

## Remembering The Decade 2013 – 2023

“New York, New York! here I come. In 2013 our destination was not the great bustling city that never sleeps but the 57<sup>th</sup> UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Sister Patricia O’Donovan and I attended on the invitation of Sister Áine O’Conner (USA) who at that time worked at the UN Justice Desk on behalf of Mercy Congregations. A decade later 2023 I now reflect on the more enduring memories of that event.

The priority theme was “Violence Against Women and Girls”. Ever since then my understanding of violence and human trafficking has been hugely influenced. The Opening Ceremony was very colourful with women from all continents and from so many countries gathered in the one auditorium and concerned with the same issue. This made me realise the pervasiveness of violence against women and girls and its destructive nature.

There were discussions and workshops on breaking the cycle of violence which is one of the most widespread violations of human rights.

- Survivors of human trafficking sharing their stories.
- On Women in media, radio and television and their experiences.
- On Women's right to freedom for and from prostitution.
- On Gender issues and Equality.

These are but a few of the workshops and presentations that took place. By 2013 I already had 10 years of experience working with two organizations - APT (Act to Prevent Trafficking) and Ruhama (which works face to face with women trafficked into prostitution). In 2012 there was little known or spoken about the trafficking and the exploitation of children. In that year a Sister colleague and I did some research to develop a programme to remedy the situation. Unfortunately, my colleague was unable to continue and well into the planning we abandoned the effort. At the Commission two Youth Lead Events

– “Girls Speak Out”, “Girls Tribunal on Violence”, awakened my interest and determination to return to the children’s project. Following discussion with Patricia we both agreed to follow through with the idea and in a short time after returning home Mercy Efforts for Child Protection with Hospitality Services was born and named MECPATHS. I will leave it to others to describe how MECPATHS has grown and developed over the decade. It started on a very small scale with a team visiting hotels, meeting the managers explaining our Power Point project and requesting time to make a staff presentation.

Today things are very different and far more efficient. Contact is made through email and a well-researched Programme developed by team MECPATHS and is delivered by eLearning. It is incorporated into the initial training of personnel, so it reaches far more people –

managers and staff in far less time. Presently, many hotels and businesses request this programme.

Another outstanding memory for me in March 2013, although not directly connected with CSW was the surprise election of Pope Francis. From Buenos Aires he was no stranger to the phenomenon of violence and trafficking of women which he calls a “heinous crime” and “an open wound in the Body of Christ, in the body of all humanity”. He encouraged Cardinals, Bishops, Priests and Laity to become involved in eradicating this “Scourge” by 2030. He has asked experts from the Vatican Academy of Sciences to share their research on different aspects of trafficking form around the world. He has met with the leaders of the major World Religions who have pledged their assistance. Many of you will remember his visit to Lampedusa to meet migrants, refugees and trafficked people in the early days of his Papacy. Since 2015 he has established the Santa Marta Group which is the unlikely alliance of Bishops and Police Chiefs worldwide to engage in anti-trafficking work. The rapid development of MECPATHS and the encouragement of Pope Francis have greatly influenced my Ministry and Prayer Life over the past decade” ***Sr. Mary Ryan, Co-Founder, MECPATHS***



Sr. Patricia O Donovan

&

Sr. Mary Ryan Co-Founders of MECPATHS

### **Looking Back with Gratitude, Looking Forward in Hope**

*‘Mercy is the call, the charism and heritage  
Which forms and reforms our lives.*

*It enables us.....to reach out with courage and compassion .....’ Mercy Constitution 3*

“Who more than vulnerable children need our courage and compassion to speak out for them and to advocate on their behalf? Catherine did it in her day and handed on that legacy to us. Ten years ago, while in the UN listening to speakers paint a picture of child trafficking, the faces of my young nieces and nephews were very much in my awareness. As various speakers peeled back the layers of this hidden crime I felt a myriad of emotions – deep gratitude that my relations were safe and protected; horror that children their age were being exploited and a huge awakening as I heard the passion of those who were advocating against child

trafficking. A door opened into a world which highlighted this heinous crime and I could not close my eyes to this reality. Mary and I returned to Dublin and the seed called “MECPATHS” was planted.

As I reflect on the last ten years, I feel deep gratitude for Mercy’s response; CLT for establishing and funding the project; the passion of the sisters in the early days who knocked on hotel doors across Ireland introducing MECPATHS’; Provincial Teams for making the work known among the Sisters. The project has been blessed by the vision, energy, passion, commitment and dedication of the staff who through networking and collaboration continue to knock on educational doors, statutory bodies, and all areas of the hospitality sector tirelessly educating and advocating on child trafficking. The ripples of influence have expanded in ever widening circles.

As I look forward, I carry a confident hope that future generations of hospitality staff, social workers, teachers, medical staff, airline staff, security personnel, statutory bodies to name a few, have been empowered to know the signs of child trafficking and report a suspicion. If the work of MECPATHS has made a difference in the life of one child, that one child has a future full of hope”. ***Sr. Patricia O’ Donovan Co-Founder MECPATHS***