

Mercy International Association Archives Committee

Mercy International Association (MIA) is an organisation of leaders of Mercy Congregations, Institutes and Federations throughout the world, founded to serve the Sisters of Mercy, their associates and colleagues in ministry. A number of subgroups (commissions) are in place to further the purposes of the worldwide association: one such grouping is the Archives Committee.

Purpose

The purpose of the MIA Archives committee is to provide oversight for MIA artefacts and archives currently held at Mercy International Centre, Baggot Street, and the Catherine McAuley Centre, Herbert Street, Dublin and to assist MIA in its recognition and promotion of the archival treasures of its Members.

Responsibilities

In carrying out its purpose, within the resources available, the committee's responsibilities include, but are not limited, to the following activities:-

- Promoting worldwide Mercy networks to ensure that documentation of the Mercy story is protected, preserved and used in such a way that it is an inspiration for contemporary and future Mercy mission.
- Nurturing and promoting research on Mercy topics and on Mercy archival materials and drawing up protocols for research.
- Identifying the character and location of the current archival holdings of the Members.
- Promoting standard practices for the acquisition, preservation and use of archival holdings.
- Overseeing the plan, timeline and budget for reallocating artefacts and archives between MIC and the archives of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy (Ireland).
- Providing an annual report to MIA prior to their annual general meeting¹

¹ Bignell, Ethel, Terms of Reference, Mercy International Archives Committee, 2003.

Some of the present work that engages the MIA Archives committee includes:-

I. INTERNATIONAL MERCY REGISTER

The development of the International Mercy Register is ongoing. This register is intended to hold the name and some information about every Mercy sister from Catherine McAuley to the present day. As you can imagine, this entails enormous work but should be well worthwhile in the end. Gratitude is due to all the Mercy archivists throughout the world who are working on this painstaking task. It is hoped that the register will be completely updated by 2008.

II. INVENTORY OF PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIALS

The second major task on hand is the assembly of a computerised inventory of all *Primary Source Materials* in Mercy Archives world wide. There are two phases to this project. Phase 1 of the inventory focussed on primary source materials generated by Catherine McAuley, her autograph letters, poems etc. The collection and logging of materials for this phase of the inventory is complete at this stage.

Phase II of the inventory, which refers to original writings of a sister who entered a Mercy Convent before or during 1850, in her own handwriting, on the original paper, has been launched. Once again we are deeply indebted to our Mercy archivists who are engaged in the gathering and registering of all these numerous writings, since this too requires extensive and painstaking work. It is expected that this part of the inventory will take some time to complete.

III. MIA ARCHIVE COLLECTION

Since the reallocation of artefacts and archives between MIC and the Congregational Archive in Herbert Street, the work of identifying, labelling and filing the Mercy International Archive is carried on by Marianne Cosgrave, whose excellent conservationist work for this valuable archive is much appreciated throughout the Mercy family. Marianne has also prepared a catalogue of the MIA archive collection as well as access and conservation policies.

IV. STANDARDS/GUIDELINES

Another area of work recently completed by the MIA Archives Committee is the development of a Standards/Guidelines document. The purpose of these Standards/Guidelines is best practice and the good functioning of Mercy Archives world wide.

V. MERCY INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH COMMISSION

The Mercy International Research Commission functions as a sub-committee of the MIA Archives Committee. The purposes of the Commission are:-

→ To develop an understanding of principles guiding Mercy research.

Such research will be:

- a) Inclusive and broad in relation to sources
- b) Multidisciplinary in approaches
- c) Multi-dimensional in process of research
- d) Inclusive of life-experiences, theologies and spiritualities of each Sister of Mercy, our Mercy associates and partners in ministry
- e) Attentive to the relevance of past experiences for the present and the future

Not every mercy research project will show all the principles mentioned above but these principles will characterise Mercy research generally.

→ To encourage the scholarly treatment of the archival and other research resources of the Sisters of Mercy worldwide, including their archives, the lives and memories of their sisters, their current theological and spiritual reflections and their current analyses of global and local issues.

→ To nurture the production of well researched analyses of our resources.

→ To promote, through the dissemination of such research, the ongoing conversion of the Sisters of Mercy, their associates and partners in ministry, and to contribute to the ongoing life of the Church.

In carrying out its role, the commission will:-

- Maintain a voluntary roster of active interested Mercy researchers and promote connections and interactions among them
- Publish an annual newsletter noting recently published works and works in progress
- Recommend methods and standards for research and publication
- Envision if desirable, regional conferences and an international convocation of Mercy research scholars in the next decade
- Assist the vice-postulator of the cause of Canonisation of Catherine McAuley
- Serve as a voluntary and informative professional resource for Mercy researchers engaged in or interested in pursuing new Mercy research projects²

The commission has compiled a roster of Mercy researchers worldwide and a bibliography of research undertaken by Mercy Sisters around the world. The above are just some of the objectives of the MIRC.

The scope and scholarly resources available to the Sisters of Mercy is extraordinarily wide, in both documentary resources and human expertise. Among Sisters of Mercy throughout the world are scores of well trained educationalists, health-care specialists, scripture scholars, theologians, historians, archivists, lawyers, anthropologists, sociologists, literary critics and psychologists, to name only a few of the relevant and collective areas of expertise. A whole world of Mercy possibility opens up when one begins to name just a portion of the collective human resource that is Mercy.

Conclusion

Archives are a very good reminder to us that there is a 'season' for everything under the sun, and strike the salutary note that we are part of a story much bigger than ourselves, reminding us that we are part of a past and indeed of "a future that is not our own" (Oscar Romero). They also remind us to look to the heart of things; our heritage challenges us with the realisation that only what is really lived can be truly challenged and only what is truly challenged can be offered for transformation and thus withstand the test of time.

Adapted 2008 by Cait O'Dwyer RSM, from an article by Brenda Dolphin RSM.

² Bignell, Ethel, Terms of Reference, Mercy International Association Research Commission, 2005