Introduction

I was asked by the Presentation Sisters in the Philippines to provide them with some input and reflections to assist them in making a Retreat on *Presentation Charism and Spirituality*. These are the copies of the notes I prepared for the Retreat and of the Reflection Sheets to be handed out after each presentation. The fourth presentation was to be a PowerPoint presentation on *Global Presentation Charism: Engagement in the Mission of God*. I have not included that session in this booklet as, since I was going to speak to the slides, there were no written notes to go with the PowerPoint presentation.

Unfortunately, I was unable in the end to go to the Philippines for the Retreat. I did, however, share these notes with the Sisters there. It was thought that perhaps these notes would also be of use to others in reflecting on Presentation Charism and Spirituality.

These are notes only, written to prepare myself to give the presentations. I would not have read these notes as lectures, but would have used them as a basis for each presentation. The retreat itself would have involved group interaction, PowerPoint presentations and prayers/rituals. The spirit of the group and their interactions with each other and with the material would have brought this material to life.

I am grateful to our Sisters in the Philippines for the invitation to present material on Presentation Charism and Spirituality. It challenged me to further reflect on our Presentation tradition which remains relevant and transformative after 225 years.

Marlette Black pbvm
Queensland
September 2009
PRESENTATION CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY—Session 1

Charism and Mission

**Let us give space**
To what has not yet
Been seen, to what is
Waiting for our hospitality.
Let us trust ourselves
Into the chaos out of which
The Spirit creates
Forms beyond our imagining.
Here, in the community
Of uncertainty, we may hear
The whisperings of the mystic,
Gaze in wonder at the artists' work.
Here is a time, and a space
To be present to what
Mother God struggles to birth: an
Invitation
To watch and wait with hope.

Anne Siddal

CHARISM

Like all charisms, the Presentation charism is a gift spread through the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the world.

Charism is the heart of the founder aglow at one period in history beating in on us in another day and age ...
Charism is tree, branch, flower, fruit.
An ever-changing, always rooted obsession
For the coming reign of God, where the reign of God is needed most,
One that develops from age to age
And then grows up in a new way in the next one.
Charism is a living passion for whatever dimension of the life of Christ ...
peace, truth, healing, mercy ... is missing now.
Here, in our time.
Where we are.

Joan Chittister

Charism is always at the service of mission.

MISSION

Mission can be described as an encounter with mystery in unexpected places and in unsuspected ways. Key terms in an older theology, in order of importance, were:
The emphasis was on the Church. The Church had a mission. That mission was also seen as increasing membership through Baptism in order to save souls. There was very little mention of the Kingdom of God because it was equated with Church. We know now, of course, that the Kingdom of God is a much wider concept than Church.

Key terms in theology since the Second Vatican Council (1960s) have been, in order of importance:

- Kingdom of God
- Mission
- Proclamation
- Church

Father Anthony Gittens says that Mission is a job description of God. Mission is God’s action. The Church doesn’t have a mission; God’s mission has a Church. The Presentation Sisters don’t have a mission; we are the Presentation face of God’s mission. Proclamation has to be about the mission of God, not about our mission.

As the Presentation face of God’s mission

our mission is about
  seeking out
  uncovering
  building on
  and celebrating
  God’s presence.

As the Presentation face of God’s mission

- our mission is a search for and a recognition of the presence and activities of the Holy Spirit among people and the cosmos
- our mission is about dialogue
- our mission is done out of our poverty
- our mission looks outward
- our mission is a witness to Christ while entering into dialogue with people of other faiths and unbelievers
- our mission calls us to conversion.

The goal of mission is to bear witness to and to proclaim God’s Kingdom within us, among us and in the whole community of life.

GOD’S KIN-DOM

Until recently the term “Kingdom of God” has been used to describe God’s transformative dream for the whole of creation. The Kingdom of God is central to Jesus’ ministry. Jesus spoke about and embodied this dream. When he spoke about it he used the phrase “the Kingdom of God”. Jesus lived in a Jewish culture where hopes for a saviour were expressed in political/military terms. The Jews hoped for a King like King David to overthrow their enemies and free them from oppression. Jesus did not talk about a political kingdom of this kind. Although he used the phrase “Kingdom of God” what he spoke of and embodied was a “kin-dom” of peace, justice and
relationships of love that drew people together into a new type of family or kinship group. Jesus expanded the idea of “Kingdom of God” into an inclusive partnership of universal love, justice and kinship. In recent years some scripture scholars and theologians, including many feminist theologians, have used the phrase “Kin-dom of God” as one that more accurately describes the mission of God as preached and embodied by Jesus. Moving away from the political and military overtones of the word “Kingdom”, the phrase “Kin-dom of God” becomes the context for relating to each person and to every living thing as kin or family. Daniel O’Leary says that when we look at life from the perspective of the Kin-dom of God, it is “a way of seeing that recognizes God’s face in every face, a God who comes to us disguised as life... This vision of God’s reign among us has increased our sensitivity to issues of justice everywhere, to the care of the Earth, to engage with the destruction and exploitation caused by human greed.”

Jesus described the Kin-dom of God in many of his parables. Sometimes he used the phrase “the Kingdom of Heaven”. For example:

The Kingdom of God is like a seed that sprouts and grows and we do not know how. (Mark 4:26-30)

The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that grows to be the greatest of all shrubs. (Mark 4:30-33)

The Kingdom of Heaven is like the landowner who pays all his labourers equally, no matter what time of the day they are hired. (Matthew 20:1-17)

The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast. (Luke 13:20,21)

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a banquet to which all are invited. No one is excluded. (Luke 14:7-25)

The only way we can miss out is if we exclude ourselves because we have other priorities or because we do not want to sit beside some of the others who have been invited.

One of the Gospel passages that describes what the Kin-dom of God is like is Luke 4:16-30. This passage has become particularly relevant for those of us who are inspired by the charism of Nano Nagle. It is a passage that illustrates very clearly the connection between Presentation charism and God’s mission – the Kin-dom of God.

Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of God is upon me,
Because God has anointed me
To preach good news to the poor.
God has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed,
To proclaim the acceptable year of God.”
And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” All spoke well of him and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me the proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself; what we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here also in your own country.’” And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and put him out of the city, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong. But passing through the midst of them he went away.

As we said before, the phrase “Kin-dom of God” becomes the context for relating to each person and to every living thing as kin or family. It is this relationship that makes a world of justice and love possible and desirable. In preaching God’s mission, Jesus brought good news to those who are poor and oppressed by unjust social structures, preaching a message of restoring right relationships that would make them kin with those who excluded them. This passage from Luke’s Gospel is about restoring right relationships so that all are kin to each other. Jesus describes the process that will make this possible.

1. A Process of Social Reversal
   - Those who are poor, the frail ones, the weak ones, the ones forced to beg, the bent-over ones, the ones who are blind, the ones who are deaf, the ones who are captives, the ones who are oppressed – have lives of bad news.
   - But things will be turned around.
   - There is hope for those who have no hope. There is the promise of belonging for those who are excluded.
   - That those who are poor is not their fault. Nor is it fate. They are poor through the injustice of oppressors and unjust social conditions.
   - The social conditions that cause poverty and oppression are condemned by Jesus.

2. A Process of Making Every Day an Acceptable Year of the Lord
   - Every seven years is a Sabbatical year; seven cycles of Sabbatical years is a Jubilee. The soil lies fallow; debts are cancelled; slaves are freed; money is redistributed.
   - Jesus’ s Acceptable Year of the Lord
     ♦ It is now – every year
     ♦ It is central to his proclamation of the Kin-dom of God
     ♦ It is a program for radical social change.

3. A Process of Including Those who are Excluded in God’s Favour?
   - No prophet is acceptable in his own country – Elijah, Elisha and Jesus. The prophets and Jesus shared deep levels of political awareness and they did not hesitate to challenge or condemn political, social and religious structures that were unjust and that oppressed those who were poor, weak and vulnerable.
• Elijah and Elisha and Jesus proclaim God’s favour to those who are outsiders.
• There is no necessary connection between worshipping and receiving God’s favour – the criteria is solidarity with those made poor and those unjustly treated.
• The first will be last and the last will be first.
• Jesus’ identification with those made poor and those oppressed was so strong and unambiguous that it led to his death.

This passage illustrates that God’s Kin-dom will only be realised with a process of radical social change which enables all to be kin, all to share equally at the banquet table. Nano Nagle’s dream was the same as that of Jesus – that all would have the same opportunities to be included and to participate fully in life, that all would be “kin” in the whole community of life.

Nano Nagle – the Face of God’s Mission to Those Made Poor

The South Presentation Annalist tells us “thus did she devote her person and her wealth to the gratuitous instruction of the poor and destitute little ones of the Lord.” As well as her work in the schools, Nano visited homeless and sick women in their homes, their garrets, their mud cabins bringing them her compassionate presence and whatever help she could and putting her life at risk as she trod the unlit alleyways of Cork at night by the light of a dim lantern. We cannot help but be reminded of Jesus’ story of the banquet to which all are invited as we read in the Annals of the first Christmas for Nano’s newly formed religious congregation. They invited 50 beggars – the poorest of the poor from Cork’s alleyways – to Christmas dinner and Nano herself waited on them and stood behind their chairs as they ate their Christmas meal. Nano, following in the footsteps of Jesus, engaged in the process of social reversal, bestowed favour upon those made poor and powerless and was a sign of hope that it was possible for all to be included as family in the Kin-dom of God. Not only did Nano, her first companions and our early Presentation foremothers preach the Kin-dom of God; they also embodied it in their own lives.

Again, we read in the Annals:

On entering their new abode they found it destitute of the most ordinary necessaries. Three beds and a few chairs was the extent of their furniture; neither these wants, however, nor the frightful gloom of their habitation (which was situated in a narrow lane and without even the smallest yard or garden) could daunt the courage or depress the spirits of our heroic missionaries. On the night of their arrival, a potato in which was stuck a candle, served the use of candlestick for two cells in the same dreary corridor. On the 21st of January our dear sisters opened their small and inconvenient schools into which were pressed a number of children amounting to nearly five hundred and these were truly poor.
(South Presentation Annals 1799)

So as we reflect on Presentation charism and spirituality, it is important to remember that charism is always at the service of mission, the mission is God’s and the mission of God is for the building up of the Kin-dom of God.

We all exist solely for this – to be the human place God has chosen for his presence, his manifestation, his epiphany.

Thomas Merton
Reflection Sheet 1

- **The Presentation Charism is a gift spread through the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the world.**
- **Charism is always at the service of mission.**
- **Mission is God’s action. The Church doesn’t have a mission; the mission of God has a Church. Presentation Sisters don’t have a mission; we are the Presentation face of the mission of God in the world.**
- **As the Presentation face of the mission of God our mission is about seeking out, uncovering, building on and celebrating God’s presence among people and within the cosmos.**
- **The goal of the mission of God is to bear witness to and to proclaim God’s Kin-dom within us, among us and in the whole community of life.**
- **The Kin-dom of God is the context for relating to each person and to every living thing as kin or family.**
- **God’s Kin-dom will only be realised through a process of radical social change which enables all to be kin, all to share equally at life’s banquet.**
- **Nano Nagle’s dream, like that of Jesus, was that all would be able to participate fully in the banquet of life and she engaged in a process of radical social change so that this could happen.**

Reflect on this picture of Piccadilly Lane, Cork. How does it speak to you of Nano as the face of the mission of God in her day?

When did you first hear about Nano Nagle? What kind of “face” or characteristics struck you about her? What is it in Nano Nagle that continues to attract you and inspire you?

Recall a situation where you have been the Presentation face of God’s mission in your ministry. Who was there? When did it happen? Where did it happen? How did you feel? How do you feel about that situation now?

- Ponder the text.
- What is a word or phrase that touches you?
- What would Jesus share with God after this experience?
- What does this incident tell you about Jesus?
- What does this incident tell you about the mission of God in the world today?

- Recall the story of Nano and her sisters and the Christmas dinner they provided for the 50 destitute people.
- Think about the story.
- What is it in the story that touches you?
- What would Nano share with God after this experience?
- What does this incident tell you about Nano and her early companions?
- What does this incident tell you about the mission of God in the world today?
A charism is a deep awareness of a gospel value or values linked to a special need in the world. The Gospel value or emphasis remains constant over the history of the group throughout history. The area of need also remains constant but the specific expressions of the need may change over time and place and culture.

A charism is a grace given primarily for the upbuilding of the Church and ultimately to bear witness to and to proclaim God's Kingdom within us, among us and in the whole community of life.

Sandra Schneiders (Finding The Treasure pp 285-288) discusses four aspects of charism:

1. Religious Life itself is a charism, a gift to the Church
2. Forms of Religious life can be distinguished as charisms (e.g. apostolic, monastic, ministerial)
3. The charism of the particular order or congregation
4. The charism of the individual call to religious life.

Our reflections on Presentation charism fall into her third category. We will reflect on the Presentation charism under the following headings:

- The distinctive characteristics of Nano Nagle's engagement in the Mission of God – the charism of the foundress
- The distinctive characteristics of the way Nano Nagle's companions and our early Presentation foremothers engaged in the Mission of God – the charism of the founding period
- The ongoing deep story of the Presentation charism in our own community (Part B)
- The ongoing deep story in global Presentation engagement in the mission of God (Part C)
- Some Biblical reflections underpinning Presentation charism (Part D)
- What is the Option for the Poor? – Scripture and Church Teaching (Part E)
The distinctive characteristics of Nano Nagle’s engagement in the Mission of God – the charism of the foundress

1. A Passion for Those Made Poor and for Changing the Social Structures That Kept Them Poor

What was Nano passionate about? When we look at her life, where did she commit her time, her energy, her love? Pius O’Farrell (p 85) says that “Nano had a tremendous sense of mission and purpose in life, specifically directed to the poor and the downtrodden”. There is no doubt that when we read the letters of Nano Nagle, the account of her work in the first Annals of South Presentation and her early biographers, the most distinctive characteristic of Nano’s engagement with the Mission of God was her passion for those made poor and for the most vulnerable members of society – a passion that was directed at changing the social structures that kept them poor and oppressed.

Poverty was part and parcel of Nano’s environment. This poverty was caused by political oppression and economic change in Ireland. Even though Nano’s work began as the Penal Laws were coming to an end, ninety percent of Irish people in Nano’s time were poor because of the imposition of the Penal Laws. These laws were passed because of Catholics’ loyalty to the Pope in Rome and alleged political disloyalty to England. In reality, their purpose was to keep Catholics in a position of social, political and economic inferiority. The Penal Laws forbade Irish Catholic landlords to increase the amount of land they held and they were forbidden to make profits of more than one third of the value of their land, thus preventing the growth in numbers and power of an Irish upper class. Catholic schools were illegal and no Catholic was supposed to teach in Ireland, thus keeping Irish people illiterate, inferior and subservient to their English overlords. Education was only available to Irish people if they were willing to renounce their faith. In reality their faith was the only source of identity, meaning and hope for the poor Irish populace at this time.

Walsh (p 7) quotes the Protestant Archbishop of Coyne, Dr Berkeley, who described the poverty and destitution in the Cork countryside (which would have applied to Ballygriffin) in these words:

*The house of an Irish peasant is the cave of poverty; within you see a pot and a little straw; without, a heap of children tumbling on a dung-hill. In every road the ragged ensigns of poverty are displayed; you often meet caravans of poor, whole families in a drove, without clothes to cover, or bread to feed them.*

There were rich and fashionable people in Cork because Cork was a port with a rich and growing trade. This trade also led to great poverty for the majority of the population. There were many sailors, travellers, soldiers, wanderers and criminals wandering through Cork causing havoc and lawlessness and all looking for a way to survive from day to day. Cork became a criminal centre for the whole of Ireland. The North Gate became the city gaol and the South Gate became the gaol for the whole of Ireland.

It was in this city of poverty, lawlessness and penal servitude that Nano engaged in God’s mission to the poorest and most disadvantaged of the city. Raphael Consedine pbvm (Fire on the Earth p 34) notes:

*The persons whom Nano knew herself called to serve were among the ‘least ones’ of Cork society. She had to choose to disregard the social barriers and attitudes of her times to assert their worth. To be ‘in the situation of a schoolmistress’ was lowly enough; to educate the very poor, and girls at that, was regarded by many at that time as a wasteful and harmful interference with the decrees of Providence.*

Like many of her social class, Nano grew up seeing this poverty around her. What was it that led her to carry the pictures of these poor people in her heart and to be so disturbed by them that she had to act?
Changing structures involves changing the structures of our own attitudes and hearts and the structures of the way other people think, as well as setting up alternative social structures. The late Margaret Kelly pbvm developed a sociological profile of Nano Nagle as a Prophet. In it she describes how, according to the German sociologist Max Weber, the prophet comes to birth in the experience of being called to mission. Implicit in the response to a prophetic call to mission is the notion of “breakthrough” signified in an attitudinal change on the part of the prophet. For Weber, this “breakthrough” or conversion is an internal reorientation born out of suffering or enthusiasm and leads toward a new orientation towards different problems and structures of ‘the world’.

We can say that Nano had three major experiences of metanoia that set her on the path of changing social structures that oppressed those made poor. The first is the experience of seeing her sister Anne selling a bolt of silk for the poor. We are told that this seemingly insignificant event was the catalyst that led Nano to devote the remainder of her life to those made poor. A second experience of metanoia was her experience of entering an enclosed religious order to pray for the people of Ireland after the deaths of her mother in 1748 and her sister, Ann, in 1749. Being haunted by the memories of the poor that she had seen when living with her brother David in Cork led her to change the way she saw the poverty of Ireland and her role in addressing it. The third experience of metanoia that Nano had was the insight that she needed to found her own religious order that would assume responsibility for continuing her own passionate response to those made poor by unjust structures.

Nano expressed her passion for those made poor and for changing the social and political structures that kept people poor by setting up schools to educate poor Catholic children. In 1754, at the age of 36, she opened her first cabin school in the face of “opposition from every side” as she herself described it (letter to Eleanor Fitzsimmons 1769). Nano began with about thirty children in a room that she had hired for them and with a mistress that she had hired to take care of them. In his biography of Nano Nagle, Bishop Coppinger records that she was absolutely terrified at the children’s wickedness. But Nano faced her fears because of her passion and wrote in a letter to Eleanor Fitzsimmons in 1769:

*I took in the children by degrees – not making a noise about it. In about nine months I had 200 children. When the Catholics saw what services I did, they begged that I would set up schools at the other end of town.*

By 1769 she had two schools for boys and five for girls. In setting up and maintaining her schools, Nano defied the Penal Laws, the structures specifically implemented to keep Ireland’s people poor and disempowered. By setting up and maintaining her schools, she was establishing new structures that would enable Irish children to grow in their knowledge of themselves, their inherent dignity and their rightful place in society, as well as in their faith. Her main concern with the growth of her schools was to ensure that they would continue to operate as schools dedicated to those made poor according to her own vision. This is what led her to successfully establish the Ursuline Order in Cork after much tedious negotiation and planning, some of which is recorded in her letters. At the age of 53 she thought she had set her schools on a firm footing. But within a short time Nano realised that to safeguard the works that expressed her passion for the poor she would have to found her own Society of Sisters. Bishop Moylan (Walsh p 89), reflecting on her decision writes:

*As the Ursulines embraced the education of the rich with the instruction of the poor, Miss Nagle perceived they could not possibly carry on her favourite object, the instruction of the poor, to the great extent of charity she could wish… The wants of the poor seemed to her to require a society of women who could consecrate themselves entirely to the instruction only of the poor.*

In this statement from one who knew her so well, we find expressed beautifully the primary passion of Nano Nagle, the distinctive characteristic of her engagement in the Mission of God and her desire that this be the distinctive characteristic of the way her Sisters would engage in the Mission of God.

As we know, education was not the only way in which Nano expressed her passion for those made poor and for
changing the structures that made and kept them poor. Raphael Consedine pbvm (Fire on the Earth p 47) describes the range of Nano’s concerns:

Who were the poor through whom the on-going call to conversion sounded in Nano’s heart and to whose service and evangelization she gave herself with so much insight, energy and practicality? They were, of course, the children of Cork’s poorest districts, but they were also the sick, lonely and aged whom she visited and tended in the public infirmaries and in their garrets, the prostitutes whom she was slandered for knowing and for whom she longed to build a refuge, the elderly women for whom she did build a home, the Irish exiles in the West Indies for whom she trained catechists, the adults to whom she gave religious instruction. They were those ‘disconsolate widows…forlorn orphans…reduced housekeepers…superannuated tradesmen, whose various afflictions she assuaged, whose tears she dried up, whose wants she so often satisfied’. In the last two cases, Coppinger’s outmoded language hides a telling reality: ‘reduced housekeepers’ were people who, from being able to ‘keep house’ were reduced to sudden poverty; ‘superannuated’ meant ‘worn down by years and infirmity’. That is to say, Nano’s poor were not all born poor.

Pius O’Farrell (p 86) refers to the works other than education carried out by Nano as “lantern work”. She says:

‘Lantern work’ was not a step to evangelisation but an early and essential part of evangelisation itself. Nano helped the sick and consoled the wretched. The essence of Nano’s social work was the caring process which fosters community. She added something – an indefinable warmth – to the social vision found in France. She added the heaven of deep compassion and joyful hospitality that reached its peak in her Christmas dinners.

Although often mentioned as a separate characteristic of the Presentation charism, hospitality is in reality an integral part of Nano’s commitment to those made poor and an expression of the quality of her relationship with them.

Nano’s biographer, Dr Coppinger (Walsh p 392), writes of the way in which Nano became criticized and looked down upon because of her passion for those made poor:

She has been bitterly cursed in our streets as a mere imposter; she has been charged with having squandered her money upon the building of houses for the sole purpose of getting a name, and with deceiving the world with her throng of beggars brats. Has it not even been said that her schools were a seminary of prostitution ...

(Dr Coppinger wrote the first biography of Nano Nagle in the form of an address to a group of philanthropists known as the Cork Amicable Society. The only known copy of the first edition, printed in 1794, 10 years after Nano’s death, is in the National Library of Ireland.)

That Nano continued to serve those made poor and find new ways to change the structures that oppressed them in the face of such criticism is strong evidence of the depth of her passion.

That a passion for those made poor and for changing the structures that kept people poor is the heart of Presentation charism is beautifully expressed in the report of her death in the Hibernian Chronicle Monday 26 April 1784:

Last Wednesday the indisposition of Miss Nagle was announced in the sorrowing countenances of the poor of this city to whom she was the best of benefactors and patronesses.

2. Zeal

Mary T O’Brien pbvm in her Retreat Paper for the Conference of Presentation Sisters retreat reflects on the word “zeal”:
Zeal is a strange word. To us it almost sounds archaic. Perhaps when we hear the word ‘zeal’ or the derivative ‘zealous’, or even ‘zealots’, we think of some type of extravagant or even erratic behaviour. Perhaps we even associate it with a touch of fanaticism… The zeal which Nano mentions ten times in her letters means fervour for a person or a cause, enthusiastic diligence (en- Theos) or ardour. I like the word ‘ardour’. It has fire in it. To be full of zeal for something or someone is to be all fired up, passionate and eager for a person or a cause. It is the very antonym of apathy.

Nano was not an apathetic person. She was all fired up in carrying out the many facets of her work. Another phrase she uses at least ten times in her letters is “all in my power”. Nano gives everything she does 100 percent because she is full of zeal for changing the way things are for those made and kept poor.

In her letters she uses the word “zeal” in expressing her admiration of others. Her brother and his wife are described as “zealous”. In a letter to Eleanor Fitzsimmons 29 April 1770 Nano writes: “I can’t too much admire your zeal...”. In talking about Dr Moylan in a letter to Eleanor Fitzsimmons she says “I always admired his zeal”. In another letter to Eleanor Fitzsimmons she describes Dr Moylan as having “such patience and zeal” (17 December 1770). This quality that she admired so much in others is one that characterised her own life. In her letter to Miss Fitzsimmons from Bath (20 July 1770) she says that it was with difficulty that she took time off to see her brothers because “it was so much against my inclination to leave my children, and only to serve the foundation I never should have prevailed upon myself”. Nano’s zeal gives her a wide vision as expressed in her words to Miss Fitzsimmons 11 July 1769:

... and my views are not for one object alone. If I could be of any service in saving souls in any part of the globe, I would willingly do all in my power.

She assures Teresa Mulally (21 August 1777) that “every assistance in our power we shall give towards having an establishment of this Society in the metropolis”. Her letters illustrate her zeal for establishing the Ursulines in Ireland and later for setting up her own Society of Sisters. The constant tedium of the business of overseeing building projects, the worry about finding suitable young women, the challenge of how those young women were to be trained and the constant worry about money were all managed because of her zeal for the Mission of God, especially as directed specifically to those made poor.

Nano knew the cost of such zeal, the cost of turning things upside down in the face of so much opposition and difficulty. She knew the personal cost. She wrote to Miss Fitzsimmons 17 July 1769:

... and in the beginning – being obliged to speak upwards of four hours and my chest not being as strong as it had been – I spat blood; which I took good care to conceal for fear of being prevented from instructing the poor.

There is a side panel on the left of the Nano Nagle icon showing a cross with pointed ends and below it a Tabernacle radiating light and Nano kneeling in prayer at the altar rails. “Doing all in her power” included spending up to four hours each morning before the Blessed Sacrament and as many in her cabin each evening. A letter from Eleanor Fitzsimmons to Teresa Mulally (Walsh p 389) tells us that she spent each Holy Thursday night in a vigil. And we know that on her deathbed it was found that her knees were badly ulcerated from kneeling constantly in prayer.

3. Courage

There is a panel in the Nano Nagle icon that describes the social and political reality of the society in which Nano engaged in the Mission of God. Each day she would have passed by the gallows of the South Gate Bridge where people were publicly hanged for crimes less serious than hers of setting up
schools to educate Catholics. This panel in the icon presents another reminder of the fate awaiting those who broke the Penal Laws – emigrant ships that took those who transgressed the Penal Laws to the other side of the world to live in permanent exile as convicts.

At night Nano would have crossed Cork’s North Gate Bridge to bring supplies to inmates of the crowded North Gaol. She guided herself by the light of a glimmering lantern. Cork’s unlighted canals and waterways had no guard rails. The paths were dark and slippery. An account from 1770 said: “if the traveller by night escapes drowning, he has not reason to complain”. It took great courage for Nano to go out into the night of darkness and lawlessness to carry out her “lantern works”. We know that this was a regular activity undertaken by Nano. Dr Coppinger (Walsh p 389) writes:

How often have we seen her passing with steady composure through the rigors of every season to tend her little flock. How often have we seen her, after a well spent day, returning through the darkness of the night, dripping with rain, mingled in the bustling crowd, moving thoughtfully along by the faint glimmer of a wretched lantern, withholding from herself the necessities of life to administer the comforts of it to others...

As well as the courage to face physical danger, Nano possessed the courage to put aside her own status and position to beg for her many works for those made poor when her own finances failed her. We are told that some of her friends offered to collect money for her but they did not collect as much as at first hoped for. So Nano took it upon herself to go begging. Tradition has it that she sat at the right hand side of the North Gate begging and her friends failed to recognise her.

And what courage does it take to start again at the age of 56, after twenty years of teaching, as the leader of a new Society of Sisters – the Sisters of Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart. We know that in this role there were many times where she was called upon to act with courage in the face of adversity. One of those occasions was when Dr Moylan objected to Nano’s construction of a new convent close to the Ursuline convent. He warned Nano that he would destroy her new structure and ordered her to rebuild it on the other side of Cork. Nano, it is recorded in the South Presentation Annals:

... mildly bowed beneath the pressure of Moylan’s displeasure, only saying that, if he was pleased to drive her thence, she would never pursue her intended object in Cork – but would retire to some other part of Ireland where she would meet with no opposition and more encouragement to affect her purposes on behalf of those she always carried in her heart – the poor.

In the face of such courage Dr Moylan capitulated and never spoke of the matter again.

4. Trust in Divine Providence

Over and over again in Nano’s letters she expresses her Trust in Divine Providence. This was her response to the seemingly unending challenges and difficulties that she faced in living her passionate dream to change the way things are for those made poor.

Where did Nano develop this great trust in Divine Providence? We know that one of Nano’s few spiritual reading books that has survived was written by Nicolas Barre (1621-1686) and was titled Lettres Spirituelles. A predominant theme in this book is total abandonment to God who can be absolutely trusted in all things.

We can assume, however, that Nano’s trust in Divine Providence grew out of her own life experience. Her decision to enter an enclosed religious order to pray for the people of Ireland was not the way. So she had to find another path. This path led her to engage in criminal pursuits on behalf of those made poor. She built and maintained schools, houses, projects. In order to safeguard her schools for the future she went to enormous lengths to establish the Ursulines in Ireland. When this didn’t meet her main object of educating those made poor, she began again by establishing her own Society of Sisters. Money ran out, people deserted her and through it all Nano maintained a deep faith in the All-powerful God who enabled her to do the most extraordinary things for the mission of God. The following extracts from her letters express her absolute trust in God’s Providence.
You see it has pleased the Almighty to make me succeed, when I had everything, as I may say, to fight against... I began in a poor, humble manner; and though it pleased the divine Will to give me severe trials in this foundation, yet it is to show that it is His work and has not been effected by any human means. (to Miss Fitzsimmons, 17 July 1769)

But the Almighty is sufficient and will soon make up this loss to us. (17 July 1769)

I can’t too much admire your zeal and great trust in the divine Providence which I always looked on as the most settled beginning any foundation of this kind could have. (to Miss Fitzsimmons, 29 April 1770)

Providence has ordered everything for the best in her regard to keep her for this place. (to Miss Fitzsimmons, 13 May 1770)

We must think the Almighty permits everything for the best. You’ll see with His assistance everything promises well. (to Miss Fitzsimmons, 13 May 1770)

I must say every disappointment we have had the Almighty has been pleased to make it turn out to our advantage; though my impatience very often made (me) not submit to His divine Will as I ought. (to Miss Fitzsimmons, 28 September 1770)

By degrees with the assistance of God we may do a great deal. (to Miss Fitzsimmons, 28 September 1770)

It’s all in the power of the Almighty; we don’t know what is best for us and so ought to be resigned to the divine Will. (to Miss Fitzsimmons, 17 December 1770)

The Almighty makes use of the weakest means to bring about His works. (to Miss Mulally, 29 September 1776)

We must leave it to the Almighty; He (will) do everything of the best in it, I hope. (to Miss Mulally, 16 December 1778)

I don’t approve of your desponding so much as I perceived in your last letter. Though (neither) you not I should not (sic) live to see it prosper in our time, yet I hope it may (prosper) hereafter and be of universal service to the kingdom. I comfort myself with this thought when I am most dejected at the many disappointments I have met with. (to Miss Mulally, 31 January 1783)

The distinctive characteristics of the way Nano Nagle’s companions and our early Presentation foremothers engaged in the Mission of God – the charism of the founding period

Nano’s early companions and the first Presentation sisters continued to exhibit the characteristics that made Nano’s way of engaging in the mission of God distinctively Presentation.

They continued their passion for those made poor. The focus of the lives of the early companions of Nano was recorded in the South Presentation Annals some thirteen years later:

Miss Nagle wished them to become the servants of the poor; and to be free to seek them out in their bowels of misery and want. For her there was not a garret in Cork which she did not visit and know – this was the road to be trodden by her congregation ...
After describing the “most uncommon act of hospitality” of inviting 50 beggars to Christmas dinner the Annalist states that “Since her death it has been carefully kept up in this Monastery, and it is to be faithfully adhered to while ever the Community shall have an existence.” This practice was adhered to until 1887.

The Annals also record:

It was her zeal for the salvation of souls, and her consciousness of the dangers which await the death bed of aged poverty that prompted her at this period, to erect an Almshouse near her Convent, where poor old women may spin out their last thread, and be assisted, when quitting this world. For this purpose, she took a house which she furnished, and sunk a sum of 200 pounds for their future comfort and support. Since her death, this Institution has been regularly kept up; and is placed under the superintendence of this Community, who are bound to administer every spiritual help, and to afford all the bodily comforts in their power, to its indigent and miserable inmates.

One story from the Annals illustrates well the way in which our Presentation foremothers exhibited all the characteristics of their foundress – love of those made poor, zeal, courage and trust in Divine Providence:

Many a time did morning dawn to disperse the gloom of a sleepless and comfortless night, spent by the kind-hearted, solicitous Superioress, Mother Angela Collins, without its presenting to her view one chance, one hope, that the day would not be passed in hunger and in want, by the laborious, uncomplaining sisterhood of whom she was the anxious provider, as well as, spiritual guide. While she lamented their exterior trials, their unmitigated poverty, she had much subject of consolation in witnessing their spirit of self-abnegation, and love of the Cross. They were truly great in their humility and lowliness. ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.’ (Matt v 3)

The result of this extreme destitution, necessarily should have been, a perfect overthrow of all Mother Nagle’s plans for the instruction of the poor; and the dispersion of the few members, who had been entrusted by her, with carrying out her noble and charitable designs, had not God interposed, and lent them a helping hand, at the very moment when they were reduced to the last extremity – How wonderful are the ways of God! How unlimited His goodness and His power!!! One day, that the distress was more than usually great, and not a prospect of relief by any human means, two of the Sisters, shedding abundant tears, prostrated themselves before the Blessed Sacrament as if clinging to the Altar, and implored of Him, who resided thereon, never to allow the Community to separate, or, to be torn from the sanctuary and from His adorable protecting arms. They arose, filled with confidence, and much consoled. The recital of an unexpected little incident will prove that their prayer was not made in vain; and that the Lord never rejects the petitions of those who approach Him with confidence, and place in Him, their whole trust: for in two days after, they were presented with a sum of 50 pounds coming from a quarter whence they least expected to obtain relief. Mr Andrew Mahony, who had died some time previously, bequeathed this sum to the Nuns; but, from some cause unknown to them, they had not been informed that such good fortune, providentially, had been theirs. On the night, after the two Religious had made the above named supplication to the Throne on High, as Mrs Mahony (the widow of the benefactor) and her Niece lay asleep in the same chamber, the latter was most dreadfully tormented in a dream. She thought her Uncle appeared to her, and unmercifully beat her. Her screams awakened her Aunt, who had some difficulty in calming her, and inducing her to resume her slumber. Again, she seemed to see him, and again she thought he beat her – On his third appearance, she fancied she heard him utter, with a voice of deep displeasure, the following words: “Go, and tell your Aunt to pay the Nuns the money that I left them.” The girl, on the next morning, related to her Aunt, all her terrors of the night: and she, participating in the same alarms, lost no time in procuring the money and bringing it to the poor nuns; who, for the first time, then learned, that this donation had been charitably bestowed on them. In proportion as this timely aid was unexpected, great also, was their gratitude to God, and their kind benefactor. Their joy was extreme, in as much as they received this welcome boon as a mark of God’s Providence over them; and as an assurance, that He would still watch over them, and enable them to pursue the good work, which had been only commenced, “the instruction of the poor”.

On 21 January 1799 the Annalist records that the three sisters who went to establish a community at the North End of the city:
... opened their small and inconvenient schools; into which were pressed a number of children, amounting to nearly 500, and these were the truly poor, abandoned, ignorant little ones. They also commenced the instruction of Adults, all of whom they found stupid and ignorant; and many amongst them who were unfortunately the victims of crime, were speedily reformed by the prayers and admonitions of their Sainted Instructresses.

These same sisters, the Annalist records, were obliged “to convert some old and worn sheets into inside garments; and the parlour chair covers, which had already done their duty well, into Neck-kerchiefs to exclude the cold, during a severe winter frost”. We are told:

Still was their courage undaunted – they always trusted to Providence.

Our early Presentation foremothers truly lived the spirit of Nano Nagle. After her death, Francis Moylan, Bishop of Cork (Fire on the Earth p 7), wrote of this small community who had been inspired by Nano Nagle:

Her spirit animates the Sisters that compose it.
Reflection Sheet 2

- A charism is a deep awareness of a Gospel value or values linked to a special need in the world. The Gospel value or emphasis remains constant over the history of the group throughout history. The area of need also remains constant but the specific expressions of the need may change over time, place and culture.

- The charism of the foundress:
  - Passion for those made poor and for changing the structures of society that made and kept people poor
  - Zeal – doing “all in her power” to change the way things were for those made poor
  - Courage
  - Trust in Divine Providence.

- The charism of our early Presentation foremothers.

Recall an incident from Nano’s life that touches you or inspires you.

- What do you think Nano would have felt in this particular experience?
- How would Nano have been in her prayer as a result of this experience?
- What is it in this incident that speaks to you?
- What aspect of the charism of the foundress is expressed in this incident?

Write a letter from Nano to your Sisters. What would she say to you about your living of the charism in your time, your place, your culture?
As well as referring to the distinctive characteristics of Nano and our early Presentation foremothers, charism is the ongoing deep story that is developed throughout the whole community’s history, shaped to respond to particular needs in different times, places and cultures. Sandra Schneiders (Finding the Treasure p 287) says that charism is the working out together of what the members of the community “felt called to, what they desired, what they were capable of, that generated the constitutive narrative and ongoing history of the community”.

Many years ago, among the Wurrundjerri people in Victoria, as it was most likely with other Aboriginal peoples, it was the sacred task of the women in the tribe during the gray, wet winter months to carry the fire. Fire meant life. In the drizzle and the damp that we associate with the winter months, it was, of course, not possible to start fires at every new camp-site. The fire had to be carried. This was achieved by maintaining hot coals in shell cones bartered from the coastal people, like the Bunnarong. Upon setting up camp the coals could be enflamed into life. It is not difficult to imagine what a vital and important duty it was to carry those shells with the coals inside them, carefully and with a great sense of responsibility. (Father David Ranson)

The charism of Nano carried in the hearts of Presentation Sisters over the years is a like these coals within the shells. These Sisters were the guardians of Nano’s dream to engage in the Mission of God in a distinctive way. Nano’s charism was nurtured and maintained and its coals kept burning by constant fidelity and attentiveness.

The remainder of this session will be a story that you tell yourselves.

Form into groups of three or four. In each group have a range of people a number of years entered – those who have been in the Congregation for many years, those who have been in the Congregation for some time and those who are newer to life in the Congregation.

Ask one of those who have been in the Congregation for some time to tell you the story of the Congregation’s/Vice-Province’s nurturing and maintaining of the Charism of Nano. Responding to the following questions might help in the telling of the story.

Now is the time to look forward, to the new leaders and creative deeds in our future. There was no golden age of religious life. There were only women and men, human as we are, who loved God, cared for persons in need, and dared to dream. We are as human, as flawed, and as gifted as they were, and still in touch with the dream.

Doris Gottemoeller rsm

What do you plan to do with your one, wild precious life?

Mary Oliver
• Who are some of the key figures in your Congregation/Vice-Province?
• How did they keep breathing life into the glowing coal of Nano’s charism over the years?
• What are some of the stories of the passion for those made and kept poor shown by these sisters and by others in your Congregation/Vice-Province?
• What are some of the stories of zeal, of doing “all in their power”, shown by these women and by others in your Congregation/Vice-Province?
• What are some of the stories of Trust in Divine Providence?

After 10-15 minutes of quiet reflection, share with each other your responses to the following questions:

• What burning coal do you carry within your own heart?
• What is it that promises us life and sustenance as a group?
• How do I personally keep breathing life into this glowing coal of the charism?
• How can we as a group keep breathing life into the glowing coal of the charism so that from it many fires can be sparked?
• How can we guard the spark of the charism?

Thank each other in your small group. Then bless each other with a candle lit from the lantern in the sacred space.
Reflection Sheet 3

Reflect on the following story. What do you think of in terms of Presentation Charism as you read the story?

A STORY ABOUT A GARMENT

Inside a cave there lived an old woman who remained unaffected by the rush and confusion and strife of daily life. She attended to other things and spent most of her life weaving until at last, she reached the point of assembling a fringe for the unique, exquisite garment she had made. She wanted this fringe to be special. She wanted to weave it with porcupine quills. She liked the idea of using something that could poke you into noticing the elements of beauty that were already there. She liked turning things around and seeing them in unusual ways. She liked thinking about what would make people gasp with surprise and admiration.

The old woman flattened each quill with her teeth. Over the years, her teeth had worn down to the nubs from teasing and shaping porcupine quills, still, she kept biting down and kept weaving on. She only interrupted her work to stir the soup that simmered in a great cauldron at the back of the cave.

The cauldron hung over a fire that began a long time ago. The old woman couldn’t recall anything older than that fire – she thought of it as the oldest thing in the world. And she knew that she must stir the soup in the cauldron – faithfully stir the soup so that the fire didn’t scorch all the ingredients, the seeds and grains and herbs that reliably sprouted up each year over the surface of the earth.

Thoughtfully and carefully, the old woman divided her efforts between weaving the garment and stirring the elemental soup. Each time she shuffled across the floor to the back of the cave, her black dog came awake to watch her every move, always going quietly and protectively to the weaving she had left.

One day, as the old woman went to stir the soup, the black dog began to nuzzle the weaving. He picked at a loose thread with his teeth and began to pull on it. Since each thread had been woven to another, the garment began to come undone.

When the old woman returned to take up her handiwork, she found a chaotic mess. The garment she had woven with such care had been roughly pulled apart, the fringe all undone. The elegance of the creation had become barely recognizable. The old woman stood and looked at the remains of her once beautiful design. She stared intently at the tangle of undone threads and the distorted patterns and felt a weight on her heart.

After a while, she bent down, picked up a loose thread and tentatively began to weave again. In her mind, she imagined the slow, gentle unfolding of a unique, exquisite garment that would be different and unusual and that would make people gasp with surprise and admiration.

As she freshly wove the threads, the old woman patted her black dog and blessed him. Her heart lightened and her hands took on a life of their own, reaching forward to pull first at this thread and then at another until a new garment began to appear, a lovely garment, a never before garment. A garment that was unique, exquisite, different and unusual. A garment that made people gasp with surprise and admiration.

Some Biblical Reflections Underpinning Presentation Charism

The celebration of the 225th Anniversary of Nano’s death and the courage of her companions is an opportunity to reconnect with the heart of who we are and the gift/charism we have been given. Celebrations such as this are very much part of the Jubilee tradition of the Scriptures. Jubilee is celebrated every 50 years. For us as Presentations the Jubilee trumpet has already sounded four times.

I would like to explore with you Jubilee and its associated themes as one possible Biblical underpinning of our Presentation charism. In 2000 two other Australian Presentations, Mary Coloe and Audrey Pigram, and I conducted a number of charism retreats. As a Biblical scholar, Mary did the Scriptural component and much of what I am presenting today is based on the notes I took during her presentations.

**Sabbath**

At the heart of the Jubilee story is the theme of Shabbath — to stop, to cease, to rest. The origin of Shabbath is unclear but it may have emerged with settlement in the rocky hill country of Israel. Israel has a harsh climate – rain is scarce and soil is precious. The agricultural community that settled there had to engage in backbreaking labour to terrace the mountain slopes, plant and harvest their crops. They learned from hard experience the need to rest their bodies and their animals in order to bring life to the soil and thus their community. This need to set aside a time to rest they also applied to God. God worked hard for six days and on the seventh day God rested from the work God had done. God blessed the seventh day and so this value built into the creation of the universe was enshrined in their Covenant Code. The value learned from their life experience was incorporated into their relationship with God and recorded as a command from God:

> Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work — you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath and consecrated it. (Exodus 20:8-11)

Sabbath is a time for remembering and retelling the story of Israel’s relationship with God.

> Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deut 5:15)
The command to “keep holy the Sabbath” is a command to remember the story of their liberation from slavery. The choice to rest from work is a regular and clear sign of their freedom from slavery. The Sabbath becomes tied with liberation, freedom.

It is important for us to remember our story – to take Sabbath times to remember that life is sacred and not a commodity to be used up; to remember the gift we have been given in Baptism and in the charism of our foundress; to nurture the contemplative stance that underpins all our work for justice.

Sabbath is not simply an agricultural practice but also a social value celebrating freedom and gratitude for God’s saving presence. From the weekly rhythm of a seven day cycle there emerged a seven year cycle that applied to the land. It was important to rest the land, to let it lie fallow to recover its fertility.

For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard. Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may find relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed. (Exodus 23:10-12)

Just as the Creator rested on the seventh day, and Israel, so too the land was to lie fallow. And this was so that the poor of the people could eat – the land itself would gift them. God’s transformative dream for all creation is that all is gift, all of creation is connected and is to live in right relationship. God, the earth, social relationships – all are to be in harmony. The Sabbath and subsequently the resting of the land and the feeding of those who are poor every seven years is an opportunity to restore the harmony of the Universe where everyone and every living thing is kin.

The primary image of the Shabbath is the foundation of Jubilee. This primary image emerges over and over in Israel’s story and with each emergence it is reinterpreted so that the value of Shabbath is kept alive as a source of life for the people and the whole of creation. The key moments in Israel’s story of Exodus, Monarchy and Exile are examples of this.

**Exodus**

The Exodus was the Israelite’s primary experience of God. The people of Israel escaped from slavery in the land of Egypt and resettled in the land living as families and tribal groups. Out of their new social situation came a need for a new social awareness and new social values. These social values then became laws expressed in the Covenant Code. This Covenant Code expresses a new social conscience, a code that emerges from Israel’s painful experience of slavery and the desert. From these experiences came the values expressed in Exodus 23:

1 You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness. 2 You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; 3 when you hear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice; nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit. 4 When you come upon your enemy’s ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back. 5 When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free. 6 You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuits. Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty. You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. For six years you sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard. Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed. Be attentive to all that I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips. (Exodus 23:1-13)

One of the new social values that was to emerge from their experience of slavery and of the desert was justice.
“You were once aliens in a foreign land, you know the heart of an alien, therefore give justice and learn compassion for the most vulnerable in your own society – the ones no longer protected and cared for within the family and the tribe – the widows, the orphans, the poor.”

This justice is very specific:

- Don’t join with the wicked
- Don’t follow the majority in doing wrong
- Make sure that the justice due to the poor is not perverted
- Care for animals – even the ox of your enemy.

Remember you were aliens – the stranger and the alien are to be given true hospitality. The biblical notion of justice, mishpat, is not an abstract value but an action to be done in the concrete realities of everyday life. This ethic of care and justice is worked into the weekly, yearly, seven yearly cycle. Justice is concrete actions in the rhythm of life. Justice is for everyone, even the aliens, those who do not belong. Israel’s religious bond with YHWH had a concrete social and political expression. In the Exodus moment Israel’s ethic of justice expresses a right ordering of relationships between all – people, aliens, animals and the land. This is God’s transformative dream for the whole of creation.

Monarchy

In this time a new value emerges. During this time the expression of Shabbath becomes expressed in shemittah, remission or forgiveness. After two or three centuries of settlement the tribal groupings united into a more unified social group – a monarchy under the kingships of Saul, David and then Solomon. The original small family units began to have ties with cities and a larger social unit. As a monarchy Israel began to deal politically and economically with other nations. In engaging with more powerful nations, the threat of losing their land became a distinct possibility and they became more aware of their land as a gift. At the same time, as a wealthy social group began to emerge, they began to experience injustice and oppression from their own people and not just from foreigners. There was a need for a new ethic, not just linked to land ownership and tribal groups but to life in a city and a nation. The new formulation of Israel’s law found expression in the Deuteronomic Code found in Deuteronomy 12-16. For example, Deuteronomy 15 states:

1 Every seventh year you shall grant a remission of debts. 2 And this is the manner of the remission: every creditor shall remit the claim that is held against a neighbour, not exacting it of a neighbour who is a member of the community, because the Lord’s remission has been proclaimed. 3 Of a foreigner you may exact it, but you must remit your claim on whatever any member of your community owes you. 4 There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the Lord’s remission has been proclaimed. 5 If only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today. 6 When the Lord your God has blessed you, as he promised you, you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you. 7 If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbour. 8 You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. 9 Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is near, ” and therefore view your needy neighbour with hostility and give nothing; your neighbour might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt. 10 Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. 11 Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.” 12 If a member of your community, whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and works to you for six years, in the seventh year you shall set that person free. 13 And when you send a male slave out from you a free person, you shall not send him out empty-handed. 14 Provide liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your wine press, thus giving to him some of the bounty with which the Lord your God has blessed you. 15 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today. 18 Do not consider it a hardship when you send them out from you.
free persons, because for six years they have given you services worth the wages of hired labourers; and the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do. (Deut 15:1-18)

The new ethic of remission of debt is tied to the Sabbatical each seven years.

- Set slaves free in each 7th year and provide liberally for them. This value comes out of memory – “Remember you were in slavery once”.
- No one is to be permanently enslaved by debt or otherwise.

But this ethic is only within Israel; it does not extend to foreigners. Foreign persons and nations could be enslaved. In this time of nationalism and the threat from foreign powers, the foreigners were the ones they feared so these laws were for their own.

With the growth of a wealthy class, some members of the community were able to lend money and accumulate loans to the point where the debtor became a slave. Lending as a means of justice to the poor was allowed but when the interest was so high that a borrower became a slave there needed to be a way to restore right relationships. Mapping remission of debts into the Sabbath year within Israel meant that justice continued even in the new social and political system. Linking remission of debt to the Sabbath ensured the poor could not be enslaved forever.

Verse 4 gives us the reason for the remission of debts – so that there will be no one in need. Those with enough are commanded to be generous, to share the blessings they have received and to do so with an open heart.

The practice of mishpat, justice, was linked to a political practice among nations in the ancient near east called ‘clean slate proclamation’. King Hammurabi proclaimed clean slate or remission of debt four times during his rule. So with a history of mishpat and the custom of a neighbouring kingdom, Israel’s theologians proposed a new ethic linked with the Sabbatical Year – remission of debt. The Jubilee tradition of the value of the land and a fallow year was reinterpreted to the new Jubilee ethic of remission of debt. Like the previous tradition, there is no difference between one’s religious life and one’s social and political life. Being part of the Covenant relationship with YHWH is part of all your living, whether it be living in the fields or living in the city, planting crops or lending and borrowing money.

A similar ethical code found in the book of Leviticus dating from this same time during the period of the monarchy emphasises that holiness is about practical justice.

1 The LORD spoke to Moses saying: 2 Speak to all the Congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

9 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God.

13 You shall not defraud your neighbour; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a labourer until morning.

15 You shall not render an unjust judgement; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour.

32 You shall rise before the aged, and defer to the old; and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

33 When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. 34 The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

35 You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight or quantity, 36 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.
Exile

The Exile was Israel’s darkest hour. They had lost the signs of God’s protection and fidelity. All that they had valued was lost – land, king, social structures and Temple. The devastation, loss and emptiness of the Exile was a time for the people to turn back to God with all their hearts. In doing so they found a God of compassion and forgiveness, a God of tenderness and restoration. The prophets expressed the hope for this restoration in the beautiful words that are dear to Presentation people:

1 The spirit of GOD is upon me, because God has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; 3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of God, to display God’s glory. (Isaiah 61: 1-3)

In this time of Exile, a time of loss and devastation, the people come to know a God of compassion and promise. At the time of Exodus, the Jubilee themes of liberation/Sabbath/justice were key values. At the time of Monarchy the Jubilee theme of remission of debt became the key value. During the Exile, a new value, a new ethic emerged which is found in the Levitical (Priestly) code, Chapter 25.

1 The LORD to spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: 2 Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for the LORD. 3 Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; 4 but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for the land, a Sabbath for the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.; 5 you shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. 13 In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property. 18 You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely. 19 The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely. 23 The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. 24 Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land, 25 If any one of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next of kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold. (Leviticus 25)

The priests during the Exile recall the people to the value of the Sabbath law and complete rest for the land – so that the poor of the people may eat. During the Exile, which lasted for 50 years, the concept of the 50th year becomes important – a Sabbath of Sabbath seven times seven. Liberation and return to the land and to family is proclaimed for the fiftieth year. The fiftieth year, the Jubilee year, begins with the blowing of the Yobal (the ram’s horn) by the priests. The word “jubilee” is taken from the word “yobal”. At the beginning of the ordinary year the shofar, an ordinary trumpet, is blown. The blowing of the Yobal is a reminder of God’s fidelity and of liberation from exile and the return to the land and to family.

8 You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. 9 Then you shall have the trumpet (yobal) sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month – on the day of atonement – you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. 10 And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. (Leviticus 25)

Because of their experience of being aliens once more in a foreign land during the time of the Exile, Israel’s justice was to extend once again to all – both kin and the aliens who lived among them. No Israelite was to be enslaved. All were to be paid for the work that they did. And in the fiftieth year their time of service was to come to an end.
Again the Israelites are to remember their experience of being aliens and slaves and base their justice ethic on that experience.

35 If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens. 36 Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear your God; let them live with you. 37 You shall not lend them your money at interest taken in advance, or provide them food at a profit. 38 I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God. 39 If any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves. 40 They shall remain with you as hired or bound labourers. They shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. 41 Then they and their children with them shall be free from your authority; they shall go back to their own family and return to their ancestral property. 42 For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold.

47 If resident aliens among you prosper, and if any of your kin fall into difficulty with one of them and sell themselves to an alien, or to a branch of the alien’s family, 48 after they have sold themselves they shall have the right of redemption; one of their brothers may redeem them. 49 or their uncle or their uncle’s son may redeem them, or anyone of their family who is of their own flesh may redeem them, or if they prosper they may redeem themselves.

54 And if they have not been redeemed in any of these ways, they and their children with them shall go free in the jubilee year. 55 For to me the people of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 25)

Israel's Ethical Vision

During Israel's evolving story the Jubilee vision of justice had been kept alive and had been reinterpreted at key moments in Israel's history in order to be a source of life for successive generations. In the time of settlement after the Exodus, the agricultural demands of Sabbath became a regular celebration of freedom. Sabbath was the time to remember their experience of being aliens themselves and to use this memory as the basis for their care for those who were the poorest and most vulnerable among them. Remembrance of their slavery led them to see all as gift and in the light of this gift to make sure that justice was available to those who are poor.

As the social world of Israel grew more complex with its growth as a nation and the development of towns, the Sabbath year emerged as a call to remission of debt and the demand for just wages.

Then from the experience of Exile, another experience of being aliens, came the vision of liberation from loss and devastation and return to land and family. Sabbath became a Sabbath of Sabbaths – a fiftieth year of jubilee.

Jesus – Prophet of Jubilee

Jesus in his mission announced that God’s year of Jubilee had begun. We explored this text of Luke 4 in an earlier session.

16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 Then he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

As we said in an earlier session, Jesus brought good news to those who are poor and oppressed by unjust social structures, preaching a message of right relationships that would make them kin with all those who excluded them. He preached a message of forgiveness and welcome to those who felt themselves to be alienated from God by sin.
He preached a message of hope that promised that when we return to God, God welcomes us back and our time of exile and alienation is over. Jesus preaches that God keeps Jubilee; God remits debts, God forgives, God welcomes sinners and outcasts back home. Jesus lives and embodies God’s Jubilee. Jesus uses stories about parties to describe how God keeps Jubilee. In Luke’s Gospel Jesus goes to many parties - Levi’s party in Chapter 5, a party with Simon the Pharisee in Chapter 7, with an unnamed Pharisee in Chapter 11, a leader of the Pharisees in Chapter 14, and Zaccheus in Chapter 19. He talks about feasts and parties in the parable of the friend at midnight, the parable of the banquet where the guests didn’t want to come, the parable of the Prodigal Son. Table fellowship is the symbol of God’s Jubilee offered in Jesus. Jesus embodied the parable of God’s banquet where all are welcome as kin in the community of life, all are enfolded in the hospitality of God. All are invited. Whether or not we stay and enjoy the banquet depends on our willingness to share it with the others that God has invited!

The Biblical Concept of Jubilee is one possible Biblical underpinning for our Presentation charism. It highlights several aspect of the distinctive way in which Nano engage in the Mission of God:

- Her passion for those made poor and for changing the structures that kept people poor and powerless
- The zeal required to do “all in her power” to live an ethic of Sabbath, justice, forgiveness and compassion
- The courage required to stay faithful to God in times of exodus, injustice and exile
- The challenge of trusting in God’s hospitable and compassionate embrace of all living Beings.
Reflection Sheet 4

Imagine that Nano is speaking to you as you reflect on the following:

Jubilee Themes in Nano’s Life

The Land/Fallow/Sabbath

I have always loved the land. I grew up loving the lush green land around my home at Ballygriffin. I used to love to ride free across the fields and to ramble along the banks of the Blackwater River. I loved the mists, the soft rains and the hills.

I loved, too, the land of my birth – Ireland – a land held under the yoke of oppression because of the Penal Laws for most of my life. It broke my heart to see my land owned by the oppressor and not in the loving hands of its own people.

Even though I spent much of my early adulthood in France, my land and her people were never far from my thoughts or from my heart. Indeed, during my 16 years on the Continent it was as if the land of Ireland and her people were lying fallow in my heart, waiting to be awakened by the cries of those made poor.

Exodus/Freedom

In 1746, on the death of my father, my sister Anne and I returned to Ireland and from that time I entered into a wilderness period in my life. I was challenged and disturbed by my sister’s concern for those who were poor as I couldn’t understand what she thought she could do to change the situation. Then my sister Anne and my mother both died within two years of the death of my father. Overwhelmed with grief and loss I went to live with my brother at Ballygriffin. In such a vulnerable state I seemed to be super sensitive to those who were themselves vulnerable and everywhere I went I seemed to see the misery and helplessness of those made poor. I felt God calling me to do something to relieve their hopeless situation but as a Catholic woman of wealth and privilege I could not see what I could possibly do.

In the end, I experienced my own Exodus as I left Ireland with its constant sights, sounds and smells of those made poor and I entered a Convent on the Continent. This Exodus liberated me from my ties to wealth and frivolity. In the convent, I experienced God’s presence and the urgency of God’s call through my memories of Ireland’s poor people. In this new social context, cut off from my land and her people and from my privileged life and at odds with the religious vocation I had chosen, I felt like an alien. And in knowing the heart of an alien, I learned compassion for the most vulnerable and oppressed people in my own country, those who had been made aliens by the Penal Laws.

I was still uncertain of how I could change the social and political realities that kept my people poor, but I returned to Ireland, to Cork, to live with my brother Joseph and his wife Frances. One thing that I was certain about was that my brief Exodus had liberated me from what I thought my vocation was to be and from an enslavement to privilege and wealth and prestige.

Monarchy/Remission of Debts/Justice/Right Relationships

For four or five years I discerned the best way that I could respond to the desperately poor and disempowered people of Cork. In that time I remembered what it meant to be an alien and I became more and more aware of the
unjust structures in my society that kept the majority of people poor and powerless.

Finally it became clear to me that education was a way out of poverty. Education would help my people to value their own religion and culture once more and it would provide them with basic skills to gain employment. Their education would be for them a freedom from slavery and a remission of debt.

In 1754 I opened my first cabin school and over the next 15 year period I set up two schools for boys and five schools for girls. I had a sense that, although my projects were small and had to be kept secret, I was restoring right relationships in Irish society. And I was willing to do this in spite of the difficulties and the risk to myself, my family and to the schools themselves.

Exile/Return to the Land

In the 1760s and early 1770s I felt that I had reached the darkest period in my work for God’s poor and vulnerable people. It was an Exile period for me. I seemed to lose all the signs of God's fidelity. My finances failed and I had to beg to keep alive my dreams for those made poor and vulnerable. My health was always uncertain, and although I ignored it, it became more uncertain as I got older. When I realised that the schools would only survive my death if entrusted to a religious congregation of sisters, it seemed an impossible task to find a congregation that was willing to come to Ireland given the risk of the Penal Laws. For years I negotiated to find a congregation prepared to train young Irish women and then to find a religious superior from among the congregations on the Continent. While these negotiations went on, the young women who had gone to the Ursuline novitiate to train for the Irish foundation were left wondering how long they would have to wait to return to Ireland. Eleanor Fitzsimmons possessed the strength of character and the patience to wait for the foundation to come to fruition, but my cousin Margaret Nagle, already a woman of 50, found the discipline of the novitiate very difficult and was so unsettled as to cause me great anxiety. The arrival at last of the Ursulines in Cork caused me great joy; indeed I even considered becoming a member of the foundation myself and wrote a clause into the legal agreement that I had with them that, if I were to join them, no dowry would be demanded. But it wasn’t too long before I realised that they could not carry out my heart’s desire and original purpose of instructing only the poor. Indeed, it had been unrealistic of me to expect them to do so.

During this period, in 1768, I entered my own Jubilee year by turning 50. In the midst of this Exile period when I had everything, I may say, to fight against, I came to realised that God would restore me to my heart’s desire. My passion for those made poor and for changing the way life was for them was restored. It became clear to me because of this period of exile, that my commitments required a society of sisters who would devote themselves entirely to the instruction of only those who were poor. So, in 1774, at the age of 56, with my faithful companions Elizabeth Burke, Mary Fouhy, and Mary Anne Collins, I formally commenced the Society of Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart. In spite of some opposition from the Ursuline Sisters and Dr Moylan, I returned to my land and built my first convent close to the Ursuline cloister.

Jesus/Embodiment of God’s Jubilee/Welcoming Heart

Jesus, the icon of God’s compassionate love, was always central to my life. I was very attracted to the devotion to the Sacred Heart and in my own life I wanted to be a parable of God’s compassionate, welcoming love for all – even those and especially those on the edges of society. I did not always find this easy. I had to become used to the poverty and ignorance that I found in the hovels, the garrets, the streets of Cork. I could certainly empathise with the early community in Philpot Lane who found themselves sticking their heads through the holes in the low thatched roof of the school because they could not stand the stench in the school room. I had to take my courage in both hands when I walked over bridges and through narrow lanes at night by the dim glow of my lantern. I was often disappointed when my young pupils ended up back on the streets in lawlessness and even prostitution and gave my schools a bad name because of their behaviour.

But my heart’s desire was stronger than my fears and sensitivities. I wanted to welcome into my school rooms all
who were deprived of their basic right to education. I wanted to welcome old women who had nothing to support and protect them into their old age, into a place that was safe and clean and companionable. I wanted to provide a house where prostitutes would be welcome to come off the streets into a place where they would be safe and protected. I wanted to provide for the poor and despairing parents and young people a place in my heart where they could find compassion and hope.

I encouraged all my sisters to welcome those who were poor and vulnerable. I established the practice, which continued for many years, of welcoming 50 beggars to share our Christmas dinner. What a Jubilee experience! When I first suggested such a dinner to my companions they were delighted, thinking that I would preside at the head of the table as I once did for my brother David. They soon came to see our Christmas dinner as a way of welcoming all to the table of God’s Kin-dom. My sisters came to have welcoming hearts wherever they were – in garrets, in schools, in the streets.

A welcoming heart is a wonderful way to ensure that all can share in God’s Jubilee, that those who are the poorest and most vulnerable are cared for, that all are forgiven and their debts remitted and that all can return to being equal members of God’s Kin-dom at the banquet of life.

*Hidden in the heart of things thou art nourishing seeds into sprouts, buds into blossoms, and ripening flowers into fruitfulness.*

*I was tired and sleeping on my idle bed and imagined all work had ceased. In the morning I woke up and found my garden full with wonders of flowers.*

*Tagore*
The Option for the Poor

As we have seen the option for those made poor is central to Nano Nagle’s engagement in the Mission of God. What is meant by the phrase ‘the option for the poor’?

The ‘option for the poor’ means that Christians are called to look at the world from the perspective of those who are marginalised and to work in solidarity with them for justice.

Standing with the poor, being present to the poor, seeing the world from the perspective of the poor, working with the poor, advocating for the poor, this is essential to being a follower of Christ. Christians stand with the poor because God stands with the poor. (J Milburn Thompson, Justice and Peace: A Christian Primer p 201)

The ‘option for the poor’ is not really an option. Peter J Henriot (Opting for the Poor p 24) says that rather than being an option, the ‘option for the poor’ “is a decisive action and a deliberate choice, reflecting values as well as desires, flowing from the core of faith.” Rather than being optional for Christians, the ‘option for the poor’ is a commitment to stand on the side of the poor in solidarity with them. It is also a choice to work for changes in social, political and economic structures so that the causes of poverty and marginalisation are eliminated.

When we speak of an option for the poor we usually have in mind a choice freely made by people who are not already poor. Becoming aware that they are relatively wealthy or privileged, they decide freely to relinquish their privileges (to some degree at least) and to become identified with the underprivileged. (An option for the poor can also be made by those who are already poor or disadvantaged; in their case it means a choice to be in solidarity with other underprivileged people rather than trying to take advantage of them and join the rich and powerful. (Donal Dorr, Poor, Preferential Option for, in Dwyer J (ed), New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought p 755)

In his book Option for the Poor Norbert J Lohfink SJ emphasises that this two dimensional aspect of the ‘option for the poor’ has a Scriptural basis. In his commentary on the Exodus story he states:

We saw that in this instance poor people are not just given some kind of aid; instead, the social system that produced their poverty is rejected in toto. They are removed from this system, and God creates out of them the miracle of a new society in contrast to all previous societies, a society in which there are no more poor. (p 55)
He maintains that Scripture tells us that it is God’s intention that there be a society in which there are no more poor. Our reflection on Jubilee reminded us that this was such an important value that codes of behaviour emerged to regulate the kind of society that was to be characteristic of Israel. Lohfink goes on to say that while it is true that poverty is not often mentioned in the New Testament accounts of the early Christian communities, this may well be because a new initiative of common life and a new way of relating to those made poor given to them by Jesus were implemented and thus social stratification and real poverty were abolished. We can truly believe that “There was not a needy person among them.” (Acts 4:34)

Anyone who interprets the central texts of the Bible concerning the poor as meaning some kind of aid for the poor that is possible without faith and without transformation of the world within the believing community, is misusing these texts and is not doing them justice. (Lohfink SJ, Option for the Poor p 78)

Sandie Cornish (Faith Doing Justice April 2009) reminds us that ‘the option for the poor’ is not a romantic or naïve notion:

To give preference in our love to those who are poor or marginalised is not to idealize these people or groups, or to romanticize poverty. Poverty and exclusion are concrete evils to be overcome. Our voluntary simplicity and solidarity should be transformative, and should acknowledge that people who are poor or marginalised are people, and are not immune from the ordinary shortcomings and struggles of humanity.

The Option for the Poor in Scripture

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures the people of Israel are presented with a consistent test of the authenticity of their love for YHWH and their commitment to the various Covenants made with God through their history. God’s Covenant with Israel was dependent on the way the community treated the poor and the unprotected – the widows, the orphans and the strangers. (e.g. Deut 16:11,12; Exodus 22:21-27; Isaiah 1:16,17; Jeremiah 7:5,6). Throughout Israel’s history as well as in the New Testament, the poor are the agent of God’s transforming power. Indeed, in the story of the Last Judgement, Jesus tells us that we will be judged according to our response to those who are hungry, those who are thirsty, those in prison and the stranger (Matthew 25:31-46).

As we discussed earlier, the Exodus was the formative experience for the people of Israel in terms of shaping their social ethic. The people of Israel were called out of slavery into a covenant relationship with YHWH that shaped a new kind of society that gave preference to those who were poor and marginalised. This preference was based on their own memory of being aliens in the land of Egypt.

Laws Protecting Aliens, Widows and Orphans

You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans. (Exodus 22:21-24)

"You shall not violate the rights of the alien or of the orphan, nor take the clothing of a widow as a pledge. 18 For, remember, you were once slaves in Egypt, and the LORD, your God, ransomed you from there; that is why I command you to observe this rule. 19 "When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf there, you shall not go back to get it; let it be for the alien, the orphan or the widow, that the LORD, your God, may bless you in all your undertakings. 20 When you knock down the fruit of your olive trees, you shall not go over the branches a second time; let what remains be for the alien, the orphan and the widow. 21 When you pick your grapes, you shall not go over the vineyard a second time; let what remains be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. 22 For remember that you were once slaves in Egypt; that is why I command you to observe this rule. (Deut 24:17-22)
In the Priestly Code in Leviticus, the preference for those who are poor and marginalised is given great emphasis:

The LORD said to Moses,

2 “Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy.

3 Revere your mother and father, and keep my Sabbaths. I, the LORD, am your God.

4 “Do not turn aside to idols, nor make molten gods for yourselves. I, the LORD, am your God.

5 “When you sacrifice your peace offering to the LORD, if you wish it to be acceptable, 6 it must be eaten on the very day of your sacrifice or on the following day. Whatever is left over until the third day shall be burned up in the fire. 7 If any of it is eaten on the third day, the sacrifice will be unacceptable as refuse; 8 whoever eats of it then shall pay the penalty for having profaned what is sacred to the LORD. Such a one shall be cut off from his people.

9 “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not be so thorough that you reap the field to its very edge, nor shall you glean the stray ears of grain. 10 Likewise, you shall not pick your vineyard bare, nor gather up the grapes that have fallen. These things you shall leave for the poor and the alien. I, the LORD, am your God. 11 “You shall not steal. You shall not lie or speak falsely to one another. 12 You shall not swear falsely by my name, thus profaning the name of your God. I am the LORD. 13 “You shall not defraud or rob your neighbor. You shall not withhold overnight the wages of your day laborer. 14 You shall not curse the deaf, or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but you shall fear your God. I am the LORD. 15 “You shall not act dishonestly in rendering judgment. Show neither partiality to the weak nor deference to the mighty, but judge your fellow men justly. 16 You shall not go about spreading slander among your kinsmen; nor shall you stand by idly when your neighbor’s life is at stake. I am the LORD. 17 “You shall not bear hatred for your brother in your heart. Though you may have to reprove your fellow man, do not incur sin because of him. 18 Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. 19 “Stand up in the presence of the aged, and show respect for the old; thus shall you fear your God. I am the LORD. 20 When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest him. 21 You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God. 22 “Do not act dishonestly in using measures of length or weight or capacity. 23 You shall have a true scale and true weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. 24 Be careful, then, to observe all my statutes and decrees. I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19)

The sense that God was on the side of those who are poor and oppressed, especially aliens, widows and orphans, is also found in many of the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Scriptures. For example, in Isaiah we read:

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; Cease to do evil, learn to do good; Seek justice, rescue the oppressed; Defend the orphan, plead for the widow. (Isaiah 1:16-17)

And in Jeremiah:

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.
Laws Protecting Debtors

"If you lend money to one of your poor neighbors among my people, you shall not act like an extortioner toward him by demanding interest from him. 25 If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, you shall return it to him before sunset; 26 for this cloak of his is the only covering he has for his body. What else has he to sleep in? If he cries out to me, I will hear him; for I am compassionate. (Exodus 22:24-26)

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is mine, and you are but aliens who have become my tenants. 24 Therefore, in every part of the country that you occupy, you must permit the land to be redeemed. 25 When one of your countrymen is reduced to poverty and has to sell some of his property, his closest relative, who has the right to redeem it, may go and buy back what his kinsman has sold. 26 If, however, the man has no relative to redeem his land, but later on acquires sufficient means to buy it back in his own name, 27 be shall make a deduction from the price in proportion to the number of years since the sale, and then pay back the balance to the one to whom he sold it, so that he may thus regain his own property. 28 But if he does not acquire sufficient means to buy back his land, what he has sold shall remain in the possession of the purchaser until the jubilee, when it must be released and returned to its original owner. (Leviticus 25:23-28)

"At the end of every seven-year period you shall have a relaxation of debts, 2 which shall be observed as follows. Every creditor shall relax his claim on what he has loaned his neighbor; he must not press his neighbor, his kinsman, because a relaxation in honor of the LORD has been proclaimed. 3 You may press a foreigner, but you shall relax the claim on your kinsman for what is yours. 4 Nay, more! since the LORD, your God, will bless you abundantly in the land he will give you to occupy as your heritage, there should be no one of you in need. 5 If you but heed the voice of the LORD, your God, and carefully observe all these commandments which I enjoin on you today, 6 you will lend to many nations, and borrow from none; you will rule over many nations, and none will rule over you, since the LORD, your God, will bless you as he promised. 7 If one of your kinsmen in any community is in need in the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand to him in his need. 8 Instead, you shall open your hand to him and freely lend him enough to meet his need. 9 Be on your guard lest, entertaining the mean thought that the seventh year, the year of relaxation, is near, you grudge help to your needy kinsman and give him nothing; else he will cry to the LORD against you and you will be held guilty. 10 When you give to him, give freely and not with ill will; for the LORD, your God, will bless you for this in all your works and undertakings. (Deut 15:1-11)

Laws Protecting Those Who Were Poor

At the end of every third year you shall bring out all the tithes of your produce for that year and deposit them in community stores, 29 that the Levite who has no share in the heritage with you, and also the alien, the orphan and the widow who belong to your community, may come and eat their fill; so that the LORD, your God, may bless you in all that you undertake. (Deut 14:28-29)

"When you have finished setting aside all the tithes of your produce in the third year, the year of the tithes, and you have given them to the Levite, the alien, the orphan and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your own community, 14 you shall declare before the LORD, your God, 'I have purged my house of the sacred portion and I have given it to the Levite, the alien, the orphan and the widow, just as you have commanded me. In this I have not broken or forgotten any of your commandments. (Deut 26:13-14)

The Option for the Poor in the New Testament

In the New testament, Jesus explains his mission as bringing good news to those made poor through a process of social reversal that makes all people kin or family in the kin-dom of God. (Luke 4) We have reflected on this passage earlier. There are many Gospel passages that emphasise that God is a God on the side of those who are poor and excluded and the kin-dom of God includes all, especially the most vulnerable and the poorest. We shall consider only some key examples here.

In Matthew’s scene of the Great Judgment there is only one criteria for being saved – how we have treated the poorest, most vulnerable and most marginalised members of our society.
When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' 36 Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 37 When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' 38 And the king will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' 39 Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 40 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' 41 Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' 42 He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' 43 And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

The Gospels record many healings carried out by Jesus and many of his parables of forgiveness. The healings were not just physical healings. They were acts that restored those healed to their place in the community, in the kingdom of God.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father never forgets that his son is his son – even though the son has excluded himself from the family. The father confidently waits for the son to return, his love ready to enfold and welcome back his son to his rightful place in the family even though he is so far on the margins of society as to be living with pigs.

And he said, 'There was a man who had two sons; 12 and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. 15 So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants."' 19 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 20 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 21 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; 22 and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; 23 for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry. 24 Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 25 And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. 26 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' 27 And he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 28 but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" (Luke 15:11-32)

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus highlights the fact that those who are aware of their need for God because of their poverty and exclusion from what goes on “inside the gates” will have a greater chance of salvation than those whose riches give them a false sense of security in their own capacities.
There was a rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, full of sores, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table; moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes, and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus in his bosom. 24 And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy upon me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in anguish in this flame.’ 25 But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ 27 And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house, 28 for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ 29 But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ 30 And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ 31 He said to him, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.’

In the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage, the healing is also a way of enabling the woman who had been marginalized because of her uncleanness to re-enter the society that had excluded her for twelve years.

As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. 43 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. 44 She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. 45 Then Jesus asked ‘Who touched me?’ When all denied it, Peter said, ‘Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.’ 46 But Jesus said, ‘Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me.’ 47 When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. 48 He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.’

Jesus challenges us to welcome those who are poor, disadvantaged, on the margins for they will be welcome in the kingdom of God.

He told a parable to those who had been invited, noticing how they were choosing the places of honor at the table. 8 ‘When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not recline at table in the place of honor. A more distinguished guest than you may have been invited by him, 9 and the host who invited both of you may approach you and say, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then you would proceed with embarrassment to take the lowest place. 10 Rather, when you are invited, go and take the lowest place so that when the host comes to you he may say, ‘My friend, move up to a higher position.’ Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” 12 Then he said to the host who invited him, ‘When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. 13 Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; 14 blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

The Option for the Poor in Church Teaching

Long before the term ‘option for the poor’ entered the language of Church documents, founders of religious congregations and their followers were living this reality as they engaged in the mission of God. Nano Nagle did not have to have this term defined for her. She did not have to debate and question “Who are the poor?” Those who were poor and powerless were all around her, and once she opened her heart to hear their cries there was nothing she could do but spend her life for them.

The term ‘option for the poor’ emerged in the liberation theology texts of the 1960s and made its way into Church social teaching in the 1970s. The leaders of the Catholic Church in Latin America came together in 1968 at a major conference in Medellin where they set out to apply the documents of the Second Vatican Council to their own situation. In doing so they introduced a new approach, a new language and a new option. Their approach began from an analysis of the concrete situation rather than by repeating traditional doctrine. They provided the Church
with a whole new set of terms and concepts such as “structural injustice”, “marginalization”, “institutional violence”, “liberation”, “participation”, and “conscientisation”. And they spoke of a new option. Having carefully clarified the different meanings of the word “poverty”, the Bishops deliberately committed themselves to being in solidarity with the poor, giving preference to the most needy members of society and arousing the consciousness of oppressed groups and helping them to organize to become agents of their own development. What is significant about the Medellin documents is not simply that they are a response to those who are poor and oppressed but that they represent a positive response by the Church to engage in the struggle to overcome oppression and injustice and poverty.

The concept of an option for the poor rapidly became influential among Bishops in poorer countries in Asia and Africa, and among religious orders. It was later taken up in the teachings of Bishops in richer Western countries, for example, in the US Bishops’ 1986 Pastoral Letter, ‘Economic Justice For All’, and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference’s 1992 Pastoral Statement ‘Common Wealth for the Common Good’. (Sandie Cornish, Faith Doing Justice, Australian Jesuits, April 2009)

During the 1960s there were concerns raised about using the term ‘option for the poor’. Some were concerned that Jesus was portrayed as just a political activist and that working to bring about God’s kin-dom was a political and class struggle to overthrow the rich. Many who were rich were concerned that the term ‘option for the poor’ excluded them from God’s embrace. Many in the Church and in religious congregations argued about who were the poor and maintained that Jesus was talking about the spiritually poor. There is no doubt, however, among Scripture Scholars that the poor in the Bible are almost always without exception those who are economically poor – those without any material resources and therefore powerless. God loves everybody, but as the passages from Scripture indicate, God has a preferential love for those who are the most vulnerable and the poorest and as Christians we are challenged to do the same.

Gaudium et Spes (Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on The Church in the Modern World)
December 1965

This document affirmed that the work for justice in the world was a part of the mission of the Church. It specifically spoke of those suffering from want and of their entitlements.

Therefore everyone has the right to possess a sufficient amount of the earth’s goods for themselves and their family. This has been the opinion of the Fathers and Doctors of the church, who taught that people are bound to come to the aid of the poor and to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods. Persons in extreme necessity are entitled to take what they need from the riches of others.

Faced with a world today where so many people are suffering from want, the council asks individuals and governments to remember the saying of the Fathers: “Feed the people dying of hunger, because if you do not feed them you are killing them,” and it urges them according to their ability to share and dispose of their goods to help others, above all by giving them aid which will enable them to help and develop themselves. (The Church in the Modern World #69)

Populorum Progression (On the Development of Peoples), Pope Paul VI 1967

In this encyclical Pope Paul VI highlights economic justice as the basis of peace. He explicitly criticizes the basic tenets of capitalism, including the profit motive and the unrestricted right to private property. He calls for integral human development and solidarity between rich and poor nations.

... the superfluous wealth of rich countries should be placed at the service of poor nations. The rule which up to now held good for the benefit of those nearest to us, must today be applied to all the needy of this world. Besides, the rich will be the first to benefit as a result. Otherwise their continued greed will certainly call down upon them the judgment of God and the wrath of the poor, with consequences no one can foretell. (On the Development of Peoples #49)
Let each one examine his conscience, a conscience that conveys a new message for our times. Is he prepared to support out of his own pocket works and undertakings organized in favor of the most destitute? Is he ready to pay higher taxes so that the public authorities can intensify their efforts in favor of development? Is he ready to pay a higher price for imported goods so that the producer may be more justly rewarded? (On the Development of Peoples #48)

**Octogesima Adveniens (A Call To Action), Pope Paul VI’s Apostolic Letter 1971**

This letter affirms that:

> In teaching us charity, the Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due to the poor and the special situation they have in society: the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others. (A Call to Action #23)

**Justice in the World, the Synod of Bishops 1971**

This document illustrates the powerful influence of native leadership of the Churches of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The Bishops teach that Gospel principles mandate justice for the liberation of all humanity as an essential expression of Christian love. This document does not use the phrase ‘option for the poor’ but its content highlights that working for justice is a ‘constitutive’ element of the Gospel. The Bishops place themselves on the side of ‘voiceless victims of injustice’ and stress the need for structural change, including an examination of the Church’s lifestyle and possessions.

Listening to the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures, and hearing the appeal of a world that by its perversity contradicts the plan of its Creator, we have shared our awareness of the Church’s vocation to be present in the heart of the world by proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted. (Justice in the World #5)

Those who are already rich are bound to accept a less material way of life, with less waste, in order to avoid the destruction of the heritage which they are obliged by absolute justice to share with all other members of the human race. (Justice in the World #70)

At the same time as it proclaims the Gospel of the Lord, its Redeemer and Savior, the Church calls on all, especially the poor, the oppressed and the afflicted, to cooperate with God to bring about liberation from every sin and to build a world which will reach the fullness of creation only when it becomes the work of people for people. (Justice in the World #77)

**Pope John Paul II and the Option for the Poor**

At the opening of CELAM’s Puebla Conference, John Paul II warned against problematic ways of understanding and practicing the option for the poor, but he also strongly encouraged the Latin American Bishops to actively pursue an authentic Christian approach to the liberation of people from poverty and oppression.

Throughout his long pontificate, John Paul II regularly used expressions such as ‘love of preference of the poor’ and a ‘preferential option for the poor’ to emphasize both the motivation of love, and the universality of God’s love. (Sandie Cornish, *Faith Doing Justice*, Australian Jesuits, April 2009)

**Solicitudo Rei Socialis (The Social Concerns of the Church), Pope John Paul II 1987**

Those who are more influential because they have greater share of goods and common services should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess... the church feels called to take her stand beside the poor, to discern the justice of their requests and to help satisfy them, without losing sight of the good of groups in the context of the common good. (On Social Concern #39)
This is an option, or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole witness of the Church bears witness. It affects the life of each Christian as much as he or she seeks to imitate the life of Christ, but it applies equally to our social responsibilities and hence to our manner of living, and to the logical decisions to be made concerning ownership and use of goods … Today, furthermore, given the worldwide dimension which the social question has assumed, this love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the vast multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and, above all, those without hope of a better future. It is impossible not to take account of the existence of these realities. To ignore them would mean becoming like the ‘rich man’ who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate. (Lk 16:19-31) (On Social Concern #42)

**Centisimus Annus (The Hundredth Year [after Rerum Novarum 1891 Leo XIII]), Pope John Paul II 1991**

As far as the Church is concerned, the social message of the Gospel must not be considered a theory, but above all else a basis and a motivation for action. Inspired by this message, some of the first Christians distributed their goods to the poor, bearing witness to the fact that, despite different social origins, it was possible for people to live together in peace and harmony … Today more than ever, the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than as a result of its internal logic and consistency. This awareness is also a source of her preferential option for the poor, which is never exclusive or discriminatory towards other groups. (The Hundredth Year #57)

Love for others, and especially for the poor, is made concrete by promoting justice. (The Hundredth Year #58)

Pope Benedict XVI continues to affirm the Church’s commitment to the option for the poor. Sandie Cornish (Faith Doing Justice, Australian Jesuits, April 2009) uses the following quotation from the Pope’s message to the Jesuits in 2008 to illustrate this ongoing commitment:

... continue and renew your mission among the poor and with the poor... As I was able to reaffirm to the Latin American Bishops gathered at the shrine of Aparecida, “the preferential option for the poor is implicit in the Christological faith in the God who became poor for us, so as to enrich us with his poverty (cf 2 Cor 8:9)” It is therefore natural that those who truly want to be a companion of Jesus really share his love for the poor. For us, the option for the poor is not ideological but is born from the Gospel. Situations of injustice and poverty are numerous and tragic, and if it is necessary to seek to understand them and fight their structural causes, it is also necessary to penetrate to the very heart of [each human being], to extirpate the deep roots of evil and sin that cut [them] off from God, without forgetting to meet people’s most urgent needs in the spirit of Christ’s charity.

Our Challenge

If we are truly to be “Daughters of Light” in the spirit of Nano Nagle then her passion for those made poor, God’s preferential option for those made poor and powerless, must direct our work as the Presentation face of God’s mission in the world.

The option for the poor is not a preference for some people over other people. It is a matter of taking up the cause of the poor as opposed to the cause of the rich. The moral judgment involved here is not a judgment about individuals who are rich or poor, but a judgment about the morality of rightness of two conflicting causes. The option for the poor is a judgment about the rightness of the cause of the poor and a condemnation of the cause of the rich, whatever the measure of personal guilt of those involved may or may not be.

It has also sometimes been thought that the option for the poor is a matter of lifestyle, an option for poverty. We do not necessarily help the poor and oppressed by imitating their deprivation.

The option for the poor is an uncompromising and unequivocal taking of sides in a situation of structural conflict. (Albert Nolan)
Taking sides in this situation of structural conflict involves:

- Creating conditions for marginalized voices to be heard
- Defending the defenseless who are oppressed by corporate and political greed
- Assessing lifestyles (including our own), policies and social institutions in terms of their impact on those who are poor and vulnerable.

Our work as IPA to address the root causes of poverty, especially by confronting personal and corporate greed attempts to do these three things at personal, congregational and global levels.

In order to commit ourselves to this work, we, like Nano, must open our hearts to hear the cries of those made poor. We must open ourselves to ongoing conversion. Jon Sobrino’s words are very challenging in this regard:

> According to Christianity, though perhaps not according to other philosophies, the poor alone are the created reality that has power to convert us. The condition for the possibility of religious being poor in spirit and open to God in the midst of material goods, knowledge, and power, (things that they will have to a greater or lesser extent and that they never can or should avoid completely) is for them to acquire the outlook of the materially poor and to make their own the cause and destiny of the poor.

> Whatever the particular meaning of the vow of poverty in a particular congregation (austerity, use of things with permission, disposition of possessions only for purposes of the apostolate) the most important thing religious do when they publicly vow poverty is to declare themselves in solidarity with the cause of the poor. When this element is lacking, poverty becomes a form of infantilism, a matter of juridical fictions, or worse, a sad irony.

**Hospitality**

Hospitality was a characteristic of Nano’s life. This hospitality was an essential aspect of her solidarity with those who were poor and vulnerable. It was Nano’s way of being present to those who were poor, her style of service. She was not judgmental of their personal circumstances; she was not critical of their way of life, nor condescending towards them. She did not expect more from them than their social, political and economic realities enabled them to give. She was hospitable towards them. Her style of being present was that of a “welcoming heart” and a practical intelligence that enabled her to be compassionate as well as strategic in addressing the unjust structures that kept them poor. This is the gift and the challenge she has left us as Presentation people.

> Hospitality has two aspects: being at home with oneself and making another feel at home. There is an old saying: Home is where the heart is. Home may be connected with certain physical surroundings, but location is not the focus of being “at home”. Any place can become home for us when our heart finds its rest there. When we make others feel at home, we have welcomed them in such a way that, by being with us, they find rest at their heart’s centre. Welcoming the other, welcoming the stranger, may often seem to put the focus only on the object of hospitality. But welcoming involves relationship. It takes two – the one being hospitable and the one receiving hospitality – and it is for both to experience that “home” is being shared because the hearts of both parties are involved.

David I Fleming SJ
A very proper lady went to a tea shop. She sat at a table for two, ordered a pot of tea, and prepared to eat some cookies which she had in her purse. Because the tea shop was crowded, a man took the other chair and also ordered tea. As it happened, he was a Jamaican black, though that is not essential to the story. The woman was prepared for a leisurely time, so she began to read her paper. As she did so, she took a cookie from the package. As she read, she noticed that the man also took a cookie from the package. This upset her greatly, but she ignored it and kept reading. After a while she took another cookie. And so did he. This unnerved her and she glared at the man. While she glared, he reached for the fifth and the last cookie, smiled and offered her half of it. She was indignant. She paid her money and left in a great hurry, enraged at such a presumptuous man. She hurried to her bus stop just outside. She opened her purse to get a coin for her bus ticket. And then she saw, much to her distress, that in her purse was her package of cookies unopened. The lady is not different from all of us. Sometimes we possess things so long that do not really belong to us that we come to think they are ours. Sometimes, by the mercy of God, we have occasion to see to whom these things in fact belong. And when we see that, we have some little chance of being rescued from our misreading of reality. Justice concerns precisely a right reading of social reality, of social power, and of social goods.

(Source unknown)
PRESENTATION CHARISM AND SPIRITUALITY—Part 6

Presentation Spirituality

There is something deep and warm in living things. It is there. Call it grace, or the presence of God, or an awareness of the need for truth or love. But that ‘something’ is good. You may wonder about it on a quiet morning, in your yearning for some meaning to this life. And memories may come, warm memories, about the goodness and love that have been shown you in life. And you will sense beneath the surface of our daily routines, goodness is slowly coming into being. Perhaps prayer is listening to that goodness, watching for it, and living from it. Perhaps prayer is nothing more than being still and asking God for God’s warmth, for God’s abiding presence in our lives.

Source unknown

Spirituality

Spirituality no longer refers primarily or exclusively to prayer and spiritual exercises or to the spiritual practices of Christianity. Today there is a new interest in the life of the spirit and the spiritual life is no longer the specialist concern of religious groups. Spirituality is now the concern of everyone – religious or secular, young or old, atheist or believer – and has broadened to connote the whole life of a person, physical, psychological, social, political and perhaps religious. In this environment there is a lack of clarity about what is meant by ‘Spirituality’. So there are many kinds of spirituality and not all of them include reference to God. For Christians, however, spirituality begins and ends with God. Within Christian spirituality there are different spiritual traditions sometimes called different spiritualities. Some of these are historical in origin (e.g. French Spirituality in the 17th century), some are associated with founders of religious congregations (e.g. Franciscan spirituality, Ignatian spirituality), some are based on sociological variables (e.g. feminist spirituality).

The word ‘spirituality’ is derived from the Hebrew word ‘ruach’ which means ‘wind’, ‘breath’, ‘spirit’, ‘whatever animates and gives life’.

Contemporary Christian writers have various definitions or descriptions of spirituality. Some of these include the following:

To be spiritual means to know, and to live according to the knowledge that there is more to life than meets the eye. To be ‘spiritual’ means, beyond that, to know and to live according to the knowledge that God is present to us in grace as the principle of personal, interpersonal, social, and even cosmic transformation.

Richard McBrien

Spirituality - ‘a way of being in the world with God’.

Anthony J Gittins
From the Hebraic context, ‘spirituality’ is concerned with force and energy, a vitality in life, a ‘coming awake’, an increased awareness about life and a deepened sensitivity to its murmurs and rhythms.

David Ransom

Spirituality is about what we do with the fire inside of us, about how we channel our eros. And how we do channel it, the disciplines and habits we choose to live by, will either lead to a greater integration or disintegration in the way we are related to God, others and the cosmic world.

Ronald Rolheiser omi

When I think of my spirituality, what I mean is the outlook, the approach, and the set of attitudes and values which are the expression of ‘me’ at my most authentic.

Donal Dorr

Spirituality – the inner core made up of all the experiences and encounters one has had in one’s life and out of which come the motivations, inspirations and commitment that make one live and decide in a particular way. One might say spirituality is the shape in which the Holy Spirit has moulded Herself in one’s life.

Mary John Manazan and Sun Ai Park

Spirituality is a profound and authentic desire of humanity for the wholeness in the midst of fragmentation, for community in the face of loneliness and isolation … for the meaning in life, for values that endure.

Sandra Schneiders

Spirituality is the diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected to the largeness of life.

Parker Palmer

Spirituality is the way in which we express a living faith in a real world – the sum total of attitudes and actions that define our faith.

Joan Chittister

Spirituality is attentiveness to the call of the Spirit of God in the concrete reality of life and in the cosmos and committed, passionate action in response to that call.

Marlette Black
If we examine these definitions we can see several key elements that are common to many of them.


**Spirituality is about being attentive.** Words that appear in the definitions include ‘disciplines’, ‘habits’, ‘ attentiveness’, ‘ways of being’, ‘deepened sensitivity to the murmur and rhythms of life’. This attentiveness is what is meant by a contemplative stance – attending to life and God’s presence within all of creation. This kind of attentiveness is beautifully captured in the painting of *The Serving Girl at Emmaus* by Velzquez and in Denise Levertov’s poem on the painting.

She listens, listens, holding
Her breath, Surely that voice
Is his – the one
Who had looked at her, once, across the crowd,
As no one had ever looked?
Had seen her? Had spoken as if to her?
Surely those hands were his,
Taking the platter of bread from hers just now?
Hands he’d laid on the dying and made them well?
Surely that face — ?
The man they’d crucified for sedition and blasphemy.
The man whose body had disappeared from its tomb?
The man it was rumoured now some women had seen this morning, alive?
Those who had brought this stranger home to their table
Don’t recognize yet with whom they sit.
But she in the kitchen, absently touching the winejug she’s to take in,
A young Black servant intently listening.
Swings round and sees
The light around him
And is sure.

*(Breathing the Water, New Directions Publishing 1987)*
In the midst of her pots and her serving, the serving girl listens, remembers, and recognises the presence of One who moves her heart and holds out the promise of changing her world.

Spirituality involves disciplines and habits that help us to be attentive to ‘the dearest freshness deep down things’ (Gerard Manley Hopkins). Some of these are personal and include practices such as gardening, walking, reading poetry, looking at beautiful art work, spiritual reading, reading Scripture, praying the Prayer of the Church, saying aspirations, consciousness examen. There are many ways that we can nurture in ourselves a deepened sensitivity to the ‘murmurs and rhythms’ of life. Some of these practices may be communal. The important value is to find some regular and disciplined ways that help us to be attentive to the Spirit of God speaking within us and among us.

Mary Oliver says that to pray is to “just pay attention”.

**Praying**

It doesn’t have to be  
The blue iris, it could be  
Weeds in a vacant lot, or a few  
Small stones, just  
Pay attention, then patch

A few words together and don’t try  
To make them elaborate, this isn’t  
A contest but the doorway

Into thanks, and a silence in which  
Another voice may speak.

(Thirst Anthology 2006)

Daniel O’Leary reminds us that being attentive, being contemplative, is something we become:

*All we have to do is simply to be present to the music of what happens, to be attentive to the mountain behind the mountain, Contemplation is something we become, not something we do. It is a way of presence, of seeing, of always being amazed.*

**Spirituality is about being intentional.** The words used in the definitions above that signal intention include ‘profound and authentic desire’, ‘coming awake’, ‘increased awareness about life’, ‘live and decide in a particular way’, ‘way in which we express a living faith’. David Whyte says ‘We should apprentice ourselves to coming awake’. Apprenticing oneself involves showing up, taking instruction, a willingness to learn and to grow, an intention to move into the future in a particular way. Spirituality involves a leaning towards, a search, a commitment, an effort. Spirituality involves the intention to direct our lives in response to God’s grace. Someone once said that we become what we attend to. Spirituality includes being intentional about what we attend to in our lives. It involves making choices about how we spend our time, our money, our energy, our interest, our vote, our passion. By intentionally choosing what is loving and just and by working to change unjust structures that exploit the whole community of life, we bring to fruition God’s Kin-dom in our midst.

Thich Nhat Hahn reminds us of the dangers of not being intentional about our lives:

*The present moment is where life can be found, and if you don’t arrive there, you miss your appointment with life.*
The disciples on the road to Emmaus were willing to spend time with a stranger, to engage with him and take instruction from the stranger who walked with them; they were willing to learn and to grow. Because they had made the choice to take time with Jesus before his death, they remembered the action of the blessing and the breaking of the bread and in remembering their eyes were opened. They became awake and recognised Jesus in their midst. Their ‘profound and authentic desire’ to understand what had happened, their intention to search for the meaning of it all led them to recognise Jesus in the breaking of the bread. In Caravaggio’s painting (right), focused on a quiet figure at the centre, two men are caught in dramatic gestures of surprise. The extreme lighting adds to the sense of excitement and revelations as they realise that the stranger among them is the resurrected Christ.

**Spirituality is transformational.** The definitions speak of ‘personal, interpersonal, social and even cosmic transformation’, ‘integration of one’s life’, ‘expression of me at my most authentic’, ‘committed, passionate action’, ‘motivations, inspirations and commitment’. In Christian spirituality there is no separation of human development and spiritual development, of prayer and action. The authentic self is given by nature and developed by grace and Spirit. As we said before, we become what we attend to and in attending to the presence of God we become more fully what God calls us to be. When we attend in prayer to the presence of God in human life, history, world and cosmos, we become more conscious of the need to advance God’s kin-dom through works of compassion and justice and through non-violent ways of living with other species and the whole of creation. We are consciously in touch with the power of God’s Spirit as a power which heals, reconciles, forgives, gives life, renews, sustains hope, brings peace and joy and unifies – through us.

Joan Chittister (source unknown) notes that there are three basic spiritual responses to culture:

- **The Intellectual** – a spiritual life that is creed-centred and provides a checklist of creeds and canons
- **The Relational** – a spiritual life that is committed to the development of human bondedness, of community as the pre-eminent model of the Christian life; a spirituality that comforts the oppressed but does little to change the oppression
- **The Performative** – a spirituality that is centred in transforming, compassionate action to uncover, celebrate and make known God’s kin-dom in the world and in the cosmos.

She suggests that in the 21st century, spiritualities of creed and community are no longer enough.

Christian spirituality is a spirituality of transformation – transformation of the whole community of life into a place where all are kin within a just and compassionate universe; the transformation of diverse groups and cultures into communities of respect and mutual care; the transformation of individuals into fully mature and free persons, the transformation of the Church into a more effective agent of God’s kin-dom of peace and justice and love.

In this modern painting of the meal at Emmaus (Arpana) the two disciples after recognising Jesus are ready for action. The overturned chair communicates their urgency to share the good news of Jesus’ ongoing presence with them. We are told ‘that same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem’ because their eyes had been opened and they recognised Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

**Nano Nagle’s Spirituality**

**What was Nano attentive to?** Nano was attuned to the edges of things. She was in touch with the experiences of people who were poor and pushed to the margins. She was in touch with their experiences of hopelessness and despair. She was attentive to
their needs – for education, for faith development, for a soothing word or a soothing hand. She was attentive to the political and social realities that created extreme poverty and dispossession. She was attuned to where political power was exercised. She was attuned to the Church and its evolving role in Irish society towards the end of the Penal Laws. She was attentive to the practical everyday necessities of keeping her schools functioning and establishing two religious congregations in Cork to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of these schools. She was attentive to the call of God’s spirit in the ordinary everyday realities of her life. She did not look for extraordinary signs and wonders to make her way to God. She was attentive to God in the daily relationships, commitments and activities of daily life and discerned God’s presence there. Her letters are a testament to this.

**How did Nano cultivate this attentiveness?**

We know from the few books of Nano that have survived that she read the Bible and spiritual reading books such as *Lettres Spirituelles* by Nicolas Barre and *Instructions* by Father John Gother. We know that Nano spent long hours each day in prayer and practices of penance.

Nano’s practice of fasting and of other austere practices were reminders to her of her total dependence on God. In a letter from Eleanor Fitzsimmons to Teresa Mulally we read:

> She added to her usual austerities that of fasting every Wednesday and Friday on bread and water since she left our convent and lived in her own house. She enjoined secrecy of this matter during her life to all her religious sisters. She took the discipline four times each week during the “Misereore”, she made instructions three hours each day during Lent, fasting, and passed eleven hours last Holy Thursday night before the Blessed Sacrament, kneeling all that time, as she was never seen to sit whenever it was exposed. (Walsh p 368)

In spite of bodily pain, she did not fail to spend hours in prayer. Dr Coppinger records (Walsh p 393):

> To form an idea of the spirit, that animated her prayer, you must be told a circumstance, which her death alone disclosed to her pious companions. In paying the last attentions to her dead body they found that her knees had been long in a state of ulceration, and then only could they account for the uneasiness, which she appeared to struggle with during this exercise. — What anguish must she have felt, while from five o’clock in the morning until nine these exoriated joints were daily applied to the ground? What renewed pang when her evening devotions were as regularly prolonged in the same unaltered posture! At Christmas, during her spiritual retreat of eight or ten days, which she made every year, and on Holy Thursday nights, which she spent on her knees in presence of the Most Adorable Sacrament ‘till morning, what pain must she not have felt?

We can assume from her background and from the name that she gave her new Society of Sisters that Nano had a devotion to the Sacred Heart. We are told by M Bernard Stewart OSB in a letter to Sr Camillus in 1969 (Raphael Consедин pbvm, *Listening Journey* pp 12,13):

> In 1730 she [Nano] was sent to school at Ypres, being twelve and remained four years till she was 16... There is also a tradition that Nano entered [there] but remained only a short time as a Jesuit Confessor advised her to return to Ireland and give herself to work for the poor of that nation. In 1704 the devotion to the Sacred Heart was officially established and the pupils were enrolled. Nano established the devotion in Cork.

Gerard Moore (*The Devotional Life* in ‘Terra Spiritus’ Vol 5 Issue 2, 2009) describes devotions as being more than pious prayers; indeed, they are spiritual disciplines requiring sustained effort and application to one’s life.

> ‘Devotion’ has a sense of warmth, comfort and love. It implies sustained effort, but one that comes from the heart rather than the will alone. There is also a strong allusion to prayer, especially with the Latin word ‘vota’. Catholic devotions include intimate personal prayer, arising directly from the emotions. The devotional life is lived in a combination of good works, personal prayer and emotional engagement.
Nano’s devotion to the Sacred Heart involved all these elements.

Nano’s devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was the source of her fidelity to her mission. Sister Teresa Austin Carroll rsm wrote in 1867:

“No doubt it was only in firm reliance on the Heart of Jesus that our young apostle could face the physical labour of her mission, to say nothing of its more repulsive features... The great devotion to the Sacred Heart that prevails in the Presentation Houses may be traced back to the days of the Foundress... This much we know for certain, that of fifty houses of the Presentation order there is not one without its confraternity of the Sacred Heart... Such are a few items in the life of her who, perhaps, did more than any other person to spread devotion to the Sacred Heart in Ireland.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the 18th century included devotion to the Passion of Christ. In a letter to Teresa Mulally 17 March 1779 Nano writes:

“It’s a good sign of our future success that we should meet with crosses in the beginning.”

And in a letter to Miss Fitzsimmons 17 December 1770 she writes:

“Whoever we live with, we must expect to have something to suffer as this world is not to be our paradise.”

In a time when Catholics did not highly value the reading of Scripture, Sister Angela Fitzsimons writes to Miss Mulally 21 May 1784 (Walsh p 368) that in the Easter Week just before her death Nano ‘had read the Passion of our Lord three times at different schools’.

Perhaps Nano’s greatest devotion to the Passion of Christ was, as Dr Coppinger (Walsh p 393) points out, her struggle against ill health as ‘a constant crucifixion of bodily indulgence’. Her devotion to the Passion of Christ was also lived out through her struggle against the social injustices that caused such suffering in the Body of Christ, the poor and needy people of Cork. And finally, her devotion to the Passion of Christ was lived out in her fidelity to the daily commitments she had made – whatever that involved; physical discomfort, begging in the streets, the tiresome negotiations to get the Ursulines to Cork, the disappointment in the Ursuline project, the constant frustration of seeing growing need and dwindling resources. Again, Dr Coppinger (Walsh p 389) sums up the passion of the fidelity to her daily commitments:

“The same laborious occupations recurred every day, and no day could charge her with ever having flinched from them.”

Like Jesus, the icon of God’s compassionate love, she came to embody God’s compassionate presence for those pushed to the edges of Cork’s society. Nano’s zeal and sheer hard work over so many years in such difficult circumstances arose from her closeness to the Heart of Jesus and her fidelity to the Gospel message to spread the Good News of God’s Love to those who are poor.

We know from several references in her letters that Nano had a devotion to Mary, the Mother of God. In her schools she promoted devotion to Mary.

“Every Saturday they all say the beads, the grown girls every evening.” (Letter to Miss Fitzsimmons, 17 July 1769)

In her letter to Miss Mulally in 1780, she describes her move from her cabin to the new convent in the midst of political disturbances in the city. She organised the move before three in the morning to avoid detection but also
so that “we were there on the Festival of our Blessed Lady, under whose protection we are. I hope she will preserve us from our visible and invisible enemies and make this house prosper and others of the same Charitable Institution in time.” In the beginning of 1783, in a letter to Teresa Mulally, Nano describes how they received a novice on the Feast of the Presentation of our Blessed Lady. We can assume that this feast was special to Nano when we read in the Annals that the new title for the congregation of ‘Sisters of the Presentation of Our Lady’ was so happily adopted by the early Presentation community.

**How was Nano intentional in her life?** How was she intentional about what she attended to in her life? Nano made choices about how she spent her time, her money, her energy, her interest, her passion. She had options in her life. She chose to be attentive to where the Spirit of God was leading her and responded with all her intelligence, her strength and her resources. She responded even when this meant having to cope with apparent failures - to be faithful to her vocation in the convent in France; to succeed in her plan for the Ursuline Sisters; to have her society of sisters on a firm footing before her death. She intentionally followed the call of the Spirit of God even when it meant giving up her comfortable lifestyle, giving up her reputation and giving up her personal safety.

Nano was intentional about the attitude she brought to her life and to the lives of others. The Evangelist Charles Swindon once wrote:

> The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past – we cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. (as quoted in Christopher Gleeson, *The Grace of Gratitude*, ‘Terra Spiritus’ Vol 5 Issue 2, 2009)

Nano’s letters reveal a woman of energy and positive outlook even when beset by challenges and difficulties. Her orientation to life, her standpoint, her approach to life was deliberately that of absolute trust in Divine Providence. Nano intentionally chose to keep going, to change her plans, to trust that God was guiding her through every step of the way. Her passion for those made poor and for changing the structures that made and kept people poor was the compass that kept her open to each step that God invited her to take.

**Nano’s spirituality was transformative.** There is no doubt that Nano’s spirituality transformed her own heart and life. Her life was turned upside down. The woman enjoying the frivolous entertainments in France is very different from the woman scandalised because of her throng of beggar’s brats.

There is no doubt that she transformed the lives of her early companions. Their fidelity and courage in the founding period of the Congregation is a testament to the spiritual heritage Nano left them and the lessons they learned from watching her spirituality in action. In spite of the fact that their early years as a Society were marked by illness, death, dire poverty and embezzlement, Mary Ann Collins could write to Teresa Mulally on the 31st March 1786 (Walsh p 370):

> ... we have the comfort to hear from the best divines in this city that there never was so much good done since Saint Patrick’s time as has been promoted by our Holy Foundress’ Establishments as they say it’s the only counterpoise to the Charter Schools and the only means to prevent the growth of Heresy...

There is no doubt of the transformative effect that Nano had on the Catholic community and on Catholic education in Cork, in Ireland and eventually in many places throughout the world. There are many testimonials to the transformative power of her own commitments, passion and attentiveness to God’s action in her life.

> What will become of the innocent orphans, hundreds of whom she drew from vice and ignorance? What will become of the sick, naked and afflicted, whom she so often relieved and comforted with her unbounded charities? The object of greatest distress was that of her greatest compassion. (Sister Ursula Kavanagh, one of the first Irish Ursulines)
They practice every religious virtue in the interior of their house, whilst they labour in the schools with most indefatigable zeal to form the tender minds of a multitude of poor children to the practice of every Christian Duty ... it seems to progress beyond all human expectation — her spirit animates the sisters that compose it - it's incredible the good they do by their charitable exertions – acquainted as I was with the venerable Miss Nagle’s views, and the great advantage her Establishment was to the great Cause of Religion... (Bishop Francis Moylan)

It is the work of Nano Nagle who, though other organisations have taken up the task she began and other agencies have carried it out on a scale that even she did not foresee, nevertheless must still be given the glory of being the mother of popular education among the Catholic peoples who speak the English tongue. (Rev P C Yorke, San Francisco 1894)

Deeds of valour are perpetuated on canvas and heroism has become immortal in marble and the pen of genius has been employed to commemorate the achievements of many a field where thousands have fought and bled. But for the meek, retiring benefactress of her race, whose career of usefulness has been among the bowels of the poor, whose path of duty led her along the dingy cottage floor or up the garret stair, that world of which she scarce was worthy has no stone or monumental bust and the eulogy of her virtues if written, must be only by Him who has promised that one cup of cold water, given in His name, shall not lose its reward. (Dean Dominic Murphy of Cork 1845)

We need not hesitate to affirm that the Church has gained more largely by the life and labours of Nano Nagle than by the exertions of anyone of her children since the days of Ignatius Loyola. (Professor William Hutch, St Colman’s, Fermoy 1875)

And of course we know from the history of the Presentation Congregations as they spread around the world that the Spirit of Nano has continued to be transformational in the lives of sisters, students, parishioners and many others over the past 225 years. The work of Presentation people in a variety of contexts has challenged unjust structures, welcomed each person and respected their dignity, and inspired people to work for an alternative society where all are included as part of the kin-dom of God.

The lantern has become the symbol of the transformative nature of the Spirit at work in the life of Nano Nagle and her followers. It symbolises light in the darkness of fear, ignorance and despair; hope in the face of overpowering injustice and oppression; and the power of even small acts of human kindness against the tide of poverty and neglect.

**Nano Nagle’s Day**
April 26th, 1976

See how the Spirit swoops down  
Deep into a woman’s heart,  
Turning her life upside down  
To build the kingdom.

Still the Spirit darts hither and yon,  
Calling together a most unlikely company,  
Linked by God’s love,  
To work beside her.

O, do not let us miss the humour of it!  
Rather, let us laugh for joy  
In our upside down world,  
Gathering straw for God’s bricks.

Raphael Consedine pbvm
Reflection Sheet 6

We Stand on Holy Ground

When a person ...

- laughs
- cries
- stands up for what is right
- hopes against hope
- accepts responsibility
- loves
- refuses to be embittered by the stupidity of life
- lives
- lives in opposition to selfishness and despair
- dies

There God’s Grace Abounds (Rahner)

Reflect on Nano’s life and fill in each of the squares with an example from her life that illustrates the word in the box. Then reflect on your Congregation as if it was a person and give examples of how your congregation reflects the word highlighted in each box. The reflect on your own life and do the same exercise.
Heart Spirituality and Temple Spirituality

I am standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me.
I am stronger for their courage, I am wiser for their words.
I am lifted by their longing for a fair and brighter future.
I am grateful for their vision, for their toiling on this earth.

We are standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before us.
They are saints and they are humans, they are angels, they are friends.
We can see beyond the struggles and the troubles and the challenge,
When we know that by our efforts things will be better in the end.

Chorus:
They lift me higher than I could ever fly!
Carrying my burdens away.
I imagine our world if they hadn’t tried,
We wouldn’t be here celebrating today.
We wouldn’t be so very blessed today.

I am standing on the shoulders of the ones who came before me.
I am honoured by their passion for our liberty.
I will stand a little taller, I will work a little longer.
And my shoulders will be there to hold the ones who follow me.

Joyce Johnson, Rouse Earth Mama, Love Large Album

Nano Nagle and our early Presentation foremothers have gone before us – wise women, strong women, courageous women with a vision for a world where all are welcome at the table of God's Kin-dom and with practical strategies to make that vision a reality. Their hopes, their dreams, their passion, their stories live on in us and in all the people around the world who have been inspired by or touched by the Presentation charism.

These women have left us a spiritual legacy to fuel our vision and shape the strategies to achieve it. We can access this spiritual legacy through two major Presentation images – heart and temple. These two images are central to Nano’s spiritual vision and to the two names given to her religious congregation – Sisters of Charitable Instruction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Anne M O’Leary pbvm has written a paper (part of the Presentation Conference Retreat on Presentation Spirituality and Charism) titled *What’s In a name: Exploring the Significance of the Change of Name of the Congregation Founded by Nano Nagle (1718-1784)*. This paper traces the circumstances and reasons for the change of names. I encourage you to read this paper. I am not going to explore now the reasons for the change except to say that Nano had devotion to both the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Presentation of Mary in the Temple. After the Congregation received qualified approval from Rome in 1791, Father Laurence Callanan ofm was asked by Dr Moylan to revise the Constitutions in line with suggestions from Rome. It is at this time that the sisters asked Father Callanan to devise a new name for the congregation, possibly as part of their attempts to put the congregation on firmer footing. The devotion to the Sacred Heart was not officially approved by the Church until
1794. Perhaps the sisters thought that by adopting monastic enclosure and changing the name of the congregation their group would be perceived as more stable, more in conformity with traditional Church practice and therefore more attractive to those women considering a vocation to the religious life. The Annalist of South Presentation Convent records Father Callanan’s response to the sisters’ request for a more appropriate name for the congregation:

He meekly observed that he had ever known Miss Nagle, the venerable foundress, to have had a particular and marked devotion to the festival of the Presentation Of Our Blessed Lady, and that he would not therefore feel any hesitation in giving it the name of the Presentation Order. From this time the congregation assumed this glorious title. They however only changed their appellation because they were and are, and ever will continue to be, in spirit and truth Sisters united, closely united, in word and in work, by and in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Heart Spirituality

Heart spirituality is Biblical. In the Hebrew Scriptures the Song of Songs portrays God as generous, life-giving and so compassionate that a glance of love from a human being can wound God’s heart. The image of the wounded heart of God appears again in John’s Gospel where Jesus’ side is pierced with a lance and immediately there flows out blood and water.

Expressions of heart spirituality are found throughout Christian history, in the writings of the desert fathers and mothers and in the Iconography in the East and in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux and the women mystics of the medieval period in the West. We have already discussed how Nano came in contact with the devotion to the Sacred Heart while she was at school at Ypres and established the devotion in Cork.

The spirituality of the heart is “profoundly graceful and human. It is graceful because, relying radically on God’s desire for human divine intimacy it seeks to be present to the presence of grace in the heart and to respond in love to that presence. It is human because it requires the response of our whole heart, perceiving, feeling and loving in a way that engages the total person.” (Kerrie Hide, pp 31,32)

The Sacred Heart of Jesus is an icon of God’s welcoming, inclusive and compassionate love. Mary Jo Meadows defines compassion as ‘the quivering of the heart in response to another’s suffering’ and she emphasises that
‘compassionate beings ... cannot bear to see suffering and remain unengaged.’ We read in the New testament of Jesus reaching out to those who were poor and oppressed, unable to see their human suffering and remain unengaged. He reached out to Samaritans, a mixed Jewish/Gentile race who were considered so godless that Judaism forbade any conversion of Samaritans. He reached out to women who were on the fringe of society, had no voice in public affairs, and who were screened off in the synagogue to prevent the men from being contaminated. He reached out to the sick whose illness was seen as an affliction sent by God as a punishment for sin. To the chief priests these people were ‘the rabble who know nothing about the law and are therefore damned’ (John 7:49). To Jesus they were like sheep without a shepherd, the poor who laboured and were heavily burdened.

In the Gospels there appears twelve times an expression used only to refer to Jesus or His father – ‘to be moved with compassion’. The word ‘compassion’ comes from the Latin “pati” and “cum”, which mean ‘to suffer with’. The Hebrew word for compassion, ‘rachamin’, refers not to sympathy or pity but to a movement of the womb of God, or the ‘guts’. It's God’s visceral response to a person about whom God cares very deeply. When Jesus saw pain or distress, he felt it at the centre of his being. Jesus’ compassion extended to the deepest, most vulnerable part of his whole being, permeating his whole personality so that he became the living icon of God's compassion for humanity, especially for those who are poorest and most vulnerable.

The Gospels record clearly that it was the human condition that opened the well springs of compassion in Jesus. ‘When he saw the crowds he felt compassion for them because they were distressed and dejected like sheep without a shepherd. (Mt 9:31-37) He was moved with compassion by physical pain and his many healings were acts of compassion. Jesus trembled from within at the sorrow of others; for example, he sensed the grief of the widow of Naim who was burying her only son. (Lk 7:13-16)

We know well the way in which Nano herself experienced ‘rachamin’, the movement of the womb of God, in the face of despair, hopelessness and suffering. We know that she too could not bear to see suffering and remain unengaged. The Annalist of South Presentation Convent records the story of her agitation while in the convent in France:

Some time after her arrival in France, she found her mind much agitated by the recollection of the vices she had witnessed among the poor of Ireland, during the short time she had passed in her own country:- thousands of tender babes seemed to implore her assistance; she could not get rid of the importunate idea – Tracing those vices to their true source, viz. the ignorance of religion among them, she conceived the most earnest desire of striking at the root of all their evils, by providing them with a proper means of instruction. Being, then, unprovided with property in any respect adequate to such an undertaking, and fully aware of the almost surmountable obstacles then raised by the penal laws to every laudable design, she determined to consult her Director on the matter, and to abide by his decision, depending upon God for assistance in the accomplishment of all He should require, with a courageous and generous confidence which were produced in her by Grace alone, since, by nature, she was timid and retiring. Having laid open her mind to a learned son of Saint Ignatius, and represented to him on the one hand, her original intention of embracing the religious life in France; and, on the other, the strong impulse she felt to return to her country, and devote herself to the instruction of the poor, she was strenuously recommended to follow that impulse as the voice of God. Equally obedient to the voice which called back to her country, as she had been to that, which, before, had appeared to bid her quit its shores, she promptly acted on the advice of her Director, and soon arrived in Dublin.

Nano herself became an icon of God’s compassionate love. The image of her compassionate heart is powerfully evoked in the words of Dr Coppinger (Walsh p 389):

How often have we seen her passing with steady composure through the rigors of every season to tend her little flock. How often have we seen her, after a well spent day, returning through the darkness of the night, dripping with rain, mingled in the bustling crowd, moving thoughtfully along by the faint glimmer of a wretched lantern, withholding from herself the necessities of life to administer the comforts of it to others...
Nano’s compassionate presence was felt in every garret of Cork and was spread among a wide range of those in need:

Who were the poor through whom the on-going call to conversion sounded in Nano’s heart and to whose service and evangelization she gave herself with so much insight, energy and practicality? They were, of course, the children of Cork’s poorest districts, but they were also the sick, lonely and aged whom she visited and tended in the public infirmaries and in their garrets, the prostitutes whom she was slandered for knowing and for whom she longed to build a refuge, the elderly women for whom she did build a home, the Irish exiles in the West Indies for whom she trained catechists, the adults to whom she gave religious instruction. They were those ‘disconsolate widows ... forlorn orphans ... reduced housekeepers ... superannuated tradesmen, whose various afflictions she assuaged, whose tears she dried up, whose wants she so often satisfied’. In the last two cases, Coppinger’s outmoded language hides a telling reality: ‘reduced housekeepers’ were people who, from being able to ‘keep house’ were reduced to sudden poverty; ‘superannuated’ meant ‘worn down by years and infirmity’. That is to say, Nano’s poor were not all born poor. (Raphael Consedine pbvm, Fire on the Earth p 47)

Nano’s heart was touched by the desperate lives of those around her. She felt the pain of those whose human dignity had been stripped from them. She identified with those who, because of unjust laws had been denied their religious heritage and the right to worship and to education. She suffered with those who were sick, aged, lonely or otherwise deprived of the necessities of life. Nano Nagle thus reflected in her life the preference of a compassionate and just God for those who are poor and powerless.

Nano had a desire to respond to those whose hearts were burdened and broken. She leaned heart to heart on the Compassionate One to learn how to respond with ‘rachamin’. She chose as her companions women of the heart who were close to the heart of God and who had hearts that could tend to the hearts of those in their care. This is the tradition of heart spirituality that we can access to underpin our living of the Presentation charism. Raphael Consedine’s poem, Woman of Welcoming Heart, captures the essence of Nano’s heart spirituality and the challenge of heart spirituality for those of us who live the Gospel in the spirit of Nano Nagle.

**Woman of Welcoming Heart**

They know her in the crowded lonely ways
woman of welcoming heart, whose lantern sheds
kind beams for eyes waste-misted by the weary miles,
for them her hands are open, for her their doors.
Room is made by dim and smoking fire, some small crust
Shared,
and she, receiving, knows still more to give,
and, welcomed, grows in art of welcoming.

Apart, in shadowed hours of night and dawn,
leaning heart to heart on the One who pulses life
into the lowest and least of all that lives,
she learns to unclasp the last-kept store
and lay it down in welcome: ‘Take and share.’

Until, the last loaf broken, the last wine poured,
she can dare the outer darkness, the fine-piercing sword,
and bear to be bereft ... heart-certain that beyond this last black mile
light streams from beckoning windows and from wide-flung door,
where she will hear the voice grown dear in silent listening years:
‘Woman of welcoming heart, here is your home.’
Temple Spirituality – The Feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple

The Feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple first emerged in the Eastern Church. Its origins are obscure but it is probably linked with the Basilica of Mary the New in Jerusalem, built by the Emperor Justinian and dedicated 21 November 543. In the Byzantine Church this feast is one of the twelve great feasts of the Liturgical year, called the Dodecaorton.

The Feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple appeared in the West at the end of the 14th century. Philip of Mezieres, a French nobleman, was the representative of the King of Cyprus at the papal court, and he persuaded Pope Gregory XI to introduce the feast at Avignon where it was first celebrated 21 November 1372. It has continued to be a feast of lesser observance in the West. This could be because there is no source for this feast in Scripture.

Its source is a piece of apocryphal writing that expands on Biblical themes called the Protoevangelion of James, written about 150 CE. This Greek work was known to early Christian writers such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen. It has had a great influence on Marian devotion and liturgical practice.

Kallistos Ware (The Feast of Mary’s Silence: The Entry into the Temple 21 November, ‘The Month’, August/September 1989, pp 337-341) summarises the content of the story of the Presentation in the Temple as it appears in the Protoevangelion of James:

The Protoevangelion ... begins by describing the grief of the elderly couple Joachim and Ann, who had been disappointed in their hopes of offspring. In her prayers Ann promised God that, if granted a child, whether male or female, she would dedicate it as a gift to the Lord. To her joy, soon afterwards she conceived and bore the Virgin Mary. When the child reached the age of three, Ann felt that the time had come to carry out her promise, and so she and Joachim decided to take Mary to dwell in the temple. But Joachim did not want the young child to be parted in sorrow from her parents, and so he gathered together the young girls of the neighbourhood to form an escort, carrying lamps and lighted torches in front of Mary. The plan was successful. Captivated by the torches, she joyfully followed the other children into the temple, not once looking back at her parents or weeping as she went to dwell in her new home. Zacharias the high priest welcomed her at the entrance to the sanctuary, making her sit 'upon the third step of the alter'. She dwelt day and night in the Holy of Holies, fed miraculously by the hand of an angel. When she reached the age of twelve, the priests felt that it was no longer fitting for her to remain in the holy place, and so Zacharias betrothed her to Joseph.

The Protoevangelion of James presents us with the wider story of Mary’s parentage, her birth, her vow of virginity, her marriage to Joseph, a widower with seven children (the brothers and sisters of Jesus), and the birth of Jesus. It has as its primary objective to address claims in the 2nd century that Mary was not a virgin and to demonstrate the holiness of Mary and her belonging to the royal house of David. In the stories of her early life Mary is seen as set apart with her purity unquestioned. She is kept set apart in Ann’s bedroom; she does not eat anything impure; her only visitors are undefiled Hebrew maidens. In the Temple she is fed pure food by the hand of an angel and spends her time set apart in contemplation. She leaves the Temple at age twelve, the time she would be approaching menses and thus seen as a pollution to the Temple. She is betrothed to Joseph but remains a virgin when she becomes pregnant. The Protoevangelion gives details of the birth of Jesus from the story of the mid-wife who asserts that Mary gave birth while sustaining the miracle of her virginity.
Mary’s nine years in the temple show that she is set apart for God. Given a
unique position in the whole of creation. Because she will bear God in her
womb she is presented as more holy than the Temple at Jerusalem. She is the
new Ark of the Covenant, the new Dwelling Place of God. The real sanctuary is
not the building of wood and stone but the ‘living temple’ that is the person of
the Virgin Mary. The dwelling place of God is the altar of Mary’s body and soul.

... Presentation is not primarily about offering a gift – a present. Mary’s self-giving "Fiat is
properly celebrated at the Annunciation. The Presentation is more the meeting point, and
moment of Divine Exchange, where Mary, the new Temple of the Holy Spirit is presented
to the former Temple of Judaism. The old temple recognises and makes way for the new. In
Eastern Iconography this is beautifully portrayed. In the background stands the Temple
of Jerusalem. On the steps in the foreground waits the High Priest as the parents of Mary
approach. In the centre of the Icon is Mary, being carried as if she were a child, but this is
no ordinary child. Although the figure is small in stature the artist has given Mary the
features of a mature, adult woman. In this we see an anticipation of the later time when
the Holy Spirit will overshadow her. The Eastern Church, with its theology of the Spirit, celebrates this feast as the exchange
between the Old and New Covenants. In the Western Liturgy this same thing is celebrated in the feast of the Presentation
of Jesus. On this day the Gospel of Luke is read where Simeon, as prophet of the Hebrew Covenant proclaims "Now, Lord, you
can let your servant go in peace, according to your word.” The former dispensation may graciously depart for the new has come.
The Jerusalem temple is no longer needed as the dwelling place of God's glory. There is a new indwelling of the Spirit, heralded
first in Mary (celebrated in the Eastern feast of the Presentation of Mary), and then in Jesus - celebrated in the Western feast
of the Presentation of Jesus. (Mary Coloe pbvm, Presentation Temple Spirituality, unpublished paper, June 1992)

The Eastern Liturgy sums up beautifully the significance of this feast:

Today, let us, the faithful, dance for joy, singing to the Lord with songs and hymns, venerating his hallowed Tabernacle, the
Living Ark, that contained the Word who cannot be contained. For she, a young child in the flesh, is offered in wondrous
fashion to the Lord, and with rejoicing Zacharias the great high-priest receives her as the dwelling place of God.

(Great
Vespers Presentation of the Theotokos in the Temple)

Temple Spirituality – God’s Dwelling Place

(I am grateful to Mary Coloe pbvm for permission to use material from a number of her unpublished
papers for the material in this section.)

Israel’s primary experience of God was in the act of liberation from slavery. At the waters of the Sea, and Mt. Sinai,
they came to know a God who was with them, on their side protecting and guiding them. The symbol of this God
who travelled with them was the Ark of the Covenant. When David captured the Jebusite city of Jerusalem, in
their way of thinking it meant that Yahweh had conquered the Jebusite gods, so now Jerusalem belonged to
Yahweh. As a sign of Yahweh’s military victory over the Jebusite gods, David had the Ark brought into the city
and set it up in a special Tent. David's son, Solomon, built an elaborate Temple to provide a proper house for the
Ark of God’s Presence. Jerusalem became the centre for Israel’s liturgy – the priests developed elaborate prayers,
people had special functions, there were rules about who could approach the holiest parts of the Temple. The
building of stone seemed to place Yahweh within the grasp of the people. Israel knew where Yahweh dwelt, they
could see the Temple. This was the tangible sign that Yahweh was with them. When the people walked into the
Temple on Holy Days there were the signs of God’s presence: the loud blasts of trumpets and horns, the clouds of
incense, the light of many candles reminded worshippers they were entering into the courts of God. With a
Davidic king on the throne, and the splendid Temple in Jerusalem, it seemed that Israel was permanently
guaranteed God’s salvation and blessing. Israel sensed God’s presence first of all in their lives, in the marvel of
their escape from Egypt, then in the journey to the land of Canaan, and settling there. As they sensed the
mysterious presence of God, they focused this mystery in special objects, a sacred building and priestly people. The desire for a close relationship with God reached its highest expression in the Temple, the house of God dwelling with them.

But the Temple became a dangerous symbol, for it seemed to domesticate God, bring God under the control of human cultic practices. Even as Israel’s monarchy developed, the Spirit raised up prophets who challenged Israel to centre their lives on the covenant, not to trust in the outward signs of a building or a king. The reformers kept reminding Israel that God’s covenant was conditional.

*If only you will heed his commandments. See I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing IF you obey the commandments... and the curse if you do not obey.* (Deut 11:26)

When Babylon rose in power and her armies swept down and besieged Jerusalem, captured its king and destroyed the Temple, the prophets interpreted this as an act of judgement. Israel had broken her covenant, therefore God deserted her Temple and City. This for Ezekiel was a cause for great hope. The kings, those men chosen to be the shepherds of the people had failed – now it was God who would act, to send a new shepherd.

*I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out ... I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep. I will seek the lost, bind up the injured, bring back the strayed and strengthen the weak.* (Ez 34)

As the people had lost heart with the loss of the city, their king and their Temple, so God would give them a new heart.

*I will take you from the nations and gather you form the peoples. I will sprinkle clean water over you and you shall be cleansed. I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit will I put within you. I will remove the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.* (Ez 36)

The high point of Ezekiel's vision of hope is the new Temple. The Temple built by human hands has failed and is in ruins, so now God can establish a new Temple. But this Temple is not a place that confines God, locates God's presence there and only there. The new Temple is the powerhouse, the source from which God's blessings stretch out to the whole world.

*Then he brought me to the Temple. There was water flowing from below the threshold of the Temple towards the East... This water became a river so deep it could not be measured. He told me – Wherever the river goes every living creature that swarms will live. There will be many fish...On the banks and on both sides of the river will grow trees, for food...They will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the Temple sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.* (Ez 47)

Ezekiel’s extraordinary vision expresses what Temple spirituality is about. It is the Temple that provides water to cleanse the people and bring them to life. It is the Temple waters that bring fertility to the pastures making them green and nourishing for the lost sheep of Israel. It is the Temple waters that bring fertility to the pastures making them green and nourishing for the lost sheep of Israel, It is the temple waters that provide food and healing. The Temple is no longer seen as a place where people are separated from the world; the Temple is the source of life and healing, reaching out into the arid desert places so that the dead stagnant waters can come to life. This is the vision of the Temple that God will provide – a source of healing and grace.

Construction of a new temple was begun in 537 BCE; after a hiatus, work resumed 520 BCE, with completion occurring in 516 BCE and dedication in 515. According to the Book of Ezra, rebuilding of the Temple was authorized by Cyrus the Great and ratified by Darius the Great. Five centuries later, this Second Temple was renovated by Herod the Great in about 20 BCE, also known as Herod's Temple. This new Temple mount of
God’s dwelling was reduced to burnt rubble by the armies of Titus in the year 70 CE. From this time on the Temple was no more. For both Jews and Christians this called for an entire rethinking of their theology of God’s presence, for until 70 CE the Temple had been the Holy House of God, the tangible place of God’s dwelling. The early Christians transferred the meaning of Israel’s Temple to the Christian community, so Paul could say: ‘You are God’s Temple’ (1 Cor 3:16), ‘Your body is a Temple of the Living God’ (1 Cor 6:19), and the Gospels could promise a rebuilt temple (Mk 14:58; Mt 26:61; Jn 2:19), meaning the community of believers. God dwells with us; no longer in stone and sacred sanctuaries but in the heart of the Christian community.

So you are no longer strangers or sojourners but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God’s household ... with Christ Jesus himself the cornerstone in whom all the building is knit together and grows into a Holy Temple in the Lord. In him you too are being built up into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Eph 2:19-22)

In John’s Gospel, at the heart of the final discourse in Chapters 14 and 15, the new Temple, the household of God is described as Jesus’ ongoing presence with the disciples in terms of mutual indwelling. The fourth Gospel affirms that even though the Temple lies in ruins and Jesus has returned to his Father, disciples of all ages still have communion with God. Believers are drawn into Jesus’ own relationship with his Father.

The Christian community in the mid-second century needed a vision of hope. Roman power was a constant threat and persecution could spring up at the whim of a local Roman ruler. The image of a child dancing for joy, set against the backdrop of a doomed Temple, urges the reader to look beyond the ruins of the Temple to a future that God will reveal. The child’s dance in its simplicity and vulnerability evokes a sense of trust in life’s promises and gives visual expression to the words of Jeremiah who wrote when the first temple of Solomon was destroyed and the people taken into exile in Babylon:

Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O Virgin Israel! Again you shall take your tambourines, and go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. (Jer 31:4)

Not only is the Christian community the Dwelling Place of God, but in the Pauline and Johannine writings the whole cosmos is infused with God’s presence. For Paul, since the Resurrection, ‘creation groans in an act of giving birth’ (Rom 8:22). The whole cosmos is the Dwelling Place, the oikos of God’s Spirit. John writes:

The Word became flesh and dwelt (literally tabernacled) among us. (Jn 1:14)

The Divine Mystery has plunged into nature and remains there. The Resurrection appearances dispel the fear that Jesus risen body is a ghost. Jesus, in his risen life, is still enfleshed. Matter is imbued with divinity and the active agent of this is the indwelling Spirit. So the world is rightly called to be the Temple, the Dwelling Place of God. This is powerfully expressed in John’s apocalyptic vision when evil is finally destroyed and the whole world is ready for God to reign.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying ‘Behold the dwelling of God is with humanity. God will dwell (tabernacle) with them. (Rev 21:1-3)

And I saw no Temple in the city, for its Temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. (Rev 22 ff)

The words and hope of Ezekiel achieve fulfilment in the living flesh of Jesus – the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (Jn 1:14). Jesus is the new Temple – the new dwelling place of God with us (Jn 2:21). It is Jesus who stands up in the temple, on the actual feast of Tabernacles, and says, If anyone is thirsty come to me. As scripture says, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water (Jn 8:38).
Finally, John shows us in the death of Jesus, a glimpse of the heart of God, pierced and broken to give life to the world – and again John draws on his knowledge of the Temple. One of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance, and at once blood and water flowed out (Jn 19:34). Ezekiel’s vision of the Temple, and the knowledge of the Jewish altar of sacrifice, come together in John’s picture of Jesus’ death. Jesus, the Temple of God, Jesus, the eye and the heart of God given for the world. Even as the blood and waters flow from the Temple of his body, Jesus breathes down to the faithful disciples at the foot of the cross, the new Spirit, that can give them a new heart. The people of Israel poured their libations through the pierced altar, and expressed their desire for God. In the pierced heart of Jesus, we glimpse God’s desire for us.

Nano Nagle – The eye and the heart of God

The Holy Place of Israel has become the swelling womb of a Virgin, the holy place of our own lives, the sacred sanctuary of the cosmos. The new Temple is to be God’s loving gaze, and compassionate heart for the world, fulfilling the words spoken to Solomon:

When Solomon had finished building the house of the Lord, the Lord appeared and said ‘I have consecrated this house and put my name there; my eyes and my heart will be there for all time. (I Kgs 9:4)

The eye and the heart of God – this is what Nano Nagle was as she responded to the call of God’s Spirit in her life. Nano was alive with the Spirit of God, reaching out into a world crying out to be fed and healed. The Temple can no more confine God’s loving gaze and compassionate heart than convent walls could confine Nano. Ezekiel’s Temple vision is beautifully expressed in the familiar poem of Raphael Consedine pbvm:

Take down your lantern from its niche and go out.
You may not build for yourself confining walls, and say,
‘Thus far, and thus, and thus far shall I walk
And these things shall I do and nothing more.’
Go out.

Our Spiritual Legacy

We have been richly gifted with two powerful symbols as ways of entering into and growing into our spiritual legacy. As Presentations we are Heart people and Temple people. This is the spirituality of our Presentation tradition – the challenge to be the new Dwelling Place of God in our world – no longer a static building but rather a pulsating heart that is a source of life and loving energy for our world. Temple and Heart spirituality call us to embody the Lord’s words to Solomon concerning his Temple: My eyes and my heart will be there forever. As Presentation people we are called to become for our world, God’s loving gaze and compassionate heart.
STANDING BEFORE US
Carole (Etzler) Eagleheart
Thirteen Ships album

These are the women who throughout the decades
Have led us and helped us to know
Where we have come from and where we are going
Women who helped us to grow.

Standing before us
Making us strong
Lending their wisdom
To help us along
Sharing a vision
Sharing a dream
Touching our thoughts
Touching our lives
Like a deep-flowing stream.

These are the women who joined in the struggle
Angry and gentle and wise
These are the women who called us to action
Who called us to open our eyes.

These are the women who nurtured our spirits
The ones on whom we could depend
These are the women who gave us our their courage
Our mentors, our sisters, our friends
These are a few of the women who led us
We know there have been many more
We name but a few
Yet we honour them all
Those women who went on before.
Reflection Sheet 7

Spend some time reflecting on the following questions:

- Which Nano story speaks to you most strongly of Nano as a woman of welcoming, compassionate heart?
- Which story speaks to you most strongly of Nano as a source of life and healing, bringing fertility to the arid world of injustice and hopelessness?
- How do you and the Presentation people in your area live out Heart spirituality?
- How do you and the Presentation people in your area live out Temple spirituality?
- What does a Heart spirituality and a Temple spirituality have to offer today’s world?

Spend some time praying the following prayer:

   God of the generations,
   When we set our hands to labor,
   Thinking that we work alone,
   Remind us that we carry
   On our lips
   The words of prophets,
   In our veins
   The blood of martyrs,
   In our eyes
   The mystics’ visions.
   In our hands
   The strength of thousands.

   Jan L Richardson, In Wisdom’s Path