

Presentation Sisters eNews

November 2024



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Sisters Lawyers – Bringing Unique Perspective to Role

Written by Sr Joyce Meyer for Global Sisters Report

Sisters are lawyers? That was the question I heard one day speaking to someone about the variety of Sisters' ministries. I wonder how many other people would also be surprised.

Yes, Sisters are both civil and canon lawyers, not only in the United States but in countries all over the world. I never realised how many there are until recently when I began researching their presence. I personally became aware of this ministry for Sisters in the late 1980s when I was in Congregational Leadership. Two of our Sisters were invited by bishops from different dioceses in South Dakota to study canon law for tribunal work. I was thrilled, thinking how advantageous it would be to have female lawyers working along with priests. It would also be a bonus to have someone with these skills for internal congregational issues rather than searching for outside assistance.

Both Sisters studied canon law in Ottawa, Canada. One noted that six in her group were middle-aged women, a small part of a large group of young priests. In her group, the Sisters represented a variety of Western countries. Their presence was beginning a new movement of women's

leadership in the church. To be qualified for canon law practice, candidates must have a doctorate in church law and once qualified they may function as judges, advocates and defenders, often in marriage cases. Judges make final decisions about cases, advocates provide advice, gather evidence and prepare documents and testimony for the tribunal, and defenders uphold the validity of marriage, allegedly null, arguing for the binding force of the marriage sacrament. Along with marriage issues, canon lawyers address other issues that involve church law.

It was interesting to learn how canon law trials differ from civil ones. Canon law trials are

largely document-based, with little direct interaction between sides. Proceedings are usually closed to the public. This is in contrast to public civil law proceedings.

My understanding is that in the beginning of this movement, most Sisters were hired to work with annulment issues, but gradually their work expanded. Sisters now work with varieties of religious



Sr. Hedwig Muse, a member of the Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate of Gulu in Uganda and a civil lawyer who works for the Association of Sisters of Kenya, speaks against a proposed finance bill to the Kenyan government parliamentary committee in an undated photo. (Courtesy of Hedwig Muse)

congregational issues or those of individual Sisters. An example might be those seeking departure from their congregations or dealing with experiences of abuse. Lawyers work with land issues facing religious congregations involving conflict with dioceses. This may happen in emerging economy countries where seeking property deeds for land they have occupied for years, the Sisters suddenly discover that land given to them by a founding bishop belongs legally to the diocese, allowing the land to be taken from them without recourse. United States Sisters and those of other countries are also involved in issues over land and institutional ministries.

The first time I met an African Sister lawyer was in 2013, when Sr Romina Nyemera, a Sister of Our Lady of Good Counsel of Mbarara, Uganda, and I worked together for the Confederation of Conferences of Major Superiors of Africa and Madagascar (COMSAM). It was not long however, before other Sisters in Africa took up similar ministries. Now there are many canon and civil lawyers among them.

I understood the reason Sisters become canon lawyers, being church oriented, but wondered

why some would choose to be civil lawyers. One Sister told me that while working in parish ministry, she discovered families, particularly the most marginalised, had little understanding that they had rights and no access to legal assistance. She spoke with her superiors about this and they agreed to send her for legal education. Along with capacity to assist families in need, the Sister found that the training provided new knowledge. It also honed her thinking skills and strengthened her self-confidence and courage to stand up for the rights of others, as well as her own.

What uniqueness do Sister lawyers, canon or civil, bring to church and society? They provide a feminine viewpoint and presence. Women facing divorce or annulments may find a Sister easier to speak to and also who understands canon law processes of excommunication (time away from convent life to discern whether to stay or leave) and departure. Land and property issues of women's congregations may be more easily discussed with Sister lawyers when such issues relate to diocesan clerical structures. Abuse cases, whether external or internal to a congregation, are another topic, as are canonical issues around opening new ministries. One Sister told me of wanting to open a ministry to women in prison. Some want to start Sister law firms. It is exciting to learn about such potential initiatives.

Another surprise for me was learning that community Sisters are often mystified by the choice of one of their own to engage in law practice. Some congregational leaders also question its value, unable to recognise the gift their Sisters as canon or civil lawyers could bring to their congregations. An example of this might be assigning a Sister with a law degree as a secretary rather than supporting her in her educational expertise. Clericalism, however, could also be at play because for many years it was assumed that only priests could be canon lawyers. This bias, along with gender bias, a belief that women are not capable in this field, impedes trust in the work of Sisters. It is easy for women to internalise the church clerical system as the norm, not crediting that women could easily hold these leadership positions.

One of my friends, a canon lawyer, noted that when she was hired as tribunal leader in the 1990's women's church leadership was increasing, especially in rural areas. Sisters were being appointed as leaders of parishes, and other diocesan positions. The trend these days for women's church leadership seems to be diminishing in some parts of the world, even though the Vatican is setting a different path by appointing Sisters into dicastery leadership. We can only hope that the current synodal movement will increase recognition of women's leadership abilities.

Thinking it important to bring visibility to this role of Sisters in the church, and learning about challenges they face within their communities and outside, I decided to open a WhatsApp group for Sister lawyers in Africa, both canonical and civil, to find support and share issues with each other. (Others are welcome to join; I was limited in contacts with other continents).

One hope is that this group will foster mutual encouragement and new ideas to begin initiatives such as opening Sister-led law practices. Such offices have been particularly valuable in addressing immigration issues worldwide.

A few years ago, our two Presentation Sister canon lawyers agreed to become lobbyists in our

South Dakota state legislature to influence legislators to think about Catholic social teaching as part of policy decision-making. Although a novelty in the beginning, they quickly became influential voices on important matters that affect those made poor in our state,

I am confident that Sisters worldwide will find many avenues to use these legal skills, and I look forward to hearing their stories.

Evolving Story of Presentation Presence in Jeevan Jyothi

Taken from South India Province Newsbrief October 2024



Jeevan Jyothi Hospice

Jeevan Jyothi Hospice (JJH) is a community Care Centre for people infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS. The Presentation Sisters operating Holy Redeemer Hospital at Theni, realised in 1985 that institutionalised care only rendered to the people in need of health care was not sufficient. This realisation led them to start a community health centre through which they organised regular visits to remote areas. Through Health Awareness and Health Education Programs, field visits, house-to-house surveys, medical camps and

research on records in the hospital and laboratory, it was known that the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Theni and the neighbouring villages was on the increase. Theni is one of the districts reporting the highest HIV prevalence (1.8%) in the state of Tamil Nadu. In order to provide a holistic, comprehensive and quality health care to the sick with a preferential option for the people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS (VISION), the Sisters started JJH, which is 10kms away from Theni town.

On 31 October 2022, the foundation stone was laid. Sr Anastasia Erattachirayil took the initiation to supervise the completion of the building. JJH was blessed by most Rev Dr Anthony Pappasamy, Auxiliary Bishop of Madurai Archdiocese and opened by Ministers of the Government of Tamil Nadu. The financial support was given by Reaching the Unreached (RTU) England, through the influence of Brother James Kimpton, De La Salle Brothers.



Srs Anastasia and Lucy Sebastian were the pioneers for JJH. Since its inception in 2003 to date,

JJH remains a home of life and light for People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA). Unconditional acceptance and compassionate love offered at JJH brings life and light to the PLHA coming here. Thus, the aim is to provide Psycho Social and Spiritual support to the



PLHA. The support is community based, resulting in their acceptance and rehabilitation in the community. The dream of the Sisters is to see a society *healthy and free from HIV/AIDS*.

The objectives are charted out and the programs are organised inside and outside the hospice. In-patient care, out-patient care and community/home-based care are provided to the patients. At present there are 21 beds for men, 21 beds for women and 8

beds for children. Treatment for infections, palliative and spiritual care and the related services are provided regularly/daily to the in-patients including counselling to individuals and families.

Besides the daily sessions for physical exercises and yoga, the in-patients go for regular walks in the evenings. Evening prayers and devotional music are for patients of all creeds. The out-patients are received warmly, registered and provided with medical care, counselling and nutritional support and are closely followed up by the outreach staff of JJH. Community/home based care is provided to the PLHA, Children Infected with AIDS (CIA) and Children Affected with AIDS (CAA) through the out-reach programmes such as home visits, palliative care, meetings for PLHA, psychological support, care-givers training and referrals. Special attention is given to the CIA and CAA through children's education. Awareness programs in schools and colleges, meeting on ART, foster care meeting and children's future-orientated programs such as creating bank accounts for them and getting temporary and permanent donors for them. During family visits and counselling, the doubts of the PLHA on inheritance, property and human rights issues are also clarified by the out-reach staff.



PLHA who are unable to withstand the hardships of daily life and lacking confidence to take up a job in other places are offered work in the Hospice. Twelve such PLHA are employed inside JJH at present. JJH also explores employment opportunities and places for the PLHA in and around Theni. As a part of the out-reach programs, economic support is provided to the

PLHA. Health Mela are organised, World Aids Day and the common cultural festivals are celebrated inside and outside the Hospice. JJH has organised training camps for CHAI members and for Tamil Nadu state AIDS Control (TANSAC); has supported outreach staff of Community Care Centre (CCC). In recognition of the work of JJH, the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) has accredited JJH with an 'A' grade.

Stigma and discrimination against PLHA is still quite strong in the communities. It happens due to irrational fear and stigma attached to the disease. The JJH outreach workers, besides the major awareness Mela's, through regular community visits, interaction with family members and meetings with communities, attempts to create and support families and community. Through meetings with Youth Clubs, Mahila Sangams and Self Help Groups etc., community support is mobilised and social acceptance is established for the PLHA.



Community Members at present (L-R): Srs Roselin Alphonse, Maria Pathiyil, Lisetta Thomas, Anastasia Erattachirayil, Stella Sousa

JJH has so far identified 2,356 PLHA, admitted 1,837, referred 2,500 to VHS Covid Treatment Centre (VCTC) and 2,252 to ART centre, started ART for 382 and an average of 20 patients receive treatment at JJH and 150 referred to PPTC. Structure is instrumental in realising the vision to the fullest with enough equipment, rooms, halls and all that is requisite in a Hospice. JJH is committed to the cause of PLHA, not alone, but in close collaboration with TANSAC, ART Centre, ICTCT, VCTC, Revised National TB Control Program and other NGOs.

Jeevan Jyothi Hospice, with its clear vision, aim, objectives and suitable programs, to a great extent is successful in providing *life and light* (as projected in its name) to people infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS in and around Theni district. We are grateful to the Donors and the benefactors for giving us the financial support for the running of the Hospice. We thank God for the past 21 years of our service in Jeevan Jyothi Hospice.

Save the Earth

Submitted by: Wania Saqin and Malka-i-Hoor (Students at Presentation Convent School, Peshawar, Pakistan)



Every week we have a specific topic on which teachers and students practice during the week. This week's topic was *Save the Earth*.

Different classes presented speeches, dialogues, dances and skits. They were quite enjoyable and informative. Our Class 9 presented a skit on 4 November 2024 to create awareness about the causes and effects of climate change. In our presentation we displayed a live interview of Mother Earth. Mother Earth spoke and discussed how the wrong activity of human beings have destroyed her beauty and nature and how upset she is over the destruction of her.

Scientists have called this era *Anthropocene Epoch* which means the dominant influence of humans and their activities on the environment.

Pollution is one of the major causes of destruction of earth's beauty. Pollution is the contamination of the air, land and water collectively. The main cause of pollution is that people have always wanted more and a comfortable life but greed has led to the destruction of Mother Earth. Mahatma Gandhi once said, *There is enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed.*

Since us human beings are responsible for the destruction of Mother Earth, it is our responsibility to take care of it and work collectively to make it better and suitable for future generations. We have experienced that during the week students of our school really took care of Mother Earth.

We must follow the 3 R's—Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. Stop using plastic bags and plastic bottles. We emphasise that our farmers should avoid the excessive use of chemical fertilisers. Taking these small steps today can bring a big change tomorrow. It is the blessing of our creator that he has provided us with Mother Earth.



IPA – Eradication of Poverty Fund 2024

Each year the United Nations marks 17 October as International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. International Day for the Eradication of Poverty is a global observance dedicated to raising awareness about the ongoing fight against poverty and the need for collective action to eliminate this widespread issue. It serves as a reminder that poverty is not only a global challenge, but also a barrier to achieving social justice and sustainable development. This day encourages individuals, communities and governments worldwide to take concrete steps to alleviate poverty, empower marginalised communities and work towards a world where everyone can enjoy their basic human rights. This day offers a time to recognise the struggles and efforts of those living in poverty as well as give them a chance to make their concerns heard. The goal of eradicating poverty aligns with the heart of our Presentation charism. The Eradication of Poverty theme for 2024 was *Ending Social and Institutional Maltreatment*. This highlights two of the hidden dimensions of poverty too often experienced by people in poverty.

Each year the International Presentation Association identifies projects for the Eradication of Poverty Collection. This year, Conference of Presentation Sisters North America named the Missionary Sisters of the Eucharist Ministries in both Guatemala and Houston Texas as the recipient of the 2024 Eradication of Poverty Funds.

Missionary Sisters of the Eucharist

The Missionary Sisters of the Eucharist was founded by Sister Anthony Marie Orland (Madre Tonia) in April 1975. Sister Tonia was a missionary in the San Francisco PBVM congregation

when she answered the call of the local Bishops to Religious Communities to found native communities of Religious.

The Mother House (which also serves as the Formation House) is in San Andreas Semetabaj,

Department of Sololá, Guatemala. The community has 50 members at this time. The Sisters speak the Mayan language of the area from which they come as well as Spanish. The Sisters in Houston have added English.

The community serves in 7 areas in Guatemala as well as in Houston. Five of the Parish Missions are very extensive and comprises several villages. The Sisters have established oratories where each village has the Blessed Sacrament and where the community can assemble for prayer, instruction and meetings. Each village has their own leadership within the Catholic Community, and they assist in training catechists, lectors and health providers. Many of the



Sisters have their certificates as CNAs and also are knowledgeable about natural medicine. They make referrals and assist the community leaders with needed resources. They also staff 2 homes for the elderly. One is a home for both men and women that is supported by the Quiche Diocese. The other is a home for abandoned elderly women, Nueva Esperanza, that Madre Tonia founded before her death. This is owned and operated by the community.

At this time the Sisters are now beginning the construction of a rehabilitation centre, Saint Maria Goretti, for women who have suffered trauma and violence in their lives and need psychological help and a place to stay during their recovery. Since 2012 the Sisters in Guatemala have been helping young people that are suffering from interfamilial violence. One of the Sisters is a clinical psychologist and has been assisting with this work. The community also has received grants to hire other psychologists so that each person would have the help needed. The Sisters realised that many could not fully recuperate where they were living and for this reason, they are now constructing the Maria Goretti Centre.

In Houston, the Sisters are working with the elderly in Assisted Living Facilities. One Sister now



Sisters in Houston with a picture of the foundress, who was a Presentation Sister for 45 years. She attracted many young women who were discerning vocations, and in 1975 she established the Missionary Sisters community in the village of San Martin Jilotepeque, Chimaltenango, Guatemala. This was in response to a request from local bishops there for the establishment of religious communities of native Guatemalans.

has her CNA and is working in Dominican Village, the only Catholic Assisted Living Facility in Houston. The other two Sisters are Health Workers and will soon apply for their CNA. The three Sisters are very active in the parish where they live as Eucharistic Ministers. Sister Leah is also Spiritual Director

of the Legion of Mary in the parish. They are also involved in the vocation program of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. They are now applying for the R1 visa for another Sister to join them as soon as possible.

This is a young community of vibrant joyful consecrated women who meet the needs of their communities where they are assigned to bringing the compassionate love of God. The Sisters call all of our Presentation Sisters their Tias (aunts) as they know that their foundress was also formed in our charism that brought her to Guatemala.

You can learn a more detailed history about the founding of the Missionary Sisters of the Eucharist in an article written by Sr Joyce Meyer for Global Sisters Report, click [here](#) to read.

Accenture 'Women on Walls' at University College Cork

As part of a new and exciting initiative entitled, *Women on Walls*, Nano Nagle is to be honoured by University College Cork, Ireland.

Women on Walls is a campaign that seeks to make women leaders visible through a series of commissioned portraits that will create a lasting cultural legacy for Ireland.

The campaign began in 2016 with the Royal Irish Academy (RIA), followed by a second campaign with the Royal College of Surgeons (RCSI) in 2019; and a third, with Dublin City University (DCU) in 2020.

In July 2024, University College Cork (UCC) joined the campaign. UCC is the first campaign to commence with a public call for subject nominations.

In October 2024, the Presentation Sisters were delighted to learn that Nano Nagle was selected as one of the nominees.

In announcing the selection, Professor John O'Halloran, President of UCC, writes,

The selection committee were hugely impressed with Nano Nagle's achievements and service to education and social inclusion. Nano Nagle's groundbreaking contributions and service to society has been rightly celebrated...



Pictured at University College Cork (UCC) are (l-r): Joanne O'Riordan, sports journalist, disability activist, motivational speaker and student of law; Caitriona Twomey, volunteer co-ordinator of Cork Penny Dinners; Dola Twomey, therapist/activist at the Sexual Violence Centre Cork; Mary Crilly, feminist activist and founding member and CEO of the Sexual Violence Centre Cork; Dr. Myra Cullinane, medical doctor, barrister and Senior Dublin District coroner; Sr. Sharon Fagan, Congregational Leader, Presentation Sisters (representing Honora 'Nano' Nagle); Dr. Naomi Masheti, psychologist, three-time UCC graduate and Programme Director of the Cork Migrant Centre. Photo credit: Clare Keogh

In November 2024, Sr Sharon Fagan, Congregational Leader of the Presentation Sisters (Union), was invited to attend a gathering at UCC where she met with the President and Dr Avril Hutch, Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, along with the other nominees who have also been selected. At this event, UCC announced that the next step is to commission new portraits of these wonderful women leaders—all of whom have links to the Munster

region and have contributed to the betterment of society. These portraits will become part of the permanent portrait exhibition at the Aula Maxima, which is situated in the Main Quadrangle at UCC.

In November 2025, the unveiling of the portrait of Nano Nagle at UCC will take place. It comes at a very fitting time, just in advance of the launch on 24 December 2025 of the celebration of the 250th Anniversary of Nano's founding of the Presentation Sisters.

What a tribute to the enduring legacy of Nano Nagle, affectionately known as 'the lady with the Lantern', that she is being honoured and celebrated in her home city of Cork in such a wonderful way in 2025.

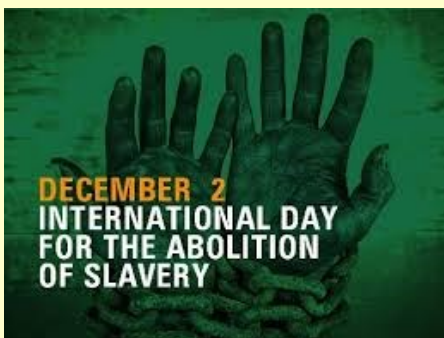
You can learn more about Accenture's *Women on Walls* campaign [here](#)

Significant International Dates in December

There are many dates throughout the month of December that hold both humanitarian and ecumenical importance. Read about them here.

2 December – International Day for the Abolition of Slavery

Latest estimates by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) show that forced labour and



forced marriage have increased significantly in the last five years. Ten million people were in modern slavery in 2021 compared to 2016 global estimates, bringing the total to 50 million worldwide. Women and children remain disproportionately vulnerable. Although modern slavery is not defined in law, it is used as an umbrella term covering practices such as forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage and human trafficking. Essentially, it refers to

situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception and/or abuse of power. Modern slavery occurs in almost every country in the world, and cuts across ethnic, cultural and religious lines. More than half of all forced labour and a quarter of all forced marriages can be found in upper-middle income or high-income countries.

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/slavery-abolition-day>

9 December – International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime



Every 9 December, the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide marks the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide—a crucial global commitment that was made at the founding of the United Nations, immediately preceding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. By General Assembly Resolution A/RES/69/323 of 29 September 2015, that day also became the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crimes of Genocide

and of the Prevention of this Crime. Every year, the Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide hosts a high-level event to observe this International Day, honouring genocide victims and marking the anniversary of the Convention.

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/genocide-prevention-day>

10 December – Human Rights Day



Human Rights Day is observed annually around the world on 10 December. It commemorates the anniversary of one of the world's most groundbreaking global pledges: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). This landmark document enshrines the inalienable rights that everyone is entitled to as a human being—regardless of race, colour, religion, sex,

language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. The Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 and sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected. As a 'common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations', the UDHR is a global blueprint for international, national and local laws and policies and a bedrock of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. It is available in 577 languages, from Abkhaz to Zulu, making the UDHR the most translated document in the world.

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/human-rights-day>

20 December – International Human Solidarity Day



The Sustainable Development Agenda is centred on people and planet, underpinned by human rights and supported by a global partnership determined to lift people out of poverty, hunger and disease. It will, thus, be built on a foundation of global cooperation

and solidarity. International Human Solidarity Day is a day to celebrate our unity in diversity; a day to remind governments to respect their commitments to international agreements; a day to raise public awareness of the importance of solidarity; a day to encourage debate on the ways to promote solidarity for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals including poverty eradication; a day of action to encourage new initiatives for poverty eradication. Solidarity is identified in the Millennium Declaration as one of the fundamental values of international relations in the 21st Century, wherein those, who either suffer or benefit least deserve help from those who benefit most. Consequently, in the context of globalisation and the challenge of growing inequality, strengthening of international solidarity is indispensable.

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/human-solidarity-day>

24 December – Anniversary of the Founding of the Presentation Sisters

On Christmas Eve we celebrate the anniversary of the founding of our Congregation. On



Christmas Eve 1775 in Cork, Ireland, Nano and three companions, Mary Fouhy, Elizabeth Burke and Mary Ann Collins founded a religious community in response to God's call to them to become consecrated women who would dedicate themselves to bearing the light of hope *to a people who walked in darkness*. Since then, Presentation Sisters have worked across the globe to secure the breadth of Nano's vision – crossing geographical, political, religious and social frontiers, bringing her vision to life with

deeds, embodying her dream through a variety of ministries, especially education, faith and spirituality, social and pastoral, health care and healing. Her vision is captured in the words that she wrote, *If I could be of any service in saving souls in any part of the globe I would willingly do all in my power.*

Next year on 24 December 2025, will mark the 250th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation. This date will launch a year of celebration in honour of the 250th anniversary.

<https://pbvm.org/who-we-are/>

Keep up to date with our Presentation Sisters, Friends of Nano and Associates around the world. If you have a story or article you would like to share, please email it to please email it to

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