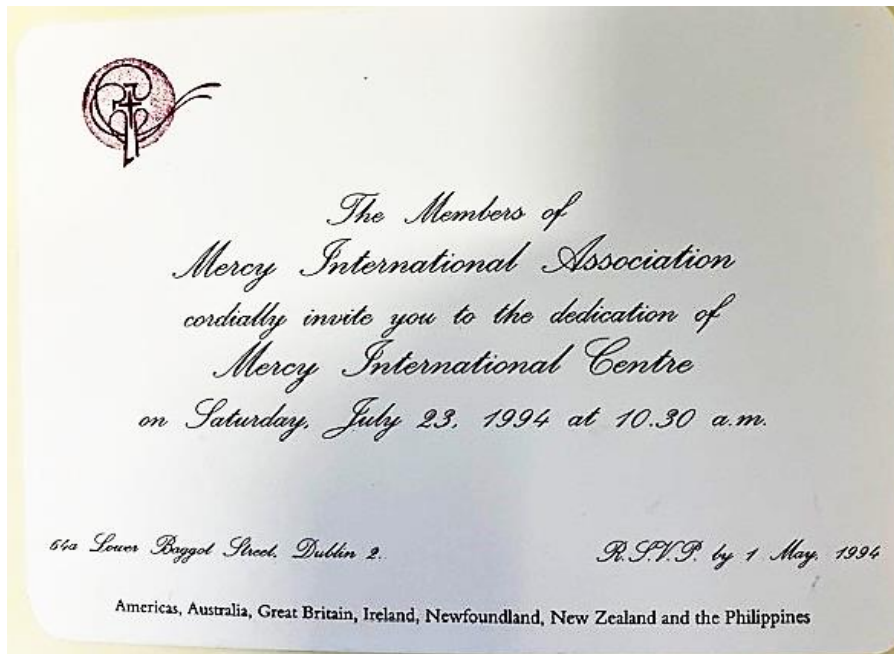


Official Opening of Mercy Intenational Centre, Baggot St. 1994

All it takes is one heart to receive the Spirit's *What if?*
and one voice to persuade an idea to sound,
all it needs is a people to take up the tune gratefully, gracefully,
and to keep singing,
to keep singing to the music of the harp,
in and from, about and beyond Catherine's house,
God's mercy in perpetual making.

(extract from *Murmur* – Sr. Mary Wickham)



In July 1994 Sisters of Mercy came together from around the world to the dedication of Mercy International Centre, Baggot St. Dublin. One can only imagine the excitement!

According to the Annals of Mercy International Association (MIA) 200 guests were present at the dedication ceremony and official opening. It had taken five years for the project to come to fruition. Even following the handing over of the refurbished building by architects, builders and other workers to the care of MIA on March 31st, much work still needed to be done to outfit the Centre and to prepare the Heritage displays. Then there was all the planning and preparation for this special day of dedication in July.

On the Thursday before the Opening, the sculpture of Catherine arrived, to be positioned at the front door. Apparently, quite a crowd gathered on Baggot Street to watch the unloading and positioning. The Annals report that Catherine was described as the “lady on the fiver” (In April 1994, the Irish Minister for Finance had launched a new £5 note, featuring Catherine McAuley with the Mater Hospital in the background).

Opening Day – July 23rd, 1994

From the annals, we learn that July 23rd, 1994, was a busy morning. Everything had to be prepared in readiness; the Chapel, the garden, and the front entrance with the plaque to be unveiled by President Mary Robinson.

Preparations were also made to ensure that all those arriving enjoyed a “Good cup of tea” in the dining room or in the winter garden.



This year on its 30th anniversary we asked Sr Mary Trainer, who was intimately involved in the project since 1987, to share a reflection on that momentous day. The following is an extract from Mary’s memories:

“The purposes of creating a World Mercy Centre were focused and refocused as they evolved. Among them were:

1. To preserve heritage, the birthright of every sister; and make the animating power of the charism accessible for those who follow us into the future... (sisters, associates, colleagues drawn by God into a shared Mission of Mercy).

2. To link creatively all branches of mercy worldwide, facilitating communication among the whole and enabling the parts and the whole to become visible to each other and to the world in a re-imagined global identity.”

Following months and years of planning, negotiating and organizing, the Centre opened.

Mary shared *“What joy filled our hearts as we welcomed one another home. In all the richness of our diverse cultures and nationalities we rediscovered the “original unity” fostered by Catherine among all the foundations”*.

As a symbol of all being united in this sacred Mercy place, Sisters from many nations poured water from their special vessel into the rill in the garden.



Mary’s reflections continued:

“As we celebrate the 30th Anniversary of Mercy International Centre/Association we remember the dreams spoken by our sisters and are awed by how they have formed and shaped who we are and who we are becoming.

Catherine, how can we ever thank you for birthing us, all of us in this tender Mercy of God? Deepen in us the ardent love of God and of God’s beloved poor ones. With all our sisters who now know the joy of meeting you in heaven, bless us and keep kindling the flame of Mercy in our hearts. And free us to dance every night”!

Affectionately, Mary

Down through the years Sr. Mary Wickham has creatively captured the spirit of Catherine and Mercy through her reflective poetry. To commemorate the 30th anniversary Mary wrote this poem:

MURMUR

A recurring motif of the way of God's mercy in the world
is the Spirit's murmur of two words:

What if?

When the profound simplicity of such a murmur is heard
and enters the chambers of one heart, then another,
and a people give it credence despite doubts and detractors,
investing in a risk lit by that first murmur,
a new story is graciously dared, latest kindling of ancient lore.

What takes flame and makes flame and renews each day the fire,
is the invitation to belong, the impulse to serve with mercy,
and to learn from this meaning-laden, memory-vested place,
as the house draws into its story those who arrive
with hearts as open as that red-bright door.

Good stories unite and gather us around the hearth.
Good stories inspire and transcend their own limits,
working their way for goodness, to re-mind and re-hearten,
the disparate drawn into one,
as the diverse water vessels poured what became the one water,
affirming the origins yet leaping outwards, flowing onwards,
claiming connections, recognizing kindred,
stirring today's and coaxing tomorrow's.

The Irish have a legend about an enchanted harp,
a lyrical instrument that of its own accord plays three melodies:

lament, lullaby and rhapsody: three variations that evoke the whole of life.
What sorrows do we tell, what songs of peace are ours, what echoes of Magnificat joy?

Thirty years ago, invisible strings arrived from myriad cultures
to craft here a new harp,
to enable a music already enshrined in the story but as yet unheard.
What music has it played since, that has travelled truly from ear to spirit?
What music is humming, reverberating between the walls and floors?
What melodies are insistently sounding but still wait to be greeted at the door?
Where is the music of *What if?* this day?

Catherine received the question, *What if?*
She made it a home and gave it a voice.
Her companions rendered the murmur into tunes beyond their imagining
and we in our complex, fractious time sing on,
the words in sometimes unknown tongues, yet melodies familiar,
sometimes dissonance, sometimes harmony,
but sing we do.

All it takes is one heart to receive the Spirit's *What if?*
and one voice to persuade an idea to sound,
all it needs is a people to take up the tune gratefully, gracefully,
and to keep singing,
to keep singing to the music of the harp,
in and from, about and beyond Catherine's house,
God's mercy in perpetual making.

Amen is a word for continuing,
it signifies a bringing to being, not an end,
and so, we sing with joy and hope and awe,
Amen, Amen.

Today, Mercy International Centre continues to be the home of the Mercy Global Family. The house is a centre of hospitality for all who come to visit. It is a place of pilgrimage and renewal for those who wish to take time and touch the spirit of Catherine. The chapel, Catherine's room where she died, and the grave are special places of pilgrimage. The 'Catherine Mc Auley and the Mission of Mercy' exhibition which was launched recently tells the history of the house, the social context in which Catherine and the early foundresses lived and the daily practices of the founding sisters. The exhibition offers a rich collection of heritage audio recordings, a wonderful collection of stories, artifacts and photographs and an interactive digital archive.

The following are some reflections on the question "What does Mercy International Centre mean to you?"

'There is a global consciousness of becoming one. Relationships have deepened. Mercy International Centre is like a hub that facilitates these connections and the building of relationships. It is a wonderful source of renewal and refreshment.'

'I love to spend time at Mercy International Centre and to touch into the spirit of Catherine. The chapel in Baggot Street, Catherine's room and spending time at her grave are very precious moments in my life.'

One main challenge shared is:

Visiting Mercy International Centre is still for the privileged, for those who can travel. There is a growing desire to bring Baggot Street into people's lives. How do we bring Mercy International Centre into the homes and spaces of those who cannot make the journey to Dublin?

Perhaps, we should, at this special time of celebrating the 30th anniversary, listen for the prompting of the Spirit as once again we ponder *What if:*

- What if a rebirthing of the charism of Mercy is taking place among us as we dare to welcome new companions through the 'Opening Doors' initiative?
- What if Catherine's dream of two hundred years ago, of vowed and lay people ministering together in the service of those in need can be more fully realised?
- What if the ministry of Mercy International Centre can grow in being a transformative presence in our wounded world?
- What if our global unity can become a model of community in a world that seems more interested in building walls than bridges?

All it takes is one heart to receive the Spirit's What if?

And all it needs is a people to take up the tune gratefully, gracefully, and to keep singing,

Let us join our voices in grateful remembrance, joyful celebration and unbounded hope as we sing together a new song of Mercy in this anniversary year,