

A close-up photograph of a purple flower, likely a tulip, with vibrant yellow stamens and a central pistil. The petals are a deep purple with visible veins. The background is dark, making the flower stand out.

Chapter Eight

Justice Desk

"The Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love: yes, cosmic because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world. The Eucharist joins Heaven and Earth. It embraces and penetrates all creation."

Laudato Si' 236

Justice Desk

After the Mercy Congregation was re-configured in 1994, justice was recognised as a major issue. A Mercy Inter-Congregational Conference took place in 1996 in our founding house in Baggot Street, Dublin. This led to the establishment of a Congregational Justice Desk and the appointment of a full-time sister (Suzanne Ryder) in the role of Coordinator. Soon afterwards, the Western Province set up a Provincial Justice Desk with a sister appointed full time to the office, to support this vital area.

This office has continued since then. The task is to research justice issues, to keep the sisters informed, to liaise with other agencies and to involve the Province in campaigning and promoting different issues as they arise. Some of the issues were Debt Forgiveness, Fairtrade, GMO, with particular reference to the Transnational Company, Monsanto. May Lynam was the first sister in this role. She visited every community to show the sisters Fairtrade produce, washing powders, cleaning agents and products which are least harmful to the environment. She also showed the communities how to recycle. She visited every county council in the west and encouraged them to provide recycling depots. This campaign was very successful and she was instrumental in advancing council policy with regard to recycling. Nora Burke is the present sister working at the justice desk and the following is her reflection on what it involves:

As Mercy Justice Coordinator in the Western Province since 2007, I have experienced a significant change in our approach to this ministry. This is mainly because of the increasing awareness of the interconnectedness of the natural world, the cosmos, the earth and humanity. It is a known fact that whatever we do is not an isolated incident but somehow has implications for all other aspects of life and living. While we always knew this, it has never been more relevant than today where we see the destruction that has happened. Today we cannot afford to do nothing. With this awareness comes new efforts in the ministry of justice to move from a task-oriented strategic plan that set out what we had to do over a set period of time on set topics. Now there has been an evolution of consciousness-raising themes aimed at moving with current ecological thinking and wisdom, in the hope of helping to repair some environmental damage and prevent more destruction.

Justice today is more about taking on a 'Guide to Sustainable Living' and monitoring our own living standards as being personally responsible for the care of our planet. So there is no one to tell us what to do, all a coordinator can do is invite and lead by example. This approach relieves some of the suffering we cause through our

lifestyles to our sisters and brothers in the Southern Hemisphere. Our carbon emissions affect the climate of developing countries, which are least responsible for environmental degradation.

We have also worked unceasingly to get the Province to become Fairtrade conscious and again this is an invitation. Through our liaising with Fairtrade Ireland many of our schools and towns support getting a living wage for farmers in the developing world, thus encouraging them to live sustainably and with dignity rather than through hand-outs.

Through our involvement with Vita and Touch Ireland we are empowering communities in the Global South where people are helped through education, social development, sustainable living and infrastructural improvement.

At local level we endeavour to lead by example reaching out to support refugees, always with a mind to helping them integrate and become self-sufficient. This is not always easy but is a challenge for us and for the local communities where we live.

The trafficking of people has become a problem in many of our local areas and again we, through a dedicated team, in the Western Province, have alerted many towns and areas of the crimes involved. By bringing a theatre group to towns we have raised awareness that such crimes are real and need to be confronted by the right agencies.

Mineral extraction and fracking are other issues adopted by the Western Province as concerns and we have linked in with agencies such as Lovely Leitrim to lobby and demonstrate our stance on such destructive methods.

Nora Burke



L-R: Cathaoirleach Seán McDermott, Alex Flores, Nora Burke, Chamber President Gerry Faughnan, Executive Director FTI Peter Gaynor.



Nora Burke has one hand on the main banner, as the town of Carrick-on-Shannon is in solidarity.



Fairtrade stand in Carrick-on-Shannon.



Nora Burke is seen above alongside Mary Finean, with a telling poster.



Once again, Nora Burke has the support of the people of Carrick-on-Shannon.



Mary Doherty adds to the scene with Mary Finean.