



MERCY  
PARTNERS

A stylized illustration of a traditional East Asian lantern. The lantern has a dark, peaked roof and a body made of colorful, geometric panels in shades of yellow, orange, red, and grey. The text "KEEP THE LANTERN BURNING" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters on the left side of the image. A small blue horizontal bar is located in the top left corner.

KEEP  
THE  
LANTERN  
BURNING



## **Acknowledgement of Country**

**We acknowledge the First Nations peoples who live in this beautiful area, who have nurtured and cared for the land and resources for millennia and who hold deep and unbroken spiritual connection to the land.**

**We welcome the Uluru Statement from the Heart and pledge to walk with First Nations peoples on their journey toward true reconciliation and justice. We support an indigenous voice to parliament enshrined in the Australian Constitution.**

If you could see the journey whole, you might never undertake it, might never dare the first step that propels you from the place you have known toward the place you know not.

Call it one of the mercies of the road: that we see it only by stages as it opens before us, as it comes into our keeping ...





With every step you take, the blessing rises up to meet you.

It has been waiting long ages for you.

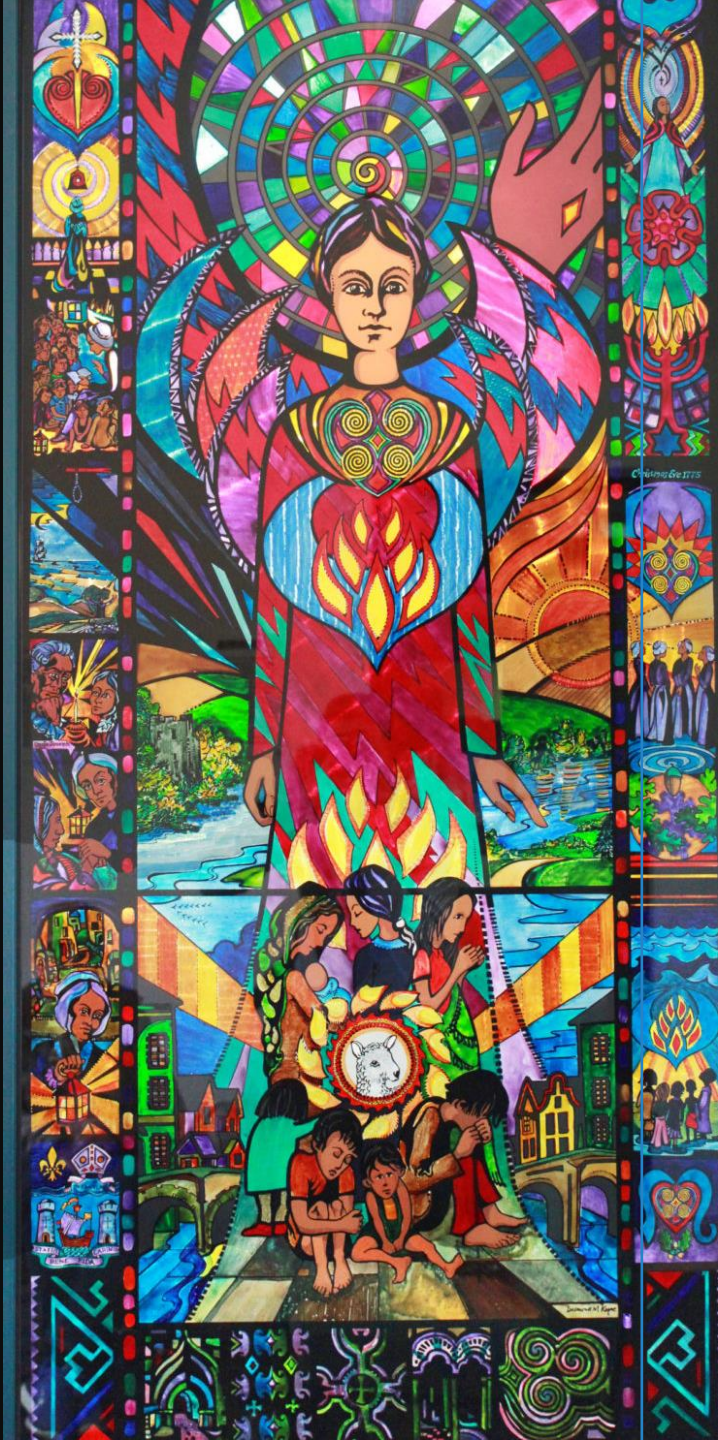
Look closer and you can see the layers of it,  
how it has been fashioned by those who walked this road  
before you,  
how it has been created of nothing but their determination  
and their dreaming,  
how it has taken its form from an ancient hope  
that drew them forward and made a way for them when no  
ways could be seen.

Look closer and you will see that this blessing is not  
finished,

That you are part of the path that it is preparing  
That you are part of how this blessing means to be a voice  
And a welcome for the way

(Jan Richardson. *Circle of Grace*. Orlando. Wanton Gospeller Press. 2015. 37)

**THE TASK OF NURTURING,  
PRESERVING AND REIMAGINING THE  
PRESENTATION CHARISM IS A  
CRITICAL WORK OF OUR TIME ... A  
NEW JOURNEY ... A CONTINUATION  
OF THE BLESSING ...**





**HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS?**

**WHAT AVENUES TO WE  
HAVE AT OUR DISPOSAL?**

**SHOULD WE BE  
REIMAGINING THE  
PRESENTATION CHARISM  
AND WHAT DOES THIS  
MEAN?**

TO NURTURE  
PRESERVE AND  
REIMAGINE  
REQUIRES  
KNOWLEDGE OF THE  
CHARISM,  
DISCERNMENT OF  
WHAT CAN BE  
NURTURED AND  
PRESERVED AND THE  
COURAGE TO LOOK  
FOR NEW PATHWAYS  
FOR CHARISM





**THE  
RESOURCE  
'KEEP THE  
LANTERN  
BURNING' IS  
DESIGNED  
TO ADDRESS  
SOME OF  
THESE  
QUESTIONS**



In its broadest definition, a **charism** is a gift of God, given to individuals to serve the good of others.

Brien and Hack describe charism as providing us with ‘... a lens through which to view the Gospel, in the hope that we will be inspired and compelled to live this call ... (2005. Charism in the Catholic School.

*Journal of Religious Education*. 53(1). 70).



Charism is the real presence of the Spirit

Charism is invisible

*Like the wind, it 'blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes ...' (John 3:8)*

Charism is real, active and moving

*Like the Pentecostal experience... 'suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind...' (Acts 2:2)*

Charism is mysterious

*We cannot define it, but we must understand it and how it works...*

**The founders themselves did not define the ministry. They did not have a strategic plan and map for what would become their ministry ... it was first an experience of the Spirit that needed time to be lived, safeguarded, deepened and constantly developed by them ....**

(Driscoll. J. Harnessing our Power through Charism.2023. CHA USA).

**CHARISM  
IS  
A  
BLESSING**





There is no doubt that charism is a blessing for ministries providing a special character that is enriching and inspirational. Marachel describes charism as giving people a road map to living the Gospel message by providing: **'A story to enter. A language to speak. A group to which to belong. A way to pray. A work to undertake. A face of God to see...**



## **ELEMENTS OF SPECIAL IDENTITY**

Rituals Prayers Celebrations Special days  
Stories Building Names Traditions Mercy History  
Heroes

Relationships Embrace of Diversity Welcome and  
Hospitality Formation Programs Support services

Mission Statement Values Philosophy

Social Justice initiatives Care for the Earth Care  
for the poor

Newsletters Publications Communication  
Transparency

Presentation Leadership and Organisation

Relationships with the Church

# CHARISM IS A CHALLENGE

For those who seek to preserve, nurture and reimagine the Presentation charism within ministries there are many challenges. Understanding the story of Nano Nagle and her particular response to God's mission is the first step. Situating Nano's story in the gospel call to radical discipleship, discerning the pressing needs of today's poor and vulnerable and developing a conceptual framework to weave these foundational imperatives into the current realities of ministries are tasks which are more complex and demanding of leaders.

Nano Nagle was a charismatic, visionary and courageous leader who responded to the challenges of her community in a radical and counter-cultural way. She used her gifts to live out God's mission as expressed in the gospels:

- leaving a path for others to follow
- sharing a particular blueprint for serving the needs of others
- giving her communities a 'spiritual personality' forged by her work with the poor of Cork.



# CHALLENGE 1

**UNDERSTAND  
WHAT CHARISM  
IS AND HOW IT  
WORKS**

The task of preserving, nurturing and reimagining the Presentation charism is one that requires understanding of the nature of charism and its role in both individual ministries and the Church more widely.

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 grey, 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 campsite. The fire had to be carried.

This was achieved by maintaining hot coals in shell cones bartered from the coastal people, like the Bunbarong. 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.<sup>2</sup>

"The charism of Nano carried in the hearts of Presentation Sisters over the years is like these coals within the shells: Nano's charism was nurtured and maintained, and its coals kept burning by constant fidelity and attentiveness."<sup>3</sup>

To carry the legacy of Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters is a work of Presentation leadership which requires constant focus and commitment. It is the responsibility of all of those who lead Presentation ministries to invite those with whom they work to walk the Presentation path. It is, as the words of Marlette Black pbvm suggest, a work of fidelity and attentiveness.

In its broadest definition, a charism is a gift of God, given to individuals to serve the good of others.

Brien & Hack describe charism as providing us with "...a lens through which to view the Gospel, in the hope that we will be inspired and compelled to live this call to discipleship."<sup>4</sup>

#### THE FOLLOWING DEFINITIONS OF CHARISM CONTAIN SOME IMPORTANT UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE NATURE OF CHARISM:

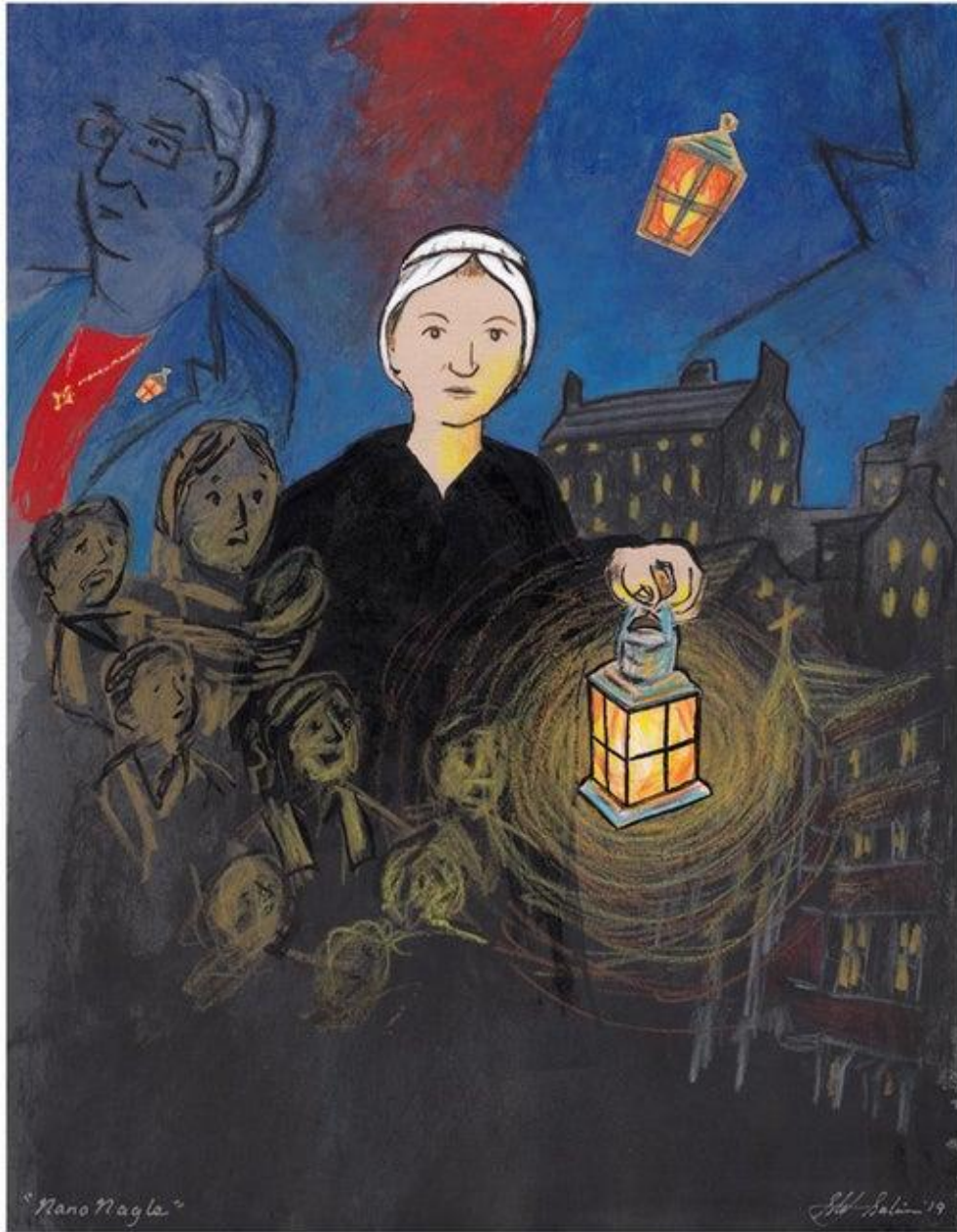
- Charism is a gift given to an individual to serve God's mission in their time and place. Nano Nagle's charism was a Gospel-centred commitment to the most vulnerable people of her society. Her gift was the ability to hear God's call to justice and the courage to act.
- Charism is grounded in the Gospel and Jesus' call to act with compassion, justice, love and other-centredness. Nano Nagle saw the face of Christ in those she served among Cork's poorest people. Her work was a response to Jesus' call to love of neighbour.
- Charism is not something owned by one person and passed onto another – charism is a spiritual energy, a way of seeing and acting that becomes part of personal or collective mission. Nano Nagle's determination to help those made poor was humble, personal and compelling. Her work served as an inspiration for others. These are the seeds of charism... the role model, the shared purpose, the legacy.
- "Charism in the collective sense is the spiritual personality of a (religious) community forged by and in its particular history."<sup>5</sup>
- "Living charism is when a group or congregation is brought to life by people who receive and respond to it, and then allow it to shape their lives."<sup>6</sup>
- "Each founding tradition...brings its own flavour, its own emphasis and focus, its own specific interpretation of the Gospel message."<sup>7</sup>
- Charism is never static. Animated by the Holy Spirit, charism is dynamic and energised. Chittister describes its nature as "mercury not clay".<sup>8</sup>
- "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... The area of need also remains constant but the specific expressions of the need may change over time, place and culture."<sup>9</sup>
- "It can be easy to approach charism as if it is a definitive checklist where items can simply be ticked off... and presume that there are established processes in place to address charism and the rich tradition will continue... that because traditions are well-established, they meet the needs of the twenty-first century, just as they always have."<sup>10</sup>

Which of these descriptions match your understanding of charism?

What challenges of charism are highlighted in these descriptions?

How does the story of the Wurrundjerri people capture the responsibility of Presentation leadership?





## For Reflection & Discussion

The following material can be used in formation sessions with staff or during retreat or reflection days. It is also useful for strategic planning sessions when mission and purpose are discussed.

### MARLETTE BLACK PBVM INVITES LEADERS TO:

"Understand the charism of the foundress Nano Nagle; appreciate the ways in which the Presentation foremothers engaged with God's mission; observe the ongoing Presentation charism revealed in the work of Presentation Sisters and discern the ways in which the Presentation charism continues to serve God's mission in response to new challenges."<sup>13</sup>

### USE THESE INVITATIONS FROM MARLETTE BLACK PBVM TO EVALUATE THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHARISM IN YOUR MINISTRY.

- How do you enhance and nurture the Presentation charism in your ministry?
- How has your ministry adapted the Presentation tradition, spirit, and charism to the contemporary context? What challenges have you faced?
- What are the key indicators of Presentation charism for your ministry?
- How does your ministry keep in contact with the Presentation Sisters?
- How is your ministry connected to the wider work of the Presentation world today?
- What are some of the stories of the local Presentation Sisters which are kept alive in your ministry?
- What are the risks to charism in your ministry? How can these risks be mitigated?
- How well is charism addressed in your strategic planning?
- If you are in a dual charism ministry - how are the Presentation heritage and spirit honoured?
- Now consider the three questions posed by Brien and Hack. Who founded us? What have we become? What are we yet to become?<sup>14</sup>

### HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO THESE QUESTIONS?



## **CHALLENGE 2**

**UNDERTAKE A  
CHARISM AUDIT**

**ASK: WHAT  
MAKES OUR  
SCHOOL  
DISTINCTIVELY  
PRESENTATION?**

# The Culture Audit

One way to examine and refresh the elements of a Presentation culture is to conduct an audit. On the following pages we present several audit schemas which focus on elements which reflect Presentation spirituality and values. They can be used with leadership teams, for induction of new leaders or for group reflection in staff meetings or reflection days.

## Audit One

This audit could be completed at a staff meeting, staff professional development or retreat day.

**Ask: can you give a concrete example for each element? What three areas could be done better?**

### THIS MINISTRY:

- is a community where positive relationships flourish
- shows compassionate concern for people
- has a clear mission statement referencing Presentation charism
- articulates a clear vision and core values in the Presentation tradition
- nurtures and grows the gifts and talents of people
- offers support and pastoral care
- celebrates through prayer, liturgy and worship
- works proactively with the wider community
- maintains connections with Presentation Sisters and other Presentation ministries
- encourages leaders who support and empower
- values and models open and inclusive communication

- values and models a collaborative approach to decision-making
- communicates Gospel values within the Presentation charism and heritage
- confronts injustice and takes action to support the vulnerable
- cares for Earth as our common home
- respects and makes each person welcome
- has a broad induction program for new staff
- has established farewell rituals when staff leave
- is committed to service
- shares resources with those in need
- has appropriate religious signs and symbols including Presentation imagery
- has ceremonies and rituals which reflect Presentation vision and mission
- supports wider ministries within the tradition, both at home and overseas

- ensures its publications reflect its vision and mission
  - honours the stories of people who personify its vision and mission
  - has policies and procedures which reflect core values
  - provides for and actively promotes professional development for all staff
  - has formation programs for all staff
  - celebrates and rewards the achievements of staff
  - has a sustained focus on the poor and vulnerable
  - models decision-making which reflects Catholic social teaching and Presentation principles
  - honours the story of Nano Nagle and the founding sisters.<sup>7</sup>
- (adapted from the work of Annette Schneider rsm)



## **CHALLENGE 3**

**CARE FOR THE POOR  
AND VULNERABLE**

**ASK: WHO ARE THE  
POOR IN OUR  
COMMUNITY?  
WHAT ARE WE DOING  
TO ADDRESS POVERTY  
AND EXCLUSION?**

Take each of these suggestions by Lyons and discuss how your ministry can respond to today's call for action for the vulnerable and those made poor.

**What social ills could you address? How can you be socially aware?**

**How can you build a Presentation network?**

**What could your ministry do differently?**

**Are there borders or boundaries you have yet to cross?**

**Is there a role for everyone in your ministry?  
How do you invite everyone to contribute?**

**What resources in your ministry do you need to care for and build up for God's mission into the future?**

**How do Marachel's descriptors of charism operate in your ministry? What else could you do?**

- **A story to enter:** How and when do you tell Nano's story and that of the Presentation women who founded your ministry? How can this be extended?
- **A language to speak:** What Presentation words, images and symbols are special to your place. How are they displayed and used? What new language is needed?
- **A group to which to belong:** How does your ministry nurture belonging?

• **A way to pray:** What prayers, rituals and celebrations are special to your ministry? What other ways of celebrating could be used?

• **A work to undertake:** What is your work? Who are you called to serve? Has this call changed?

• **A face of God to see:** What face does your ministry present to those you meet every day?<sup>8</sup>

#### CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING EXTRACTS FROM FLANAGAN

**How do these words help guide the ongoing process of reimagining?**

There is enormous work to be done at the level of signification if the prophetic Presentation song is to be interpreted and sung in our time.

It may not/will not be the exact same song that Nano sang. It cannot be, because we are in a very different place. But the basic melody will be recognizable.

Perhaps a harmony line or a descant, a base line or a chorus may be added. But the essentials of the song remain the same.

In the strengthening of our resolve to ensure the continuation of the Presentation song, we are invited to embrace the new and the untried.

We do not know what shape or form the Presentation way will take into future or how the charism will continue to evolve.

All we know is that it will be different. It will bear the hallmark of newness. There will be continuity with the past and discontinuity too, as with all evolution.

Because the Presentation charism is a living and particular refraction of the Gospel, it is dynamic. It is also enfleshed.<sup>9</sup>

**What part of the song is your ministry singing?**

**Are there 'hallmarks of newness' in your current practice?**

**What can your ministry contribute to the 'enfleshing' of Presentation charism today?**

**What 'enormous work' needs to be done to reimagine the Presentation charism into the future?**

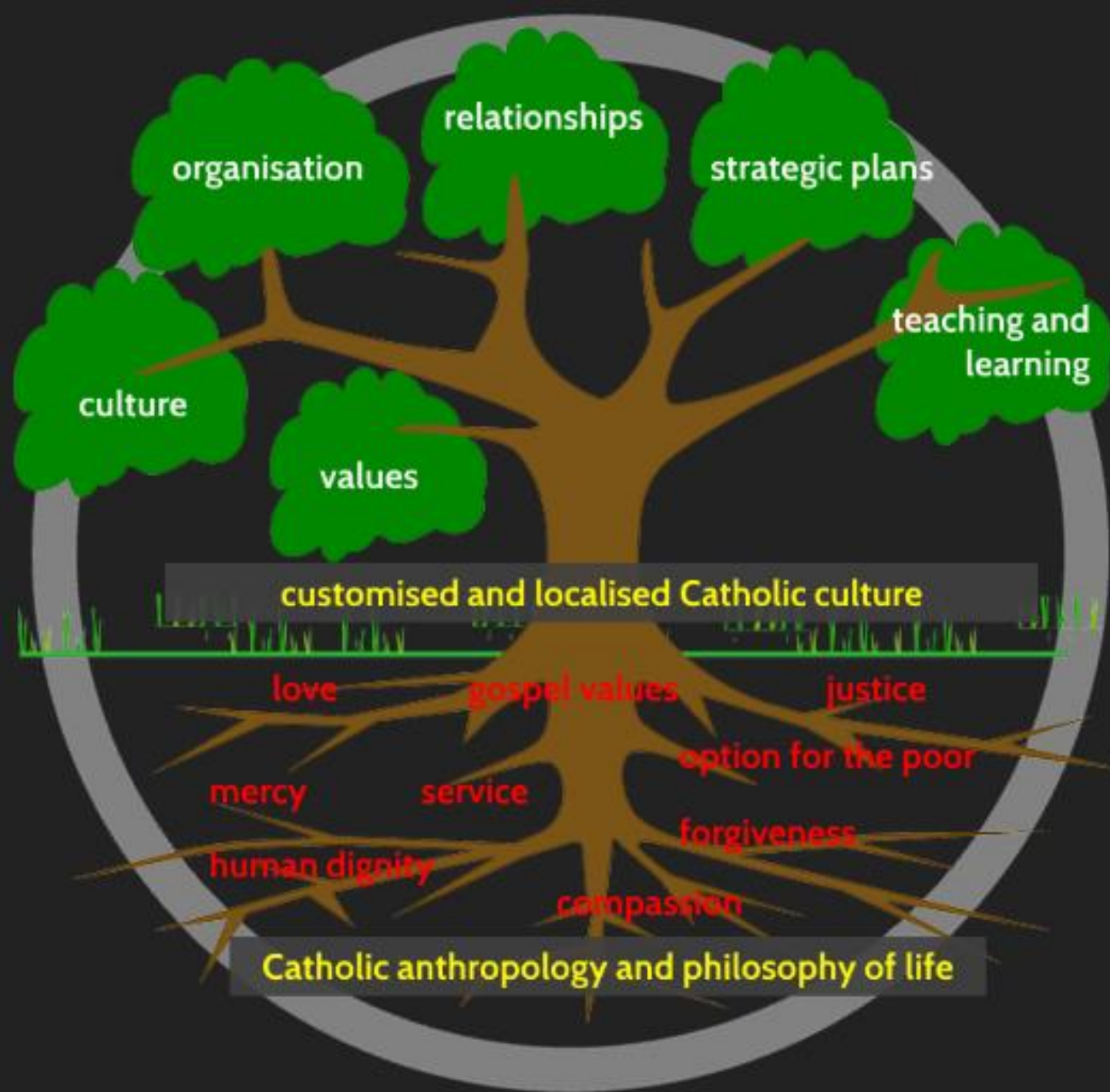
**What would you like your ministry to look like in fifty years time?**

Because the  
Presentation  
charism is a living  
and particular  
refraction of  
the Gospel, it is  
dynamic.



## **CHALLENGE 4**

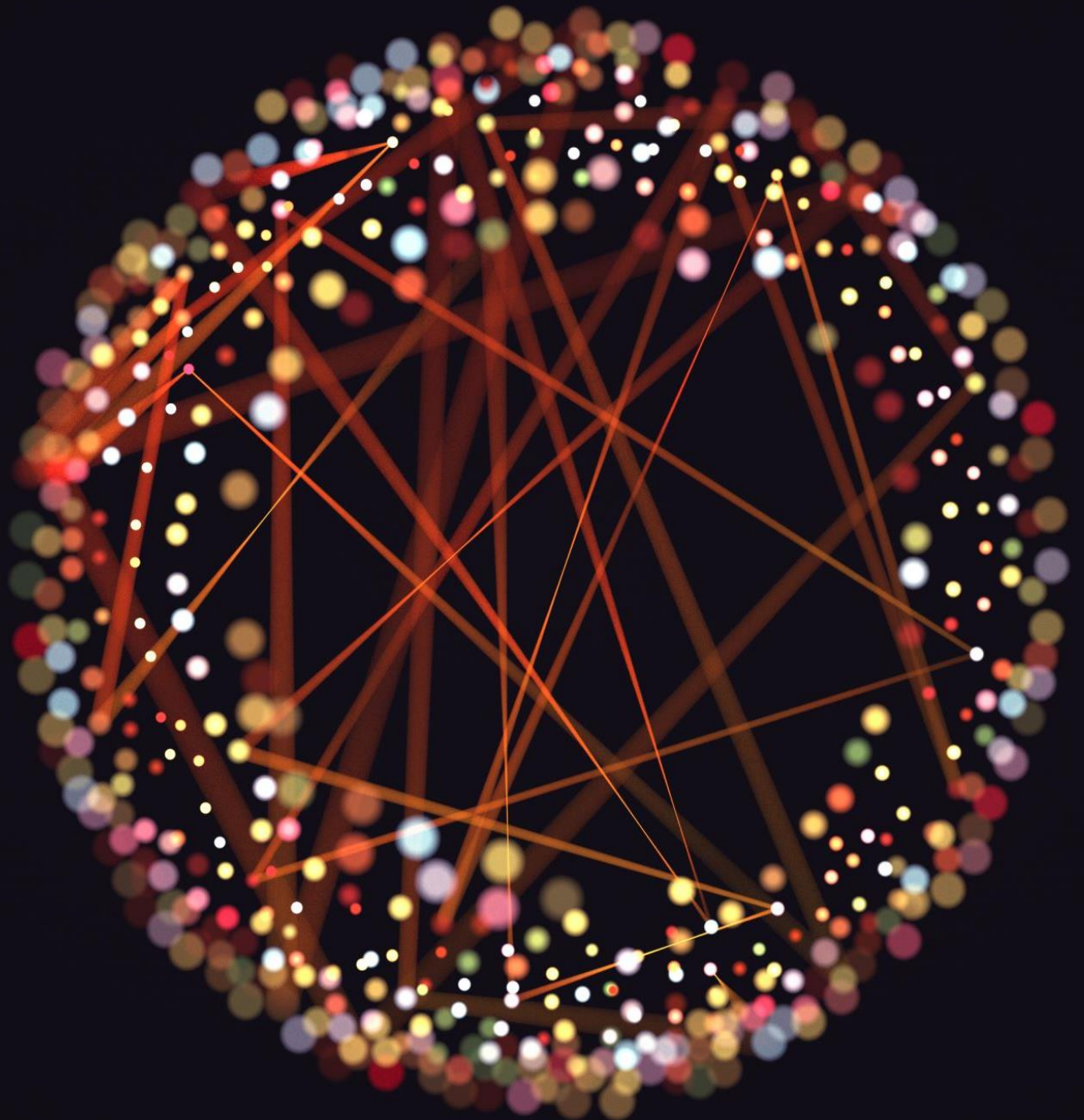
**LOOK AT HOW ALL  
ASPECTS OF YOUR  
SCHOOL SUPPORT  
YOUR PRESENTATION  
IDENTITY**



# **SYMBOLS**

**What symbols  
are sacred to  
your  
Presentation  
space?**

**How are they  
used?**





## **PRAYERS AND RITUALS**

**When is prayer used in your place?**

**Are they printed in bulletins and newsletters?**

**Do you respond to special occasions?**



## **SONG**

**How can we use school songs to touch the story of Nano Nagle?**

**How do you select songs for rituals and liturgy?**

**What contemporary hymns capture the Presentation story?**



## Reflections on the Life of Nano Nagle

"If I could be of service in saving souls in any part of the world, I would willingly do all in my power."

So prayed Nano Nagle as she walked the narrow lanes of eighteenth-century Cork, doing with singleness of purpose what lay at her door to be done. She was a woman who, in her simplicity, dared greatly... dared to let herself be guided by the Spirit of God. And when God's Spirit, like some will-o'-the-wisp on the mountains, led her from the warmth of what was safe and comfortable; out past the four walls of what was 'enough' and 'reasonable'; away past the security of the familiar, tried and proven; she followed with laughter in her heart.

(Raphael Considine pbvm. One Pace Beyond.  
Victoria: Presentation Congregation of Victoria. 1988)

**Theresa Mulally and Mary, her companion, describe their meeting with Nano Nagle.**

The first morning after our arrival in Cork, there came a rap at our chamber door at six o'clock. Miss Mulally was putting on her clothes - for it could not be called dressing - when there entered a little elderly woman with a shabby silk cloak, an old hat turned up, a soiled dark cotton gown, and a coarse cotton petticoat, drabbled halfway and dripping wet - for it had rained heavily. When she announced her name to be Nagle, they embraced for the first time with hearts congenial.

(Archives, Presentation Convent, George's Hill Dublin. 1802).

When Nano's own financial resources ran out, mirroring the life of St John of God, she, too, trusting Divine Providence, began begging to support her schools, ministry of healing, hospitality and almsgiving. The South Presentation Annalist records this story about Nano's habit of begging: She went from door to door begging a support for these schools which her own exhausted finances could not administer. In making this charitable sacrifice of her own feelings, she exposed herself to the rude refusals of some, and to the malignant sarcasms of many more...

(Bernadette Flanagan et al. Nano Nagle and an Evolving Charism.  
Dublin. Veritas. 2017. 72).

Nano Nagle's gradual awakening to the plight of the poor was certainly influenced by her experience of seeing the poor workers waiting for Mass on her way home from the ball one early morning, through Ann's selling of the silk for a future gown to buy medicine for the sick, and through her accompaniment of Ann as she made charitable visits. However, Nano had yet to realise that having made this half-unwilling response to her own honest appraisal of her life, she had yet to set her feet on a long road.

(Raphael Considine pbvm. One Pace Beyond.  
Victoria: Presentation Congregation of Victoria. 1988).

Dire poverty, loneliness, neglect, despair. This is what lay at Nano's door to be done. What lies at the door of your Presentation ministry today?

Nano 'dared greatly'. When have you been called on to 'dare greatly'?

'With laughter in her heart'. Where have you met people who could be described this way?

What impression of Nano Nagle is given in this extract?

Where do you see 'congenial hearts' in your ministry?

What does this account of Nano's need to beg for funds reveal about her approach to obstacles in her ministry?

When have you been called upon to ignore 'status and position' to serve the vulnerable or those made poor?

This extract speaks of a 'long road'. How has your awareness to the call for justice developed?

Where have your epiphany moments led you?



*Nano Nagle, Foundress of the Sisters of the Presentation*

**Today we must ask:**

**What challenges confront our communities?**

**How can Nano Nagle's example and inspiration provide a road map for our own response?**

**Are we prepared to be courageous and counter-cultural in our response to those made poor?**



**ONGOING CHALLENGE**

**DEVELOPING  
PRESENTATION PEOPLE  
AND LEADERS INTO  
THE FUTURE**

**We require continuous grappling with the meaning of our Catholic identity and its import for ministries today. Such an undertaking cannot be the project of a few individuals or occasional seminars** (Neale)





**FORMATION MUST  
BE**

**STRATEGIC ...**

**ENGAGING ...**

**RELEVANT ...**

**EMBEDDED ...**

**NURTURING ...**

**MULTI MODAL ...**



WHAT ABOUT REIMAGINING?

Before we go off reviewing, reimagining and renewing ourselves and our organisations, we have some basics to attend to.

The purpose of this reviewing, reimagining and renewing can be easily misunderstood or misinterpreted. It could amount simply to the development of new organizational visions and strategic plans, to grow strategies ... all well and good, but possibly nothing to do with our core purpose, our true identity.

Our reference point for any reviewing, reimagining and renewing must be our identity. Who are we? Why do we exist? What is our purpose? We need to get sharp clarity about these questions...

We are not reviewing our identity as a static thing, but as a living thing that evolves in relationship to, and in the context of, our world, its people, its needs.<sup>10</sup>

#### SOME KEY GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR LEADERSHIP TEAMS

How do we believe that God is active in the world?

How do we believe that we are God's presence in the world?

How do we understand the charism of Nano Nagle and her way of being God's presence in her world?

How have we used critical thinking and social analysis to understand the signs of our times?

What are the justice areas which call for our attention?

How could we address these in our ministry?

How do we frequently ask, what distinguishes this ministry from others?

Do we have a clear sense of purpose that is shared and articulated?

Do we regularly assess our behaviours and attitudes against Presentation values?

Have we made a clear distinction between words and deeds? Who we say we are as distinct from how we act in the day to day?

How prepared are we to change priorities or directions?

What has remained the same over time? What is enduring?

Have we asked what can we learn from others on the same journey?

What would Nano Nagle say to us if she visited our ministry today?

We are not reviewing our identity as a static thing, but as a living thing that evolves in relationship...





The information in this section of the resource is designed for future visioning. It could provide the content for an executive retreat or staff day on charism and identity. Suggested approaches are included in subsequent pages.

Charism is a gift given to individuals to serve God's mission in their time and place and it can never remain in that time. Charism, as a Spirit led, Gospel grounded phenomenon is dynamic and eternally evolving. Hence, the task of preserving and nurturing a Presentation charism must go hand in hand with ongoing renewal and reimagining where the Spirit is leading Presentation ministries today.

#### AS LENNAN REMINDS US:

"... we must live our faith and exercise leadership in a way that is based on authentic discernment of the tradition and is attuned to the contemporary context... leaders must continue to discern the direction of the Spirit through openness to Scripture, the signs of the times, and the belief in the action of God in the world today.... In the midst of this, our challenge is to bring creativity to bear, while risking the vulnerability which comes from being open to the new." <sup>2</sup>

The task of reimagining the Presentation charism and identity of a ministry is therefore complex and rewarding. There are many questions and no clear road maps for success. Some of the questions that need to be asked are:

**How do you apply Presentation history and tradition to current discernments?**

**How should you translate the Presentation heritage into today's realities, challenges and possibilities?**

#### What aspects of Nano Nagle's story provide guides for reimagining the charism?

While there are no definitive answers, a close examination of the life of Nano Nagle and the contribution of the Presentation Sisters to communities across the globe should give us some directions – lantern rays for reimagining the Presentation charism today.

#### ANNE LYONS PBVM PRESENTS THE FOLLOWING IDEAS ON REIMAGINING THE PRESENTATION CHARISM:

- **"...find an entry point in human life"** where you can make a difference.<sup>3</sup>

There are many social ills needing to be addressed and it is impossible to help everyone. But you can make a difference to some and this is the Presentation call.

- **Build strong networks** – Nano had contacts and supporters – you can't do these things alone.
- **Break boundaries and cross borders** – think wider than your place "move to the peripheries – to life on the razor's edge".<sup>4</sup>
- **Be imaginative in seeking new pathways.** Just because things have always been done in a particular way, doesn't mean you can't change direction.
- **Never "underestimate the importance a single person can have".** Nano Nagle, like many of the founders of religious orders, began her ministry alone – her work attracted like-minded people – this is the way of charism.<sup>5</sup>

- **Be a role model, a trailblazer and pathfinder** – inspire others. Use every opportunity to tell the story of the founder, to 'show' others the opportunities which exist to help others.<sup>6</sup>
- In the words of Nano Nagle, "The Almighty makes use of the weakest means," so **trust in God that you have a place, however small.**
- **Be a good steward:** ensure your ministry lives on.
- Like our founder we are meant to **be socially aware**, reading the contemporary culture with eyes of faith, refusing to be deterred by obstacles.<sup>7</sup>
- **Be alert to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor.** Read, research and discover where you can make a difference through advocacy, encouragement or support.
- **Keep the story and vision of Nano Nagle alive** and relevant to new generations. People are inspired by stories of men and women who achieve great things. Speak about Nano Nagle and her dream for a fairer world.

Leaders must continue to discern the direction of the Spirit.



**FOR  
SUCH  
A  
TIME  
AS  
THIS.**



**From the Book of Esther 4:1-16**