

A reflection on the IPA story

Kathleen Tynan, PBVM

In a letter dated 17 July, 1769, Nano Nagle wrote, "For I can assure you my schools are beginning to be of service to a great many parts of the world – this [Cork] is a place of such trade ... If I could be of any service in saving souls in any part of the globe I would willingly do all in my power."

Nano's contemplative spirit gave her a vision that extended beyond the winding lanes of Cork to encompass gospel service that was global. The seeds of the International Presentation Association are in this vision.



The International Presentation Association story began in 1981 during an international meetings of congregation leaders in Rome. Several Presentation leaders were present. In breaks between sessions they met informally in a room in the Ergife Hotel. Nano's words, "there is no greater happiness than to be in union," resonated within the group and a desire to be more closely connected was born.

There is no greater happiness than to be in union

In 1984, the Australian Society hosted a national gathering to mark the 200th anniversary of Nano's death. The Society leadership at the time included sisters who had been present in 1981. Invitations were extended to Presentation leaders from across the globe. A national gathering of 280 sisters from Society became international when seven leaders from the Conference and seven leaders from the Union attended. This experience convinced sisters that more could be done together than alone. Three gatherings followed in quick succession: Mt. St. Anne's Ireland, 1985; Pune, India, 1986; Los Gatos, California, 1988. Sisters Lucy Troy (Union), Majella Kelly (Society) and Dale McDonald (Conference) formed a working group to prepare for the 1988 meeting.



Melbourne, Australia, 1984

At the same time, other connections were being made in the Presentation sphere. Sisters such as Raphael Consedine, PBVM were touching minds and hearts across the world. Symbols, songs, poetry and story have been integral to developing a sense of global connections. Raphael's poem, *Take Down Your Lantern* had brought to life the lantern as a global symbol for Presentation people.



In 1988, a new form of a global connectedness was born – International Presentation Association (IPA). An identity statement, six goals and an operational structure were developed. All Presentation sisters were to be members and the IPA was to be funded by a per capita levy.

Las Gatos, California, USA, 1988

The goals from the Los Gatos meeting gathered the hearts' desires:

- to deepen the understanding of our charism;
- to be challenged to ongoing conversion so that our lives may be characterized by an option for those made poor and powerless;
- to strengthen our efforts for justice and to develop a process to enable ustospeak and act collaboratively for justice;
- to collaborate in the development of apostolic religious life;
- to deepen a sense of unity;
- to develop a sense of a global congregation and provide a direction for mission for IPA;

The first IPA Assembly was held in 1991 and congregation leaders and provincials were delegates. On April 26, 1989, Presentation sisters across the globe committed themselves to membership in a ritual prepared by the Indian province.





International Presentation Assembly, Perth, Australia, 1991

The evolving nature of IPA is revealed in the themes and logos of the six IPA Assemblies:

- Beyond the Possible (Perth, Australia 1991) catching and stretching the imagination for mission
 Walking in the footsteps of Nano (Portarlington, Ireland, 1995) journeying to the future with Nano's eyes
 Jubilee Justice Restoring Right Relationships (Esopus, New York, USA, 1999) defining our call to the heart of justice
- A New Dreaming Seeking Wholeness of Creation (Coolangatta, Australia, 2003) evolving our understanding of restoring right relationships
- Listen to ... the cry of the earth... (Bangalore, India, 2007) bringing a contemplative awareness and presence to the life and ministry of IPA
- **Consciousness Evolving** (St. John's, Newfoundland, 2012) deepening our consciousness of the Universe Story and of the interconnectedness of the whole community of life





International Presentation Assembly, Portarlington, Ireland, 1995

After the 1989 Assembly a Presentation Network for Justice was established when each Congregation/Province appointed a Justice Contact.

In 1995, IPA chose to move "beyond the possible" and developed a statement of purpose.

Flowing from our identity as Presentation Sisters the unique purpose of IPA is to channel our resources so that we can speak and act in partnership with others for global justice.

The 1995 Assembly decided to expand the position of IPA coordinator by appointing a team consisting of three part-time members, one from each of the Units, to work with Maria Lopez, the new coordinator. The members of the team were Teresita Abraham (Zambia), Yvonne Nelson (Fargo), and Anne Lane (Wagga Wagga) A significant commitment of the Assembly was to explore obtaining NGO status at the UN.



In December 1998, the IPA Leadership Team organized a gathering for Justice Contacts in Cebu, Philippines. By the 1999 IPA Assembly, the process of obtaining consultative status as an NGO with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was almost completed. There was a growing understanding that the justice network would be integral to IPA's NGO work.

Based on a recommendation from the 1995 IPA Assembly, in July 1999, the Irish Provincials of the Union took responsibility for planning and hosting a specific three week program to deepen and nurture spirituality in keeping with the identity and unique purpose of IPA.

At the 1999 IPA Assembly, further changes were made to the staffing structure. If IPA was to be a voice for justice working for structural change with ECOSOC status at the UN, there was need for a full-time NGO representative. A new structure was established with two full-time positions — an IPA NGO Representative and an IPA Networker. Role descriptions for the IPA Networker, the NGO Representative and Justice Contacts were developed. Importantly Justice Contacts were to be participants at the next IPA Assembly. APLA (Association of Presentations in Latin America) was given representative status as a region in its own right. The mission of IPA to speak and act in partnership with others for global justice was given a sharper focus with four justice areas being named:

- women and children;
- indigenous peoples;
- environment/sustainable development;
- human rights.



With membership numbers declining significantly across IPA, financial sustainability was becoming critical. To address a lack of financial equity in the funding of IPA, it was decided that the levy for sisters in the global south would be approximately one third of that for sisters in the global north.

In early 2000, IPA was accredited as an ECOSOC NGO. Since then IPA has been actively involved in contributing papers to and participating in UN sponsored NGO conferences. The effectiveness of IPA in utilising the wealth and wisdom of sisters and co-workers across the globe has grown.

In the IPA assemblies that followed in 2003, 2007 and 2012 more time was given to link spirituality and justice in a contemplative way, to celebrate diversity and to develop connections with sisters from many cultures.

In the 2003 IPA Assembly, the presence of the Justice Contact widened the IPA tent. Leaders and Justice Contacts now worked together on ways to increase the effectiveness of the justice network. A new Identity Statement reflected a deepening understanding of how Presentation women are called to be of *service in any part of the globe* through the work of IPA. After 2003, participation by IPA members in the work at the UN began to increase. Sisters were encouraged to apply as short or long term volunteers at the NGO office. Recently representation has also included several young men and woman as IPA volunteers.

A pre-assembly experience in 2007 invited participants to visit Presentation ministry sites in India and to listen to the reality of people and Earth made poor. During the IPA Assembly participants engaged in deep listening

- to the voices of India;
- to the voices of those who had led IPA since 2003;
- to the voices of IPA membership.

The issue of sustainable funding for IPA was addressed. A fund was established by a one-time substantial contribution from each congregation/province. This enabled IPA to plan with predictability and without concerns for a decreasing revenue stream. It was a courageous and generous decision to commit to a long-term future for IPA. A finance committee was appointed to manage the fund.









In 2012, the IPA Assembly tent continued to widen with the presence of several co-workers and associates and the term Presentation People was introduced. The theme of consciousness evolving led the assembly into reflecting on the deepening challenges presented by the Universe Story, the Presentation Charism Story and the IPA Story.



International Presentation Assembly, St. John's, Newfoundland, 2012

Since the initial ritual prepared by the Indian sisters in 1989, IPA members have been nurtured and challenged by resources prepared and shared across the world. The preparation of rituals for celebrations of special significance, such as, Nano's Day, the Feast of the Sacred Heart and the Presentation Day Novena continue to invite all Presentation People to widen the tent of their prayer to be culturally inclusive.

In her report to the 1995 IPA Assembly, Sister Beth Kress reflected—"It has been my privilege to walk in and behind the footsteps of [Nano] in these infant years of the International Association.... she is a young woman teaching in San Francisco, in Negros, in Hobart, in West Ghana; she is a prison chaplain in Newfoundland, in Birmingham (U.K); she walks through the slums in Bangkok, in New York, in Lima...."

Since its first edition, *IPA Connections* has evolved to become the means by which all Presentation people walk in and behind the footsteps of Nano. Through *IPA Connections*, the spirit of Nano is encountered in sisters, associates and co-workers and in the ministry of working for structural change through the NGO portal. *IPA Connections* and the growing volume of resources available through the website nurture the deeper river from which, in turn, the life of IPA is nourished.

The IPA story began and continues to evolve from Nano's Dream.

Nano,

Your heart yearned to embrace the world, but your ways were held within narrow streets. Each day's pilgrimage was walled. You fared beyond no far seas to share God's word. No. You kindled fire on homely hearths, small sparks of hope against the dark. But within...ah, within... there blazed such fire, such beacon of desire to see the dream of God made real on earth, that still it flames to kindle other hearts afar in space and time. May we burn with like desire while here we seek to bring the dream of God alive today.

Raphael Consedine, PBVM Mission House



Used with permission - Songs for the Journey - Presentation Sisters Victoria



SISTERS WHO HAVE TRIMMED THE IPA LANTERN SO THAT ALL COULD BE THE FLAME

COORDINATORS

Beth Kress (Dubuque) 1989-1995

Maria Lopez (Newburgh) 1995 -1999

JUSTICE OFFICE CONTACT

Dorothy Scesny (Fitchburg) 1993 -1994

IPA NETWORKERS

IPA NGO REPRESENTATIVES

Angela Cameron (Wagga Wagga) 1999-2001 Annette Shears (Queensland) 2002-2004 Marlette Black (Queensland) 2004-2013 Elena Hoye (Dubuque) 2013Sharon Altendorf (Fargo) 1999-2007 Fatima Rodrigo (India) 2007-2013 Elsa Muttathu (India) 2014-

IPA LEADERSHIP

UNION

Elizabeth Starken 1989-1996 Wiona Engel 1996-2006 Teresita Abraham 2006-2008 Prema Antony 2009-2012 Mary Deane 2012-

CONFERENCE

Dale McDonald 1989-1990 Karen DuBord 1990-1991 Rosina Conrotto 1992-1996 Paula Ringuette 1997-2003 Betty Rae Lee 2003-2007 Mary Jo Wise 2008-2011 Sharon Fagan 2011-2013 Patricia Anastasio 2014-

SOCIETY

Majella Kelly 1989-1991 Angela Cameron 1991-1996 Kathleen Tynan 1996-2006 Bernadette Keating 2006-2011 Maureen Watson 2011-2016 Gabrielle Morgan 2016 -

