(**Image: (L)** The Justice Day Gathering in Mt. St. Anne's, and Sr. Mary Hanrahan **(right)** makes a presentation to Sr. Ann Marie Quinn in recognition of her contribution and that of the IPA Team, to our Global Justice focus).

A profound sense of presence & practice

Province Justice Day 2023

The format of the day

Our annual Justice Day organised by the Justice and Friends of Nano Commission* has become a regular and important opportunity to share our work for Justice as well as being brought up to date on current issues, and discovering ways of enriching our practice. This year's Justice Day took place in October 2023, in Mount St. Anne's Retreat and Conference Centre. From the outset a reflection given by Sr. Lillie O'Reilly set the tone for a rich day of sharing on so many levels.

Dr. Niamh Brennan through her presentation *"A spirituality of presence to a Universe that is sacred"* led us in to a deeper sense of realisation of *'presence'* in the cosmos. Srs. Mary Hanrahan (Provincial Leader, NEP) and Eileen Nash (our delegate at the International Presentation Assembly (IPA), with Brian O'Toole (Director of the Inter-provincial Justice Desk) updated everyone on the proceedings of the 8th IPA Assembly which took place in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador from the 18th to 24th June 2023. This session closed with a presentation by Sr. Mary Hanrahan (Provincial Leader, NEP) to Sr. Ann Marie Quinn, Executive Director of the IPA in recognition of her work, and that of the IPA Team in bringing to fruition a reinvigorated and newly focused IPA, that will support our work for Global Justice until the next Assembly.

Closer to home, Srs. Margaret Mary Healy and Evelyn Byrne outlined the vision & practice of the Challenge to Change (C2C) Programme which is informed by the Presentation charism and ethos. Justice, human rights, sustainability and promoting right relationships are central to the work. C2C has been in existence since 2002 enabling students to understand how their local actions can have a global impact. In the final session of the day, Brian O'Toole shared the current work and focus of the Inter-provincial Presentation Justice Desk.

*__Members of the Justice Commission are:__ Ms. Carmel McHugh, Sr. Concepta O'Brien, Sr. Eileen Nash, Sr. Helen Lenehan, Sr. Lillie O'Reilly and Mr. Pat Breslin.

A spirituality of presence

(A brief insight from Niamh's presentation)

13.8 billion years ago our Universe began as a single point, the size of a pinprick. Which means quite simply that the origin of all things came from One Source. But it didn't just happen overnight. It required a journey - a 13.8 billion year journey! Within that journey Earth came into existence 4.5 billion years ago, so for two thirds of the existence of the Universe, there was no Earth! *"When we talk about the spirituality of Earth, we are referring to a quality of Earth itself, not a human quality but something that the human responds to". (*Thomas Berry, The Sacred Universe).

Science teaches us that everything that ever was and that will ever be, was contained in that fireball which burst into existence so splendidly and so mysteriously some 13.8 billion years ago. The origin of all things from one source.

What this tells us is that the creation of the Universe is a seamless event – nothing can be suddenly dropped into the world from outside of it but rather everything that is here now, comes out of this source.

What it also points out is that we, as humans, form a single community with all of Earth. There is no discontinuity, no separation between the human and the rest of life.

The additional point Niamh made is that, because the Universe is a seamless event from One origin point, it is also a physical and a spiritual reality from its beginnings. And this includes Earth, where we have our most immediate experience.

There is an intrinsic spiritual quality to Earth. Humans are in deep communion with the Universe and Earth processes whether we are aware of it or not. Our most immediate task when we wish for an ecological spirituality is to enter into this new sense/understanding of Earth.

Thomas Berry says that the human being activates the most profound dimension of the Universe in that we are the Universe's capacity to reflect back on itself in conscious self-awareness.

Degradation of natural world

When we talk about a spirituality of Earth, we talk about entering into a spirituality that is already present, that is part of what holds the world together, not something that only pertains to the human. In Laudato Si' Pope Francis quotes Pope Benedict who says this: *"The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast". (LS,*152)

For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. Pope Benedict makes the link between our external environment and what goes on inside us. And this is something that Thomas Berry has been saying for over thirty years. Pope Francis points out how our own spiritual deserts have resulted in the degradation of the natural world.

Our spirituality is not separate to the processes that brought life forth. In fact, our spirituality is shaped by the same processes that brought the world and this Universe into being. Not just our spirituality, but our humanity and our consciousness. But now, it is the quality or the

(**Image:** Dr. Niamh Brennan speaking at the Justice Day in Mt. St. Anne's).

depth of our inner life that is shaping our environment.

This new world of automobiles, highways, parking lots, shopping malls, power stations, nuclear-weapons plants, factory farms, chemical plants: this new world of hundred storey buildings, endless traffic, turbulent populations, mega-cities, decaying apartments, has become an affliction perhaps greater than the more natural human condition it seeks to replace.

We live in a chemically saturated world. It is not a life-giving situation. If not deadly it is degraded. Humans now live amid limitless junk beyond any known capacity for creative use. Our vision is impaired by the pollution in the atmosphere. We no longer see the stars with the clarity that once existed. ('The Universe Story', Thomas Berry p249). Such a chemically saturated world, an artificial 'wonder world' has come at the cost of the rainforests, the oceans, the air, the other species. This diminishment of the natural world, the reduction of its abundance & diversity consequently leads to a diminishment in the human experience and eventually, the human self.

For Thomas Berry the natural world is the primary revelation of the divine. When we degrade the natural world, we degrade the various ways by which the divine is revealed and the various ways in which the divine communicates. We silence a divine voice.

[A brief synopsis of the presentation by Dr. Niamh Brennan, NE Province Justice Day 2023].

Dr. Niamh Brennan is a writer and educator. Her research focuses on the ecological crisis & raising concerns about the future of all life, underscoring the role philosophy and spirituality play in ecological thinking.

'Just Ways'

(**Image:** Sisters Margaret Mary Healy and Evelyn Byrne preparing for their Challenge to Change presentation at the NEP Justice Day, Oct 2023).

(Image: An imaginative 'rapp' created by a Dublin school to alert all to carbon emissions associated with transport, made its way to the UN High Level Political Forum in July 2022, with video live-streamed worldwide, and narration by Brian O'Toole (Interprovincial Justice Desk). The image is of the protagonists.

Challenge to Change

'Doing what it says on the tin'

Raising awareness is a key element of each Challenge to Change project. Often the topics chosen for a project can be complex, difficult and often confronting e.g. child soldiers or human trafficking, but this doesn't deter the students from researching, caring and working to raise the profile and awareness of topics that perhaps we mightn't like to hear about.

Towards the end of the school year, all participating schools are invited to send representatives who will speak to their projects at special seminars that celebrate the achievements of all. This is when the C2C Project really comes to life. There is renewed energy and student creators are eager to explain their learning. They want to tell the best parts, the worst parts and the fun parts. They want to show their piece of work. But more than everything what stands out is their enthusiasm, their passion for their chosen subject, their authoritative explanations and their confidence and willingness to share alongside their ability to stand over their work. Students through their projects, have taken active, competent steps to make a positive difference.

"Challenge to Change is about doing. It is about learning by doing. It is about valuing all. It is about rearing young advocates and about integration of speaking and thinking, that puts the person and their dignity at the centre. It is about being moved by the heart as it taps into a curiosity, and promotes teamwork where participation and affirmation are the prizes".

Challenge to Change Workshop Dates 2024

April 2024 Tues. 23rd	Lyrath Hotel, Kilkenny
May 2024 Wed. 1st	Tullamore Court Hotel

"Students choose projects that relate to People, Planet, Partnership, Peace and Prosperity – the 5 P's of the SDGs".

'Just Ways'

(Images: L. Courtesy of Talitha Kum website).

Walking in dignity together

Combating the reality of human trafficking

RENATE Co-President, Ivonne van de Kar, was Key Speaker at The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) Conference on *"The role of Churches & faith-based organisations in fighting trafficking in Human Beings: Catholic initiatives."*

The conference was co-organised by COMECE and the Santa Marta Group, an anti-trafficking charity launched in 2014 to act as a catalyst for law enforcement, civil society and the Church to work together to combat this global crime. The Group is supported by Pope Francis, who described human trafficking as *"an open wound on the body of contemporary society; a crime against humanity."*

The conference hosted by Spanish MEP Juan Ignacio Zoido Álvarez, was held in the European Parliament in Brussels on 14th February, as an opportunity to celebrate the networking & collaboration which strengthen a common mission to combat human trafficking and exploitation. COMECE is engaged in advocating with the institutions of the EU for policies that address the scourge of human trafficking, supporting victims, and holding perpetrators accountable. In this context, we invite you to read the **latest contribution on the topic**.

Some of the facts

Nearly half of the victims of trafficking within the EU are EU citizens, and a significant number of them are trafficked within their own Member State. EU and non-EU victims are also trafficked from their country of origin via transit countries to their destination, both within and to the European Union. The EU Anti-Trafficking Directive has been the backbone of the EU's efforts in combatting human trafficking since 2011.

The Commission progress reports & the results of the EU-wide data collections demonstrate that trafficking in human beings has further evolved and the available means are not sufficient to fight it effectively.

According to the latest available data, between 2017 and 2018, there were more than 14,000 registered victims within the EU. The actual number is likely to be significantly higher as many victims remain undetected. The Commission acknowledged in the EU Strategy on combatting trafficking in human beings 2021- 2025 adopted on 14 April 2021, that various reports indicate that the decade old Directive may not be entirely fit for purpose any longer. As a result, the Strategy sets out as a key action to evaluate the implementation of the Anti-trafficking Directive and if necessary, based on the outcome of this, propose revising it to make it fit for purpose, including assessing the possibility of having minimum EU rules that criminalise the use of exploited services from victims of trafficking.

The 'Walking in Dignity' App

Talitha Kum has just launched an App, which invites individuals to walk on a journey towards awareness of human trafficking and its prevention. The App is designed to teach, engage & care about the people facing human trafficking and to care for, heal, and empower survivors. See link below for all details.

Talita Kum Talita Kum launch 'Walking in Dignity App' **APT Ireland:** https://www.aptireland.org/

Other Key Note Speakers at COMECE:
Rev. William Kenney CP, Auxiliary Bishop Em. of Birmingham, member of the Int. Affairs Group of the Catholic Bishops' Conf. of England & Wales, & member of the S. Marta Group; H.E. Mgr. Noel Treanor, Apostolic Nuncio to the European Union; Kevin Hyland, Strategic Director of the S. Marta Group; Fr. Patrick Gillard OP, Founder of SAWA, Belgium, and José Luis Bazán, COMECE Adviser on Migration, Asylum and Freedom of Religion outside the European Union.

(The Interprovincial Presentation Justice Desk for Ireland & England engages with the work of RENATE with Brian O'Toole from the Desk: **RENATE—Europe: HERE The Catholic Church in EU: https://www.comece.eu/** *).*

(**Image:** An official photograph of all present at the 8th IPA Assembly in St. John's Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. (Courtesy of IPA Website)

Hearing the 'God' of the Universe

The eighth Assembly of the International Presentation Association held in St John's, Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada, from June 18- 24, 2023, is now a graced memory for all who were blessed to be delegates (sixty-five persons). Presentation people passionate about contributing to strengthening the global effort to speak and act collaboratively for justice through the lens of the charism of Nano Nagle, gathered in St John's during these days. Presentation Sisters first came to this eastern most point of North America in 1833 echoing the 'lived' theme of the 2023 Assembly: **'Listen! God of the Universe beckons.'**

God beckons us today

The story of the four Sisters who bravely left Ireland 190 years ago to fulfil Nano's dream of gladly going anywhere to be of service to the Gospel, reminded Assembly participants that listening to God's call is at the root of the Presentation charism.

From the opening ritual, participants were invited into conversation with the Creator and all creation, in song and contemplative listening and through large and small group dialogue.

On the first full day of the Assembly, Dr. Jessie Rogers, scripture scholar and Dean of Theology at St. Patrick's Pontifical University in Maynooth, Ireland, guided the sacred conversations by offering insights into experiencing God as community, relationship and love. The contemplative day was framed with the question: *'How does our work and our way of being, promote love?'*

Following Dr Jessie's contemplative offerings, the Assembly facilitators, Dr. Judith King and Sr. Anne Lane, PBVM, began guiding the group toward fulfilling the purpose of assembly: reviewing the IPA's justice work, discerning new commitments and decisions on governance and structural issues required to better facilitate the IPA mission into the future.

To this end, the core focus of the following days was in reviewing and celebrating what had been accomplished since the last IPA Assembly in Sydney, Australia in 2017. The gathering was also enriched by the presentation of a play, 'Path through the Dark'.* The play offered a dramatisation of that period in Nano's life when she lived under the constraints of Penal Law, and still was able to respond to God's call to act on behalf of the poor

*This breathtaking one-woman show performed by Judi Chalmers was enhanced with music & song by Annette Buckley.

Hunger for Justice

At the invitation of the planning team, Sr. Joyce Meyer was asked to offer an inspirational message to spur transformational thinking for the justice agenda going in the future. Joyce spoke about the 'four hungers' saying:

"Hunger is a word that has caught me and led me into four of its dimensions: Human Hunger, Earth's Hunger for restoration and relationship, Hunger for Voice, and Hunger for Heart Intelligence".

Joyce elaborated on these four dimensions, explaining that the *fourth hunger* is that of our own hearts, also longing to be recognised and heard.

(**Image:** IPA Justice Contacts present at the IPA Assembly 2023. (Courtesy of IPA Website).

Today we idolise brain power and yet, according to current neuroscience research, the heart has a 5,000 times wider electro-magnetic field than does the brain. In other words, our hearts take in 5,000 times more information from our surroundings than the brain. She proffered—we need heart education.

Heart energy besides positive emotions includes intuitions, and feelings we push aside that make us uncomfortable, the hunches that come to us out of the blue that we ignore and later often regret. Using heart intelligence determines the kind of presence we bring to any situation or issue.

"For us, as Presentation People, our practices of contemplative prayer help us integrate these heart energies but they are also needed for our action". (Joyce Meyer, PBVM)

Significant issues for the decade ahead

Identifying significant issues now and for the decade ahead: Joyce shared that for her, they are the Four Hungers:

The hunger of families whose land no longer feeds them, families fleeing from conflict, natural disasters and economic shocks;

Hunger of our earth to be restored and related to;

Hunger of women, children & indigenous people to be listened to, to have voice in addressing the issues that impact them; and the Hunger of our own hearts to be deeply listened to in prayer, decision-making, and action while always asking these three questions:

1.What wants to happen in this situation?

2. What energies are needed for leadership and stewardship in this situation? and

3. What is the call to the next step to assist its evolution into the future?

As IPA, we can ask these same questions of ourselves alongside that of discerning:

What is the vision of IPA and its strong commitment to justice that is trying to emerge and lead us into the future?

It is not possible in this brief article to share the rich detail of the reports compiled after the Assembly. Perhaps some quotations taken from these reports, viewed alongside the images will give a sense of the inspired life of this Assembly and its outcomes. (**See** IPA Website **HERE**).

Living, listening and discerning together

Some quotations

From the Welcome & Opening Address by Julie Watson, PBVM Congregational Leader:

"We are here this evening because of the seeds planted by the women who gathered at a Congregational Leaders Meeting in Rome in 1981. Between 1981 and 1988 the seed continued to be nurtured, and in 1988 a new form of global interconnectedness was born in the IPA.

As Congregations we are united by the vision of one courageous woman Nano Nagle, who 250 years ago risked her own life and the lives of her family to step out and challenge the injustices of her time, enshrined in the Penal Laws in Ireland.

We also remember another woman, Mary Anne Collins one of Nano's companions who in the face of great challenges and poverty continued to hold the fragile Congregation for those immediate years after Nano's death. Without her tenacity and courage the work that Nano began would not have continued. As Sr. Mary O'Brien said recently as she reflected on Mary Anne Collins:

'Our origins are in fragility, and weakness and limitation', yet that did not prevent Nano and her companions from attending to the needs of the downtrodden and voiceless, and holding the flame of justice in a time of blatant injustice, not much different to our present times. Nano's spirit and vision continues to unite us all here at this time and invites us to embrace our reality in the context of the world that we are living in - a time of serious global challenges and uncertainties – a time that demands our creativity, great trust in God and deep faith – a time to dream the impossible … as possible".

Hearing the 'God' of the Universe …/

Dr. Jessie Rogers (who was a 'Guide to God's Beckoning' at the 8th Assembly) had also been invited to remain for a second day as delegates began their deep deliberations. She was asked to listen to what she heard was emerging 'between the lines and underneath the conversations'. The following is but one quotation from this feedback.

"I can hear you have a strong and clear sense of mission and that it is deepening and expanding. I was struck by the expression *'those kept poor'* which so powerfully highlights systemic injustice and shifts the whole paradigm from *'service to the poor'.* Yes, I can hear that there is a challenge to develop and change the structures to meet the new context and shifting realities, and honour that strong mission. (John 10:10)* which just kept coming up. It so perfectly names how the Presentation Family are called to be and become the presence of Jesus in the world today.

Your diversity is a gift not a problem, and do not let your identity be too narrow. As you become more visibly international, work hard on including everyone, particularly listening to those who do not have a voice of privilege.

Finally, it is clear your question at this 8th Assembly is not: *"Do we have a future?"* But rather: *"What kind of future is God beckoning us towards?"*

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full".

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From the IPA Directors Report 2018 to 2023. (Directors: Gabrielle Morgan PBVM Joy Peterson PBVM and Sharon Fagan PBVM).

"Amidst the challenges we are being called to find within the silence of our hearts, an openness to listen to the God of the Universe beckoning us to deepen our commitment to live a spirituality of being in Communion, so that we may live in unity with all of creation and promote a world that is just for all. As women and men of hope we are being invited to engage in a journey of transformation that involves deeper contemplation where we can learn to co-operate with grace and participate more fully in the ongoing story of creation. May we follow the light as did Nano".

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Dr. Despoina Afroditi Milaki IPA NGO Representative at the UN.

"We are all guided by the charism of the Venerable Nano Nagle and by our IPA values & mission to help the vulnerable, the impoverished and those in need. On my end, as the IPA NGO Representative at the UN, I would like to ask you to keep working together in different ways to promote YOUR work to UN level & to deepen the sense of interconnectedness and oneness that we uniquely experience as a big IPA family".

[**Note:** Dr Despoina Afroditi Milaki has taken up the important role of the Chair of the 2024 Civil Society Forum. Through this role the IPA can multiply its capacity for influence].

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Lancia Rodrigues, PBVM Spirituality & Charism Animator at IPA.

" the theme of this 2023 IPA Assembly is, *'Listen, God of the Universe beckons'*, deepens and widens the trust-ful scope in accepting God's presence to stretch our hearts and perspectives for God's life and mission, now. It also attunes us to the Synod inviting us to soulful listening, dialogue and discerning encounters for communion.

My hope is that IPA spirituality, both personally and in common, listens to the present reality of wars, climate disasters and abusive relationships by containing vulnerability like Jesus did with His heart's ears and eyes leaning to God who can create through us new possibilities. May we just choose to keep a space for love amidst everything, like we heard how the pioneering sisters to Newfoundland did when they stepped here".

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Anne Marie Quinn, PBVM, Executive Director, (IPA) in her Report:

"Nano's time was a time of darkness, a time where the people of Ireland were powerless & voiceless. Today our world is broken by the Cry of Earth & the Cry of the Poor. Our World is crying out for the light of Transformative Justice. It calls all of us committed to the work of Justice to live from a contemplative space, like Nano did in her time". "I would like to take this opportunity to express a few words of gratitude. Once again to express my thanks for the opportunity to serve IPA in the position of its inaugural Executive Director over the past 5 years. It is not a position I would have imagined I would have been in when I attended the 7th Assembly, but God works in mysterious ways".

Image: The Newfoundland & Labrador Leadership Team with the Honourable Judy Foote, Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland & Labrador (ctr), together with Srs. Sharon Fagan (IPA Director) (2nd Left) and Miriam Martin (IPA Assembly Liturgist) (2nd Right), at the 8th IPA Assembly.

8th IPA Assembly Outcomes

The Trustees of the IPA decided to create a new organisational structure for the Association that will facilitate a more sustainable organisation for the future and will put structure on a more collaborative system between Presentation Sisters and partners in Justice work.

The Vision of IPA

A world in which the oneness and sacredness of life is honoured. *"Love one another as you have hitherto done" ~ Venerable. Nano Nagle.*

Mission of the IPA

To speak and act in partnership with others for global justice, from a contemplative stance, in a spirit of oneness with the whole of creation. "*Spend yourselves for the poor" ~ Venerable Nano Nagle.*

Our Call to Action

The International Presentation Association believes in and respects the dignity of all. In our advocacy we will honour and advance the rights of women and children, indigenous and tribal people, and our Planet Earth.

Images: Working sessions at the IPA Assembly 2023 (above).

From the 8th IPA Assembly Closing Address by Julie Watson PBVM – Congregational Leader.

"Our theme for the Assembly – Listen! God of the Universe beckons – has been the touchstone which invited us to be grounded in the God who calls us. To pay attention, to notice, to listen to God's call in the reality of our lives.

He came so that all may have life and have it to the full. When He saw the crowds, He was moved with compassion. He invites us to see and to act, to be moved with compassion, to be open to the other … This same invitation is the thread running through the life of Nano. … Nano's way of living was nourished by the Gospel. … Nano was moved with compassion to act against the injustices of her time … Now it is our turn to step up and be midwives of an unnamed future ... not just those of us gathered here at this Assembly but each one of us across the globe committed to the charism of Nano, and the call of Jesus to be His disciples, are called to live the values of justice and service in our communities and in our ministries".

Image: (R-L) Sr. Julie Watson, PBVM Congregational Leader, and Sr. Anne Marie Quinn with Judy Foote (ctr) Lt. Governor of Newfoundland & Labrador.