

## Mercy Global Concern

**Bridging the Gap Conference October 12<sup>th</sup> -24<sup>th</sup> 2008.**

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**Work: Communications Co-coordinator Northern Province  
Justice Commission Northern Province  
Inter Church facilitator East Belfast  
Pastoral Council vice chair St.Mary's Greencastle Co. Antrim  
Liturgist and Director of Music as above**

**Working with adults as part of the Parish setting, as well as the Inter Church Group.**

**The experience will be used at various levels. Firstly I will be able to share with the sisters here in the Belfast Cluster Area.**

**I can use material received with the other groups that I am involved with at specific times of the year and as events unfold e.g. the current crisis in the Congo etc.**

**Planning Advent and Christmas Liturgies there is always space for the highlighting of the plight of people throughout the world. We have a direct link with a priest in India where recently there has been attacks on Christians.**

**My participation has:**

- 1. My participation has given me new ideas to try here in Belfast.**
- 2. Certainly has revitalized and renewed my enthusiasm to continue my work.**
- 3. Yes I plan to keep in touch with my colleagues from the seminar.**
- 4. Stimulated my interest in international affairs.**
- 5. Given me a broader perspective for my work**
- 6. Provided me with useful contacts**
- 7. Provided me with a community of support.**
- 8. Empowered me to make a difference on my return**

**To all the above I answer YES!!**

**My participation has  
Increased my understanding of**

**1 The work of the Sisters of Mercy**

**2 The United Nations**

**Again I most certainly state YES!!**

## **Overview of my experience at the Mercy Global Concern Conference**

**Travelling from Belfast Northern Ireland to the mighty city of New York was a challenge in itself. To go to the United Nations was indeed the unique experience. A SPECIAL PRIVILEGE, a once in a lifetime opportunity to be in touch with all the Nations of the world on the one campus.**

**Our days were filled with expert presentations on topics which were interrelated under the auspices of Mercy Global Concern and the organizational skills of Sr. Deirdre Mullan who is our Mercy representative at the U.N.**

**After initial introductions and an update on the role and purpose of the Mercy International Association:**

**The scene was set for us by the Presentations of Adele Howard and Anne Walshe from Fraynetwork Multimedia Australia, when we were challenged to Interact and expand our Horizons, and in doing so be Mercy in Partnership throughout the world. The term PARTNERSHIP became the buzz word for the whole conference. As we moved through various inputs from theory to action, it was all in solidarity and very much WITH those in need.**

**The highlights for me were:**

- 1) To have been present in the U.N. Conference Hall on 17<sup>th</sup> October when Sr. Senolita from Tonga spoke of her role as a Sister of Mercy and also as a representative of Caritas International. Present were 1800 invited guests from all nations, people like ourselves striving to ease pain and suffering in our world. This was a 'KAIROS MOMENT', a time to stand up and be counted. I truly felt part of this great coming together. The challenge is to live out locally, but with the knowledge and awareness that others are in 'solidarity', be it Australia, America, England, Kenya, Zambia, South Africa, Jamaica, Philippines, New Zealand, Tonga, or Wales; in other words with the twenty –five strong group of Mercy Sisters who were part of the Conference.**
- 2. There were opportunities for discussion / questions and also reflection. My reflection centred round the query 'Why did I go to the U.N.?' The answer loud and clear is to be renewed in spirit-to be challenged and stimulated in a way that was real. To see Mercy in action by visiting the Mercy Centre in the Bronx and also Mercy Haven Long Island. The care and concern, foresight and planning was evident for all to see. The unique hospitality special to Mercy re –affirmed all that is good. Our group left with grateful hearts and a sense of 'pride', in Mercy in Action.**

**One of the key quotes from the conference has been:**

**‘Statistics are numbers with the tears washed of them’.**

**These words reverberate through the whole experience. We had many words and lots of statistics to ponder. The challenge is to remember that it is ‘people’, that are being talked about. There can be something impersonal about facts and figures, but when we hear the story of what can happen in a ‘person’s, life it makes all the difference.**

**Our days were filled to capacity with a variety of great speakers who wanted to project and enthuse us with their particular aspect on the theme of ‘Bridging the Gap’. At times this was overwhelming and we were saturated with words and ideas. It might be helpful to look again especially at the programme for the last full day Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> October. All topics were so important it is difficult to prioritise. My suggestion would be to have had further discussion with Sr. Carol Rittner on the topic ‘Violence against Women’. Her dynamic presentation made a great impact on many of us.**

**The ‘All Africa Sister to Sister Project’ could be scheduled earlier in the conference. This would give Sr. Denise Coughlan more time to share her story re Cambodia.**

**I realize that there has been a lot of time spent preparing the schedule for each day but maybe fewer presenters but a chance for deeper sharing might be better especially when we get to late afternoons.**

**Another suggestion I would like to make is that more time be spent in the United Nations complex meeting delegates and observing the workings of the Sessions. We did have a good experience as already mentioned, but for most of us this is the only time we would be in attendance and I think it would be greatly appreciated.**

**Please accept my sincere thanks to everyone involved in the Conference. The speakers, facilitators, ‘the weaver’, Sr. Eileen Glennon O.P. who gave a summary of each day events. Special thanks to Sr. Deirdre whose energy and skill kept the entire event moving. Thank you as well to Cathy Solano our Intern from Australia, whose friendly presence and guidance helped make our getting about easy and hassle free.**

**Finally Thank you to all those who helped Fund the Conference. God Bless you and keep you. As we say in Ireland ‘May the road rise to meet you’.**

**May our sense of Mercy at an International Level grow ever deeper. May our awareness of the challenge of our times and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, be foremost as we move towards Advent and the coming of the Prince of Peace.**

**Veronica O'Brien Belfast N. Ireland 6<sup>th</sup> November 2008**