ahead.

Looking forward, I am grateful for life, for health, for the blessings I enjoy. The New Year lies before me, clean and unspoiled, like undisturbed snow. Who knows what will leave footprints on it? I have no doubt some of them will be wonderful, and realistically, some of them may be challenging. I trust that, as in previous years, I am held in a loving embrace, and so, I step forward with hope and joy *'All shall be well, all manner of things shall be well'*.

Sr. Philomena Horner

From the South African Province

Different cultures (even in the convent) celebrate New Year differently... In the Black community, New Year's Day is more important than Christmas and for our African sisters being with their families is a "must".

Waking up on January 1st, all is very quiet except for the birds singing, calling to each other since 3.00 am. The night may have been warm but once the sun is up it will be chocolate-melting hot! Many times I've woken with a prayer in my heart: "*Please let it rain!*" .

As it's a bank holiday, the silence continues well into the morning before traffic begins to move – going to church, visiting family and friends, finding a cool place for a family picnic, perhaps in the gardens, so beautiful at this time. Others dress up in new clothes and gather as an extended family for prayer and feasting.

A day unlike any other day, it holds our hopes, our dreams, our promises, our questions and our fears. It is a day when we take a big breath before stepping into the new year.

Sr. Colleen Wilkinson

From the Western Province

(I wrote this poem a couple years ago after purchasing a new diary – it resonates with my sentiments when I think of 2022!)

Diary

The image on the inside cover
urges: it must be your best
year yet. I need assurance

I'll have the resources
to envisage this urge. No Google
search will pledge how the year
will unfurl, what promises

hope will whisper, which paths
will expand. How to navigate new
rapids; have fortitude for infinity

to evolve beyond boundaries; allow
them be springboards for flight,
or be reconciled to a citizenship
of loss?

Though I don't know where my conversations will take me, I delight in the hope that the New Year's offerings will be gentle with me and with each of us and should a citizenship of loss be ours that we will trust the grace all losses offer.

Sr. Mary Lee

From the Kenyan Province

New Beginnings

The human mind is often wired to resist change perhaps because the thought of new beginnings always presupposes disguised painful endings that might disturb our comfort zones. While not everyone is enthusiastic about change, yet there are definitely times when we look forward to fresh beginning that are exciting or even compelling. I imagine one of the reasons most of us make New Year's resolutions is because there is always an innate yearning in us for something that will stir up the dynamo within us in order to bring flavor to life, as we shape how we would want the New Year to be for us.

As I reflect on the new beginnings I am also reminded of the Congregational process that we have been engaged into for the last few months. On a personal level there have been moments when I would have been engulfed by apprehension of what this new direction might be for me and I presume this feeling might be true for many of us. However, I find comfort in the words of Martin Luther King, Junior who once said that: *"Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step."*

I like the thought of being at peace not to see the whole staircase or rather not being sure of how things will unfold simply because I am allowing my faith to guide me on. In the last few years I have learnt that the joy of life comes from my encounters with new experiences and that has helped me to be open to see life from new horizons.

As we open our arms to embrace 2022 I invite you to join me to ponder on a quote from Ellen Goodman: *"We spend January first walking through our lives, room by room, drawing up a list of work to be done, cracks to be patched. Maybe this year, to balance the list, we ought to walk through the rooms of our lives... not looking for flaws, but for potential."*

Sr. Agnes Mativo

From the Mission & Development Office

I hear the words "New Year" and I think.... another chance, another beginning. Inevitably nature around me is cloaked in mist and sodden with that soft Irish rain poets talk about, so there is no sense yet of those green shoots sprouting from the earth with the promise of growth. No, this is not about renewal but rather a completely different story begging to be told. New Year is the opening chapter of a new book I have been keeping until last to read, because I can sense it is going to enthral me, inspire me and make me wonder all over again why I can't or don't produce a work such as this.

On January 1st I am probably at my most childlike, believing that anything is possible, that this year I will not leave those dreams under the pillow but bring them into the light and live them.

Maria Douglas

From the US Region

Tracks

In a cold blue January dawn in South Dakota, I open
the back kitchen door, pushing the screen out against the snow
to see the tracks crisscrossing the space between me and the lilac bushes.

Rabbits lolloping have checked out my porch
before making a dash for the field. A crow has alighted,
then flown. And here are the long skinny toes of a squirrel
still crisp, even the nails showing.

A neighborhood cat (I know him well) has stalked something—a mouse?
No, a chickadee. Claws retracted, heavy paw pads sinking past the crust,
the Tom pulls the dragline of his thick tail behind him. His fear-struck
prey makes cold tiny arrowheads right and left--where to go, where?
before escaping into air.

Then in some quiet moment, it seems a deer passed through,
her heart-shaped hoof marks headed for the trees beyond.
I cannot see her, but I do: slow and watchful,
walking with utter elegance, sure
of life for just this very instant.

These are my dawn walkers this New Year,
dissolving template of all those who pass through our lives
and are gone: infinitely diverse, abundantly present
if we are present to the mystery and grace
of each one's being.

All I've got now are these tracks in the snow.
Quick! Get them, capture them
before the sun comes out and the melting
distorts or melts them away into ether.
Capture them.
Or let them ascend.

Sr. Mary O'Connor

From the Southern Province

Despite the enormous problems of recent times I see "light shining in the darkness". People are realising more and more how their choices affect the fragility of Mother Earth and are responding positively to Pope Francis' challenge to protect "our common home" and becoming more aware of how we are shaping the future of our planet.

Tidy Town Groups, farmers, gardeners and others are all putting some land aside to provide places in which nature will be restored thus providing favourable conditions for plants, birds and insects. Hopefully, like Saint Francis, we will acquire greater sensitivity for all living creatures and we will join with him as he asks them to *PRAISE THE LORD*.

Covid-19 has forced us to walk untrodden paths of grief, uncertainty, and isolation. The pain for some families is beyond words. In 2022 I see us moving forward in hope of new life and healing. Joan Chittister's words resonate with me at this time, "form your communities to climb and climb and climb to where God is even now" as we hopefully journey from Calvary to Tabor.

"Begin again to the summoning birds...begin to the loneliness that cannot end" ...Brendan Kennelly urges us to embrace all life with its failures, mistakes and pain but never to be paralysed by its darkness.

As we step into the New Year may we be filled with gratitude for all the blessings we experienced in 2021. May our hearts be filled with courage and hope and may we remember like R. S. Thomas

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*life is not hurrying on to a receding future,
nor hankering after an imagined past.*

*It is the turning aside like Moses to the miracle of the lit bush,
to a brightness that seemed as transitory as your youth once,
but is the eternity that awaits you."* (The Field)

Sr. Pauline Murphy