

## Happy 10<sup>th</sup> birthday to mercy@live

I remember my tenth birthday very clearly, mainly because I just couldn't believe that I was actually ten years old. To my mind, it was a great age, and to have lived for a full decade seemed to me to be a wonderful achievement.



This month, November 2017, I feel the same way about the tenth birthday of our congregational newsletter, mercy@live. The first issue of mercy@live was sent out by email on the First Friday of November 2007 at 9am (Irish Time). Since then, in an unbroken line, 120 issues of mercy@live have reached your inboxes.

Of course, when we remember and celebrate significant birthdays, it is customary to look back, recall the beginnings and say 'thank you' for having come so far.

Our online congregational newsletter mercy@live was named after its older sibling and predecessor, the print newspaper called Mercy Live. Mercy Live was published fifteen times over five years, from 2001 to June 2006. I'm sure that you all remember the much anticipated package of Mercy Live newspapers arriving through the letter box at your community house – it was published three times a year and was packed full of interesting articles, interviews and regular feature items from members around the Congregation. A team of 'reporters', mentored by Sr. Mary Conway of the Congregational Leadership Team (CLT) 2000 – 2006, sourced the articles and spent many hours editing them and locating the perfect images to accompany them. I had the privilege of working with the Mercy Live reporters for over three years, assisting in publishing ten issues of the newspaper.

As time went on and more and more of us embraced the wonders of email, the idea of an online newsletter for the Congregation began to surface. Mercy International Association was already having great success with the weekly Mercy E-News, and the immediacy of the regular delivery of news and information was becoming more attractive than the triannual print publication, which, due to its nature, was never going to be immediate in relation to the news of the Congregation. Another factor was cost. We realised that the Content Management System required to create and publish an online newsletter only cost as much to build as one issue of Mercy Live, and it would never cost another cent after that. With

printing and postage costs rising steadily in Ireland, this made financial sense, as well as opening up new avenues for communication between the Congregational Leadership Team (CLT) and members, members and members, and members and CLT.

So, in early 2007, Fraynetwork Multimedia in Melbourne, Australia was commissioned to build the online framework for mercy@live. It was an exciting time, watching the initial designs coming through and deciding how the newsletter would look and function. I could not make up my mind whether the banner for mercy@live should be pink, purple, green, blue or yellow, as I liked all of them. What a delight it was on the day Anne Walsh of Fraynetwork said that we could have all of the colours and rotate them month after month! So that is what we did, and it has been happening ever since.

mercy@live was set up as a monthly publication – it was felt that this was frequent enough for news to be fresh while not being so frequent that it might be ignored, due to the volume of other information coming through our email inboxes. The Congregational Leadership Team members committed themselves to writing a reflective article for each issue, and this has proved to be a highlight of each issue to date. The publication of the names and obituaries of sisters who died during the preceding month is a sobering feature of each newsletter and gives us the opportunity to pray for the deceased members of our congregation. A team of mercy@live researchers, one in each Province, ensure that articles are written and submitted each month. Without this amazing commitment on their part, the newsletter would not have been so rich and interesting.

I said my farewell to working directly with mercy@live on June 5<sup>th</sup> 2015, as I had committed myself to mission with the organisation ‘Solidarity with South Sudan’. So, I published my last issue of mercy@live at 9am on the First Friday of June and headed off into the sunshine (literally!).



*Teacher Training College, Yambio, South Sudan*

Since July 2015 I have lived in Yambio, South Sudan and am tutoring in a Teacher Training College here. I teach English and Professional Studies, and have a music club for students at the weekends. This is an international, intercultural, inter-congregational project and I live in a mixed community – men and women from six different countries and nine different congregations. We are regularly joined by short term volunteers who come for a month or two and help out in the college. As I write, I have completed two years here and I am very happy.



*Graduation Day*

South Sudan is a country in the midst of turmoil and civil war. Daily we hear of violence and killings, ambushes on the roads or catastrophes of one kind or another. Extreme poverty is a reality here for most people. Our teacher trainee students are fully sponsored by supportive agencies, as not one of them would be able to afford their education otherwise. Our hope is that this new generation of trained teachers will effect change in South Sudan in years to come, so that peace will reign and that the people of this beautiful country will be enabled to develop their home. At present there are no paved roads, no communications systems, no electricity, no postal system, no social welfare system, a pitiable education and health service and no public transport system. Safe travel is only possible for those who can afford to fly.

I thank God for the opportunity to live here and to play some small part in being in solidarity with the suffering people of South Sudan.

I thank Sr. Cecilia Cadogan for inviting me to reminisce a little about mercy@live on the occasion of its tenth birthday.

Please continue to pray for peace in South Sudan.

*Ailish O'Brien rsm*

*Yambio, South Sudan*

*South Central Province*