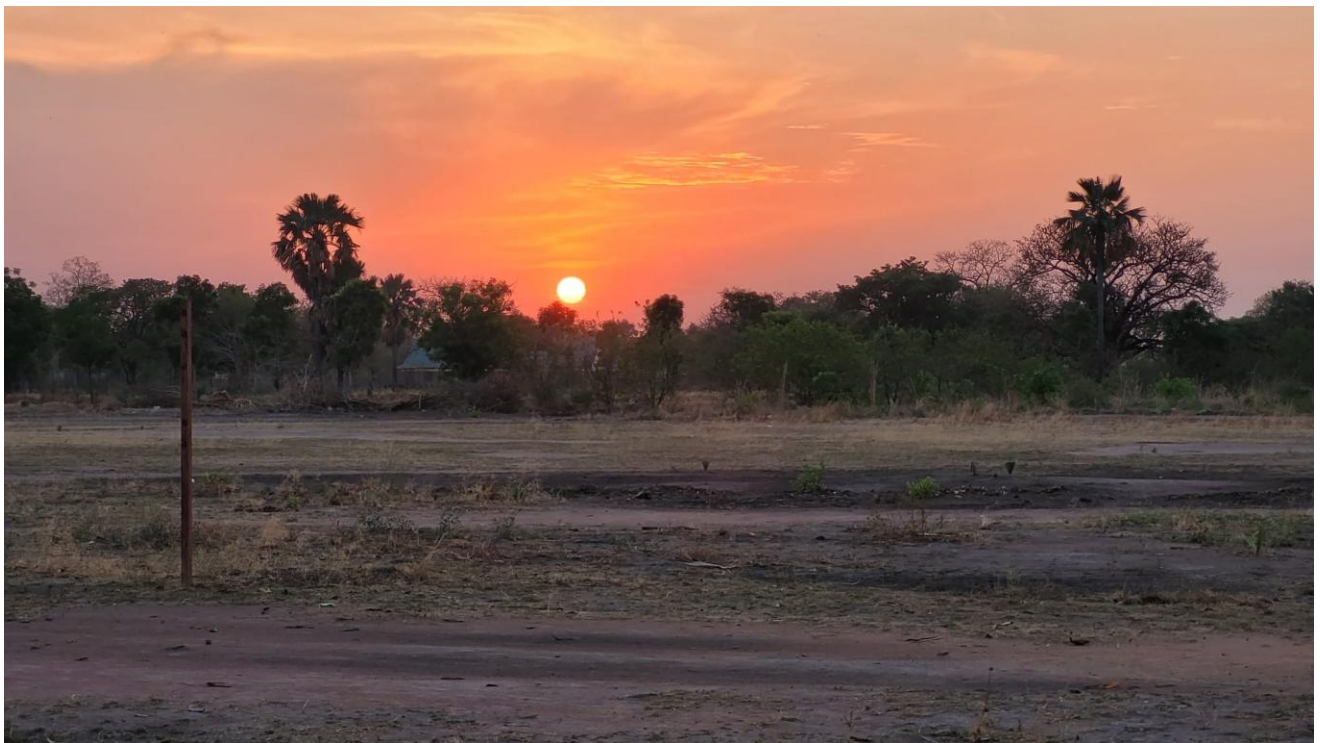


# MARY WARD INTERNATIONAL IRELAND



## ANNUAL REPORT January to December 2024



**Partnership for Development and Mission**

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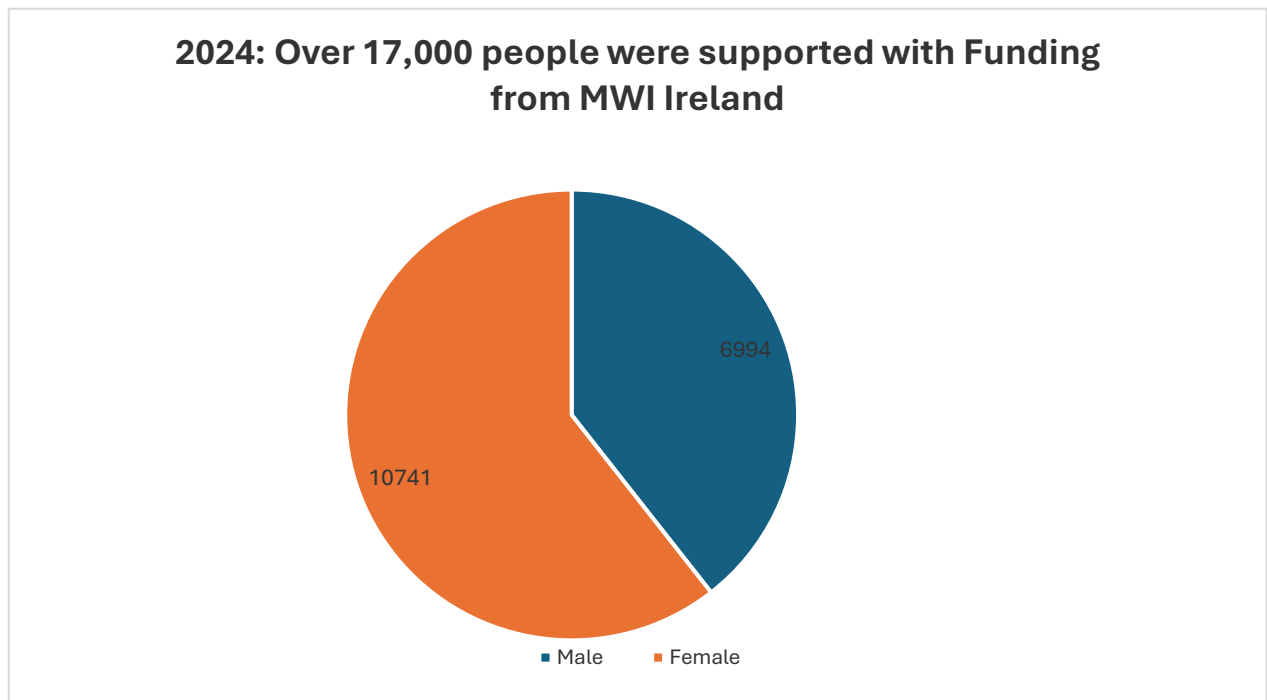
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## 2024 - IMPACT ACHIEVED

The development work supported through MWI Ireland is transformational. The presence and work of the Loreto Sisters shine a light for people, many of whom endure severe hardship and trauma.



While many people have been reached, it is the individual stories that are truly inspirational. The following is a snapshot of some of the achievements of the projects in 2024.

\*\*\*\*\* **SNAPSHOT OF ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024** \*\*\*\*\*

**First Graduation of Nurses in Lukulu, Zambia:** In the remote and underdeveloped district of Lukulu, Zambia, Pat Hanvey IBVM manages the Sancta Maria College of Nursing. In 2024 the college had its first graduation of qualified nurses. The graduation itself, the first ever in Lukulu, was a special event and a major achievement. It is a symbol of hope for the people of Lukulu, not just for the College.



*Images from the graduation ceremony at the Sancta Maria College, Lukulu, Zambia.*

**First Generation to Complete School – Brickfield project in India:** In Kolkata, India the Loreto Sisters manage a holistic project supporting migrant workers in the brickfields around Kolkata. A key aspect is supporting the children to access education. One of the most remarkable achievements came in 2024 when, for the first time, children who worked in the brickfields, from the marginalised Mushar community, passed their state exams, obtaining excellent marks. This accomplishment was a historic moment, not just for the students but for the entire village. They are the first generation in their families to achieve this academic milestone.



*Left: A typical Loreto Brickfield School; Right: The six children, who attended Loreto Brickfield Schools, who became the first in their community to pass their state exams - Arti Kumari, Anjali Kumari, Prince Kumar, Ajit Kumar, Ranjan Kumar and Shivan Kumar. Shivam topped his school securing 80%.*

**Environmental Initiative - Nairobi, Kenya:** The Loreto Sisters run an environment and climate action project in Mathare slum in Nairobi. Part of the initiative was to unblock a drainage system that serves eight hundred households. The blockages were resulting in flooding and increased the risk of diseases such as malaria and cholera. The project volunteers, or “Climate Change Champions” as they were known, started by doing routine clean-ups and invited the residents around the area to join. The area Member of Parliament was impressed with their efforts and assisted in constructing a proper drainage system. As a result, the area was notably less affected by the severe flooding in Nairobi during 2024. The pictures below show the drainage system before and after the intervention of the



**Between Friends:  
Discovering Stories  
Together – Peru:** This project by Mary Ward Peru is transforming lives. Using a Peer Methodology, adolescent students are trained as reading promoters, running dynamic and interactive sessions with younger peers. This not only boosts reading and comprehension but also fosters leadership, teamwork, and socio-emotional skills.

# OPERATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The following provides an overview of some of the key operations and achievements during 2024.

## Engagements with Misesan Cara

Misesan Cara is a membership organisation that supports the development work of Irish missionary organisations. It is our biggest donor. There was a significant engagement throughout the year:

- Eight new proposals were submitted. All were approved.
- Seven reports were submitted. All were closed with positive feedback.
- Misesan Cara conducted Distant Monitoring with the Sancta Maria College in Zambia. MWI Ireland participated in facilitating this meeting and the Missionary Development Coordinator (MDC) attended the online meetings. The report stated that *“the project has had significant impact already in augmenting the coverage and quality of health care available to some of the most disadvantaged and under-resourced sub-provinces of Zambia. It is now officially functioning as a pipeline of qualified health professionals to serve in local health centres and the hospital, with the first graduation of the college completed in October 2024”*.
- The MDC attended three Misesan Cara member meetings during the year, including the AGM. The MDC also attended several other meetings organised by Misesan Cara focused on their funding schemes and processes.
- The MDC also served on a representative group of members who discussed and aimed to resolve, with management of Misesan Cara, common issues experienced by members.

## New Funding Mechanisms

- Misesan Cara developed a block-grant-type system to manage its funding called the “Member Managed Grant.” It means that members of Misesan Cara make one application, including all the projects it wishes to seek funding for, over a three-year period. Each member was assigned a “funding bandwidth” with a maximum and minimum level of funding they could apply for. For the Loreto Sisters, this bandwidth was between €400,000 and €490,000. Misesan Cara is phasing in this new system, and it comes into effect for the Loreto Sisters from 2025. In 2024 however there was significant preparatory work for MWI Ireland to meet Misesan Cara’s new requirements while also preparing project teams for a whole new system with new procedures and application forms. This preparation included four workshops with project teams and leadership as well as multiple 1-2-1 meetings and engagements.

## Organisational Capacity Assessment

- A key feature of the Member Managed Grant is the increased responsibility of the Loreto Sisters in Ireland to manage a block grant. One of the most significant pieces of work during the year was completing an Organisational Capacity Assessment. Misesan Cara commissioned this assessment to determine our capacity to manage a large grant. The assessment focused on four areas:

Governance, Development Practice, Financial Management and Safeguarding. As the development office for the Irish province, MWI Ireland was central to this assessment.

- In the process of preparing for this assessment a MWI Mission Development Strategic Document was developed by Sr Brigid Tunney which provides important guidance.
- The assessment concluded that the Loreto Sisters can manage a block grant. Nineteen recommendations were made, particularly to strengthen our governance and oversight procedures. The report emphasised the need to *“ensure that there are adequate governance structures for leadership and oversight of all Mísean Cara funded projects and in particular to ensure adequate segregation of duty between those that run the project on a day-to-day basis and those who oversee it.”*
- The report was accepted and an action plan was developed to address the recommendations made. By the end of 2024 six of the recommendations were addressed and twelve were underway. There was one longer-term recommendation that had yet to start.
- While this assessment was thorough and took a lot of time and energy, it provided an extremely useful framework to strengthen our systems and processes in managing development grants.

### **Creation of a Development Committee**

- In 2024 a new committee was set up called the MWI Development Committee. Its purpose is to act as a “critical friend” of MWI Ireland and to review and make recommendations regarding the Member Managed Grant to Mísean Cara and on policies and procedures as developed by MWI Ireland. It is an advisory committee and an important part of our overall quality assurance and organisational accountability procedures.
- The committee members are Sr Gabrielle Murphy (Chair and member of Leadership Team), Maureen O Dwyer (external advisor), Eamonn Casey (external advisor), Sr Margo Mulvey (former MDO), Mags Fitzpatrick (Finance Manager with Irish Province), Anthony Hannon (Missionary Development Coordinator) and Sr Brigid Tunney (Province Bursar). Both Maureen and Eamonn bring vast experience and very valuable insights into development work and governance.
- This committee met once in 2024, with three meetings planned for 2025. It is an important support for MWI Ireland as we implement the Member Managed Grant with Mísean Cara.

### **Collaborating with Project Teams and other MWI Offices**

2024 has been a very positive year in terms of the interactions with project teams.

- For each of the eight proposals and seven reports submitted to Mísean Cara there were several interactions by e-mail and online with the relevant project teams and with leadership. This was to ensure that the proposals and reports were of a high quality and addressed the priorities of Mísean Cara.
- Workshops were held in September and October with representatives from all project teams involved in the Mísean Cara Member Managed Grant. This included Loreto South Sudan, Mary Ward Loreto in Albania, Mary Ward International in Kenya, India and Peru, the Sancta Maria

College in Zambia and Darjeeling and Kolkata Mary Ward Social Centers in India. These workshops also included members of the relevant Province Leadership Teams. Several additional 1-2-1 meetings were held as project teams prepared their proposals for the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2025 deadline.

- A mini-Organisational Assessment was also carried out with the same project teams. Information on their governance, safeguarding and financial management systems and processes were gathered. It was clear that good systems and procedures were generally in place. Risk management emerged as an area for strengthening.

### ***Project Visits***

- In 2024 the MDC made memorable visits to South Sudan, Kenya and India to meet with the project teams and experience firsthand the impact their work was having on the local people and communities they work with. Further details on these visits are provided later in this report.

### ***MWI Network***

- In 2024 we continued the work done in previous years on building the collaboration with other Mary Ward International offices. In total there are 6 MWI offices – in Ireland, Spain, Australia, Kenya, India and Peru. We held three meetings in 2024 where we shared about the work we do and ideas on how we could collaborate better together. MWI Ireland and MWI Australia are collaborating on the reporting of projects we are both supporting in Kenya, Nepal and India. The intention is to reduce the time spent on administration and reporting for project teams.

### **Engagements with Supporters and Well-Wishers**

- MWI Ireland is truly fortunate to have several very generous well-wishers and donors. During 2024 87 donations were received in total. 5 Donations were received from one person for whom we do not have an address. For the remaining eighty-two donations:
  - ✓ 38 (46%) were acknowledged within 7 days.
  - ✓ 28 (34%) were acknowledged within 1 month. In most of these cases the delay was due to the MDC being away on project visits or annual leave.
  - ✓ 16 (20%) took longer than 1 month. In most of these cases, the donation was made online, and the person who gave the donation was not clear.
- In addition to the eighty-seven donations, seven people are donating to MWI Ireland through monthly direct debits. The total amount donated through direct debits in 2024 was €3,580.
- Sixty of the donations were designated for South Sudan. Along with the thank-you letter the donor was also sent a recent newsletter and an overview of the impact of the mission.

### **Communications, Advocacy and Development Education**

#### ***Irish Catholic Article***

- A particularly proud moment for MWI Ireland was to have an article published in the Irish Catholic Newspaper on Mission Sunday in October 2024. A 2-page article highlighted the work in South Sudan and promoted the exciting new mission in Aweil.

# Loreto Rumbek is Expanding

In 2022, five graduates of Loreto Rumbek, now working mothers in the North of South Sudan, returned to the Loreto School in Rumbek with an exciting proposition. They invited the Sisters to open a new primary school for boys and girls and a secondary boarding school for girls in their hometown called Aweil, about a 10-hour drive from Rumbek. Mary Nyanarop Ameklai and Regina Ajok Deng were 2 of these graduates. The following is an extract from an interview where they explain their motivations behind making this invitation.

**Loreto:** Nyanarop and Regina, you both belong to a group of five former Loreto students who invited the Loreto sisters to open a new school in Aweil, Northern Bahr el Ghazal. Where is this idea coming from? Why does Aweil need a Loreto school?

**Regina:** The people in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, especially women, have faced significant challenges accessing education due to the war. As a result, there is a lack of educational background and passion for higher learning in our community. I'm from Aweil, but I had the privilege of growing up in Lakes State, where I received a quality education. Now, I'm back to serve my community and make a difference.

**Nyanarop:** In Aweil, girls face significant barriers to quality education. Many drop out of school at an early age, often getting married young and missing out on opportunities for personal and professional development. The lack of dedicated boarding schools for girls is a pressing issue. Without these safe spaces, young girls often find themselves with limited options after completing primary school, frequently lead-

ing to early marriages and a cycle of unfulfilled potential.

The establishment of a Loreto school in Aweil would address these challenges directly. Loreto schools are renowned for their commitment to providing quality education and empowering students to become confident, capable individuals. The unique focus on nurturing not just academic skills but also personal development sets Loreto apart from other educational institutions.

**Regina:** In South Sudan, 2.8 million children are out of school, and the majority of them are girls. The lack of good schools and boarding facilities with strong standards, like those at Loreto, is a significant barrier. Loreto protects girls and provides them with an environment conducive to learning. If I hadn't attended Loreto, I would have likely dropped out after my first year and faced a life of early marriage and mistreatment, like many women here. Loreto Primary and Secondary is among the best schools in the country, where students gain confidence and valuable skills, even those who start school later in life.

**Nyanarop:** Loreto schools are

unique; my own journey reflects the profound impact of a Loreto education. Thanks to the skills and confidence I gained while at Loreto, I can now present myself effectively in front of others. When I moved to Aweil, my strong educational background enabled me to secure an excellent job with an NGO, competing successfully against other male applicants. Loreto's education empowered me to stand out in a competitive job market and pursue my ambitions fearlessly.

**Regina:** When I look at the five counties in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, I see a lack of representation for women in decision-making. Loreto taught me that women can achieve great things, gain respect, and participate fully in society. Many women here are suffering and being mistreated in their marriages because they lack awareness of their rights and education. That's why I believe extending Loreto Primary and Secondary to Aweil is vital. Educated women can stand up for their rights and take on leadership roles, changing societal norms gradually.

Freedom and respect are fundamental principles I hold dear.



Regina Ajok Deng, Mary Nyanarop Ameklai

Women are only respected when they are educated and aware of their rights. Without education, we will struggle to assert ourselves and gain the freedom we deserve. This is why I am passionate about having Loreto here in Aweil.

I want more girls to receive the same quality education I did and to be included in decision-making roles within the private sector, NGOs, and government. With educated women leading the way, we can create a society where mistreatment and inequality are no longer tolerated.

In our current state, women feel completely powerless, often unable

to claim ownership of their property. Even those who work hard find their assets taken by men. It pains me to see how women are treated. When we are educated, we can stand up and say, "No, I won't allow this to happen." That's why we need a school that offers quality education—so that women can claim their rights, participate in decision-making, and contribute to a better society.

**Nyanarop:** Can you help us bring this vision to life and collaborate with the Loreto sisters to educate our fellow sisters in Aweil?

**“If I hadn't attended Loreto, I would have likely dropped out after my first year and faced a life of early marriage and mistreatment, like many women here”** - Regina Ajok Deng



**Help us build a school!**

Donate now directly on our website or via bank transfer.

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Please include your name and contact

details as a reference.

# Delivering education in a nation born in conflict



The Irish Loreto sisters have been empowering young South Sudanese women for two decades, Chal Brady writes

From being exchanged for cattle to fulfil wedding arrangements, to becoming educated leaders in their community, the lives of women in South Sudan have changed dramatically due to the tireless work of the Loreto Sisters.

After an invitation 20 years ago in 2004 by the Loreto leadership team to again find their missionary spirit and engage in a programme called 'Courage to Move', the Loreto provinces began discerning where to start a new mission in a new country. The Irish sisters accepted an invitation from the Bishop of Rumbek to southern Sudan – which would later become South Sudan after the country would split. The aim was to establish a girls' boarding secondary school.

Speaking to The Irish Catholic, Loreto Sr Orla Treacy IBVM (Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary) who has been working to empower the people of South Sudan for two decades said that work to get the school up and running began "in an area where we discovered girls weren't even going to primary school, let alone secondary school, in a culture where cows are valued more than girls, more than women – they are married in exchange for a cow dowry. The education of girls was certainly something very new for the people".

While it took a number of years to get settled, not only was a boarding school started – which has 385 female pupils – a primary day school was also established. It is currently educating 1,200 boys and girls.



Sr Orla Treacy, director of the Loreto mission in Rumbek, South Sudan, walks outside the school with children in 2017.

In the boarding school, some of the girls stay 365 days a year because of the circumstances they face at home. Sr Treacy puts this down to several reasons, including escaping forced marriage, insecurity in the areas they come from – South Sudan is still reeling from years of civil war – or simply because they have travelled from so far away to go to school.

Sr Treacy said in many ways the schools is also like a women's refuge and that there would be girls coming to them aged 16-17 and may only graduate at 21.

**Healthcare Centre**  
Loreto's Mary Ward Primary Health Care Centre opened in 2018 and is the newest of the core programmes at Loreto Rumbek. The clinic serves the school and the wider community. It provides basic health education and nutrition support, water sanitation and hygiene education, maternal and well-baby care, provision of essential drugs and supplies to those with minor illnesses and conditions, support and counselling.

To support the school and the healthcare centre they have been trying to engage local qualified staff which was

difficult with South Sudan being one of the most illiterate countries in the world. To combat this they set up an internship programme so that school graduates could return for two years to assist in the schools or in the healthcare centre.

Sr Treacy explained: "So a lot of those students now would provide classroom support in the primary school, or they provide administrative support or clinic support, or in development work in different areas around the compound. And then we would support them to go to university. So today we have 60 of our graduates in university in Kenya."

**"We now have about 500 graduates who are working within the country or studying outside. But those young women are now coming back as educated young women"**

She recalls South Sudan gaining its independence in 2011 and the President Salva Kiir Mayardit telling

the nation they were not rebuilding South Sudan, but building it. "So there's a sense for us in Loreto that education is our mandate and it's education in all areas – helping to build a community. So our graduates would be studying education, healthcare, engineering, law, journalism, business, IT, all the main areas that you would want in developing and building a new country," said Sr Treacy.

"We now have about 500 graduates who are working within the country or studying outside. But those young women are now coming back as educated young women. And they are now settling, marrying and having their children – and looking to the future."

Five of their graduates who are settled and working in the northern part of South Sudan approached the mission in Rumbek 18 months ago asking if they would consider opening another mission in their area of Aweil, as the young women there were not receiving the benefits of an education. The project has since been given the green light by the congregation's leadership team in Rome and by the local

bishop.

"We had come at the invitation of the bishop, whereas this time the invitation was coming from the graduates, which was really beautiful. It was a real synodal moment for us, where it was the laity inviting us," she said. While the area is traditionally Catholic there are no religious sisters there. The hope is that construction will start in November of a day primary school for boys and girls and a girls' boarding secondary school and a small clinic – the same as Rumbek. It has the support of the bishop of the Diocese of Wau.

## Conflict

Asked about South Sudan's security and often fraught political situation, particularly with elections recently being pushed forward, Sr Treacy said: "South Sudan was born from conflict. It is about building a country from the ground up. There was a push from the international community for elections. I think locally people thought 'yes if everybody is available and able', but we still have many people in camps in neighbouring countries and while peace is coming in, people are only slowly returning. I don't think there was disappointment from a lot of us that the elections were pushed, I think people feel we are still in a transitional period."

"We are still trying to grow as a nation together, we have a lot of identities, we have a lot of challenges around building a national community so I think it will take us time to settle. In terms of the fear of the conflict, when you live in a new country like this there is always going to be anxiety but you work with the needs that are there and as missionaries we always stay with the people. We have been blessed in Rumbek that we have been able to always work, the only time we ever had to close schools was during Covid and ironically, we never got Covid in Rumbek – at least we never saw it in our clinic."

The Pope has often prayed for peace in South Sudan over the years, even making a papal visit two years to the embattled country, which had a profound impact on Rumbek's schoolchildren. Sr Treacy said: "It was a fabulous

experience, as a diocese we walked to visit the Pope. That was an extraordinary experience for the young people because they had grown up in conflict and all of a sudden they were doing a peace pilgrimage through their own country, many of whom had never seen beyond the town boundary.

"When the Pope comes to your land he brings international eyes as well and that was really positive for all of us to recognise the international, universal Church and to feel the world in solidarity with us and to feel that love and hope from the Pope, he is very strong in his desire for peace."

**"I hope we come from a very different value centre and the idea is to live among the people and to be a message of hope, a message of love to the people"**

Asked about whether Sr Treacy feels Irish people understand or value the lasting impact Irish missionaries have made all over the world in developing healthcare, education and much more, she said in it doesn't really matter if people understand the impact.

"Missionaries don't do it for the glory of others to see them. I think we do it because we feel there's a need and there's a call and we're rooted in God and we respond to that need. If it brings pride and glory to a nation, that's an extra bonus, but I don't think any missionary would ever tell you that's something that they're either disappointed about or that they're expecting."

"I hope we come from a very different value centre and the idea is to live among the people and to be a message of hope, a message of love to the people, however we do that, whether it's through education, health care, whether it's through human rights, through a direct prayer ministry, pastoral ministry, whatever it is, I think it's about bringing dignity to the people and I think that would always be what we would want as missionaries," she said.

## Social Media

MWI Ireland promotes the work of the Loreto missions with an X Account created in 2022. By the end of 2024, the account had 346 followers. A sample of tweets published during the year are below:



### *Development Education with Loreto Schools*

- The Loreto Schools in Ireland are continually active in raising awareness, and supporting, the Loreto missions. There is a particularly close connection between the schools in Ireland and their “sister” school in Rumbek, South Sudan. In 2024 a delegation from South Sudan visited Loreto Schools in Ireland to talk about their experience and plans for a new mission in Aweil. The delegation included: Elizabeth Adak – past pupil, qualified lawyer, and member of the Loreto Rumbek board of management; Mary Nyanarop – past pupil, Education officer for Norwegian Refugee Council and part of the inviting committee for Aweil; Mr. Yuga Charles – the Operations Manager for Rumbek; Helena Erler CJ - communications person in Rumbek and Orla Tracy IBVM, the Director.



Mary Nyanarop speaking to students at Loreto Secondary School, Fermoy.

## Change in Leadership

In 2024 there was a change in the leadership of the Irish Province. In September Sr Brigid Tunney's term finished and she was replaced by Sr Gabrielle Murphy. Brigid was a former Missionary Development Coordinator (MDC) for MWI Ireland. When a lay MDC was appointed in 2022 Brigid served as the link person between MWI Ireland and the Irish Province Leadership Team. Brigid was always a pleasure to work with. Her experience and wisdom were greatly valued. Gabrielle has taken over as the link person and shares her rich experience and insights.

## Plans for the Future

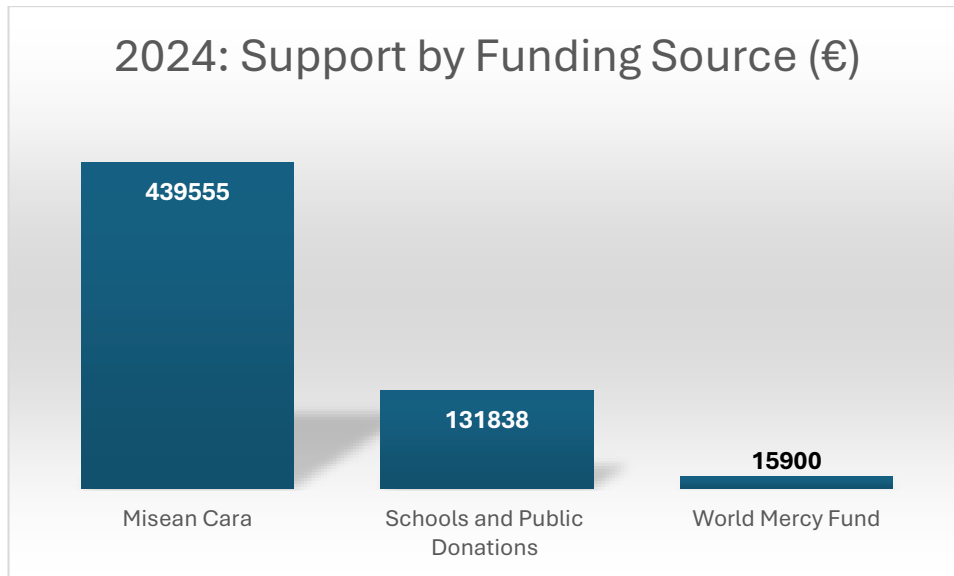
- To submit, as a key task for 2025, a strong proposal to Misesan Cara for the Member Managed grant as this will determine the level of funding the Loreto Sisters will receive from Misesan Cara over the next 3 years.
- To implement the recommendations from the Organisational Capacity Assessment and to strengthen the policies and procedures of MWI Ireland so that we manage well the block grant from Misesan Cara and any other funding received.
- To explore additional donors who may support the work of the Loreto Sisters. There will be a particular focus on identifying funding support for the new mission in Aweil, South Sudan.
- To continue to deepen the collaboration between the different MWI Offices and with Provincial and Institute leadership teams.



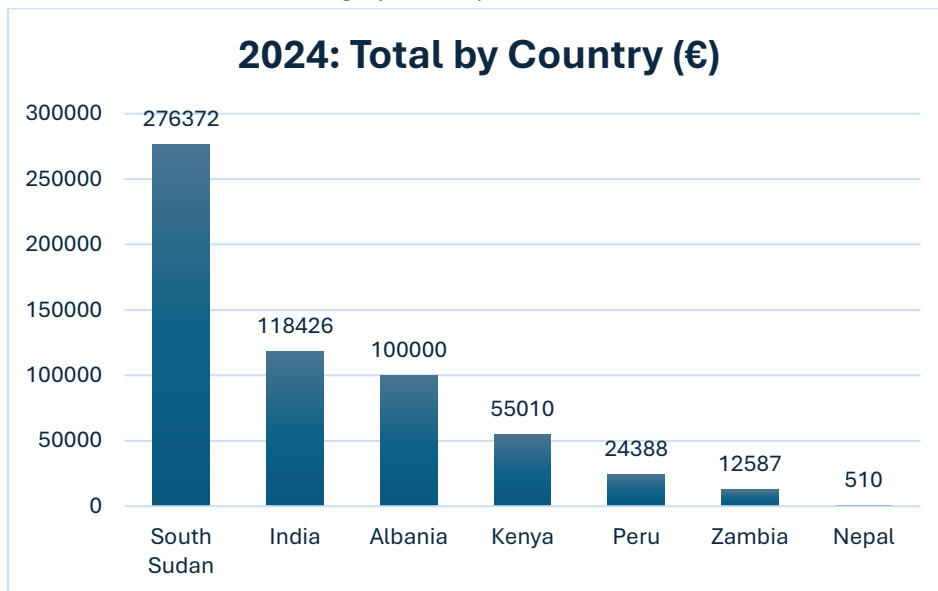
OFFICE STAFF: Anthony Hannon; Missionary Development Coordinator (MDC), MWI Ireland (full-time).

# FUNDING SUPPORT IN 2024

Over €580,000 was approved for projects during 2024. This includes funding approved by Misesan Cara and the World Mercy Fund as well as donations received from Loreto schools and supporters that were transferred to their designated projects.

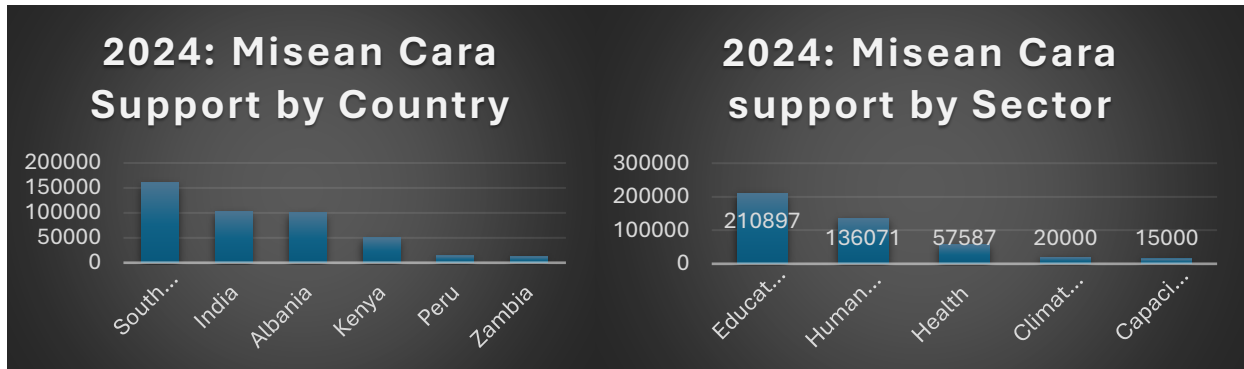


The below table breaks down this funding by country:



## Funding Support from Miseen Cara

During 2024 a total of €439,555 was approved by Miseen Cara to support eleven projects in six countries. An overview of the location and sector for this funding is provided in the tables below. MWI Ireland is very grateful for the fantastic support received from Miseen Cara.



## Grant from World Mercy Fund

A health project for Rumbek South Sudan was supported by the World Mercy Fund for €15,900. This funding needed to be transferred to South Sudan via MWI Ireland due to technical issues.

## Donations from Schools and Well-Wishers

A total of €329,264 was donated by Loreto schools and supporters in 2024. Most of this funding was designated to specific missions in Peru (€205,643) South Sudan (€102,197) and India (€16,274). The funding received for Peru included funding towards the construction of an extension for a school that is being run by Patricia McLoughlin IBVM. This will be transferred in 2025. The donation was received through a past pupil of Sr. Patricia's from her time in Loreto Gibraltar. The donor grew up in a poor Moroccan family who migrated to Gibraltar. The Loreto Sisters in Gibraltar gave him and his siblings a place in their school when others would not. He worked hard and did well. He met Patricia last year in Gibraltar and wanted to give back to the sisters in gratitude for what he received.

These donations were transferred to the designated missions or carried forward into 2025. MWI Ireland is incredibly grateful for the consistent and very generous support received.

# PROJECT VISITS

2024 was a very enlightening year for MWI Ireland. Visits were made to South Sudan, Kenya and to India. The main purpose was to deepen understanding of the context in which projects operate, meet with project teams and the people they work with, discuss plans and fulfill requirements of donors for monitoring and oversight. It was a year of immense learning.

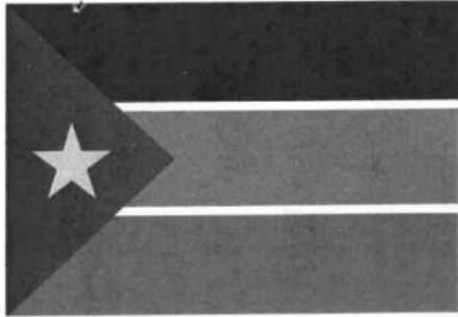
## South Sudan

In April the Missionary Development Coordinator (MDC) made his first visit to South Sudan. This visit was over 7 days and included multiple interactions with management, staff and students. He also met with the Bishop of Rumbek Diocese, the Education Manager of the diocese, the Chief of the area and the Principal of a nearby De La Salle School for boys. He spent time observing the various activities within the compound, the teaching and interactions between the students, the activities at the health center, including a vaccination camp. He met with two graduates from Loreto Rumbek who shared their experience in Loreto Rumbek and their fascinating and courageous journey in life so far. He attended a welcoming ceremony for the new students who had recently arrived to start in the girl’s secondary school. This ceremony also marked the 16th birthday of Loreto Rumbek.

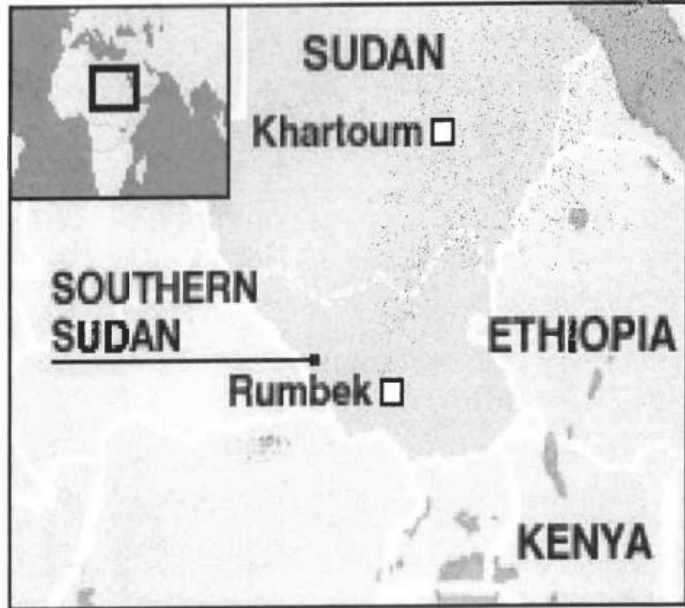


*Left: Meeting with two graduates from Loreto Girls Secondary school who are now participants in the internship programme. Right: Meeting with the local Chief.*

An aspect that struck him was the extent to which the Loreto Compound is a place of refuge and sanctuary. The sense of security, joy and hope is palpable within the walls, particularly among the girls in secondary school and the graduates who are part of the internship programme. The fact that some of the graduates from Loreto Rumbek remain on the compound during their internship, while others return to Loreto Rumbek as employees, provides strong motivation for the girls.



## **13 Girls enrolled in secondary school**



*Above: Extract from a Loreto Rumbek Newsletter in 2006. At the time only 13 girls were attending second level education in the Rumbek Diocese. In 2024, in Loreto Rumbek Secondary School alone there are 387 girls.*

*Below: A welcoming ceremony for the 1st Year students at Loreto Rumbek Secondary School.*



The compound also acts as a sanctuary for members of the community in times of immense stress and challenge. Many of the people in South Sudan experience severe hardships. Dire poverty, frequent shortages of the necessities of life, untimely deaths of loved ones, lack of opportunity, years of war and ongoing violence combine to create great trauma. For women and girls this trauma is exacerbated by social and cultural factors and by the lack of control many have over their own future. Early marriage and domestic violence are prominent and there may be nowhere for women and girls to turn to for support if

they dream of a different or better future for themselves. Loreto Rumbek is a beacon of hope in this regard and adopts a trauma-informed, empathetic approach to their work. There are mindfulness workshops, retreats and counsellors available to support the girls and staff.



*Large crowd gathered at Loreto Rumbek Health Center for vaccinations.*



*Child on their way to primary school and irrigated garden in the compound producing food for the students.*

An example of the importance and trust placed on Loreto Rumbek by the community was an incident during the MDC's visit where a mother brought her young son to the compound to ask that he be sheltered within the walls as there was a risk to his life. The boy stayed until suitable arrangements could be made for his safety.

## Kenya

After South Sudan the MDC visited Kenya. This visit was over 6 days where he met with members of the East Africa Province Leadership Team, Province Finance Team and the Province Safeguarding Officer. He also met with the Loreto Global Safeguarding Officer who is based in Nairobi but has responsibility for safeguarding across the congregation. He had several meetings and engagements with the MWI Officer for East Africa. He spent a fruitful day visiting each location of the 3 development projects currently being implemented, i.e. the Disability Inclusion, Anti-Human Trafficking and Climate Action projects. At each project he met with the Project Manager, community leaders, project volunteers and representatives of government departments. For the Human Trafficking Project, he also met with the police and with a number of survivors who generously shared their stories.

**ADVOCACY ON COUNTERING HUMAN TRAFFICKING:** The Anti-Human Trafficking project was selected to be a member of the National Consultative Forum to review the country's Counter-Trafficking Act. The government chose 3 anti-trafficking organisations, and the Loreto project was one of them. During the review Jackline Mwangela IBVM, the Project Manager, advocated for the victims of human trafficking and the supports they require in terms of medication, psychological support, education and economic empowerment. They challenged the government for lack of safehouses to protect victims and the lack of action from the government when it comes to persecuting the perpetrators.



*Members of the forum – including Sr Jackline seated first on the left.*

All three projects operate with communities living in urban slums in Nairobi. They have a deep knowledge of this context. They proactively engage with the community, raising awareness about the various issues they seek to address and visiting families in their homes to understand the challenges they face. The project manager, a Loreto Sister, acts as an organiser and facilitator. With patience and flexibility, the Sisters skilfully use their influence and connections to create a vital link between the community and the resources and expertise that is available. This approach is empowering and creates a strong sense of hope among the community. The people supported by the Disability and Human Trafficking projects reported what a positive experience it was to feel listened to and respected. For some, it was the first time in many years that they had hope for a better future.

The effects of the climate crisis are very evident. While the MDC was in Kenya, the rainfall was very heavy which was not the norm for that time of year. The slum areas are informal and built in precarious locations near rivers. Over the years floodings were getting worse with homes at risk of being washed away. The Climate Action Project was having a very positive effect with volunteers determined to change the image of Mathare. It was noted by the local government representative that the cleanest area in her jurisdiction is the area where this project is taking place.



*Right: Veronica Mwangangi IBVM – middle of the back row, Pauline Waithaka IBVM – furthest right on back row stand with members of the “Climate Champion” volunteers who collaborate with the Sisters on the Climate Action Project in Mathare slum. They were instrumental in creating the “oasis” of green in Mathare pictured on the right.*

## India

The visit to India came out of an invitation to attend the 10th birthday of the Kolkata Mary Ward Social Centre (KMWSC). This was a beautiful occasion where the work of KMWSC was celebrated. The Missionary Development Coordinator (MDC) travelled with Sr Brigid Tunney, the Irish Province Bursar and member of the Irish Province Leadership Team. They spent 2 weeks visiting various projects implemented by KMWSC. The MDC also spent 2 days in Siliguri visiting the Darjeeling Mary Ward Social Center (DMWSC).



*The 10-year celebration of KMWSC with the remarkable staff and their inspirational leader Sr Monica Suchiang*

What was striking was the proactive approach of reaching out and working with people who are among the most marginalised and disadvantaged by society. In the case of KMWSC this includes migrant workers, sex workers, victims / survivors of human trafficking and abuse and people living in very remote areas. There is a clear strategy to reach those often not seen or heard. In the case of DMWSC it is the tea plantation workers, many of whom are fourth-generation descendants of the original labourers. They have spent their entire lives on plantation land without owning any property and have no alternative sources of livelihood or accommodation. Their deep-seated disempowerment leaves them unable to access the legal and statutory remedies available to them.



*Anthony and Brigid meeting with a community group living on the remote Sundarban islands on the Ganges delta.*



*Left: A child using solar lamps provided by KMWSC to do their homework in the Sundarbans where electricity is often unreliable. Right: Anthony and Brigid visit the Sonagachi red light district and meet with some of the women and children supported by KMWSC.*

The focus on empowerment was also striking. Staff are fearless in their support. They have the confidence in their professionalism to counter apathy when it is encountered, particularly in dealing with police and others in authority. Because of their lived experience and the traumas they have endured, the people can have extremely low self-esteem and feel great shame. Perhaps the most significant impact observed was the restored dignity people felt through their interactions with the project staff. They felt listened to, supported and respected. They had a sense of hope for the future. They had hope for their children, that they may be the generation that breaks the intergenerational poverty and oppression. This was particularly powerful to witness.



*Right: Meeting girls who worked in the brickfields around Kolkata and attended the KMWSC brickfield schools. They are being supported to continue with their education and be the first generation in their family to complete second level education. Right: Had the honour to meet Arifa Khatun, who won an Award for Courage in 2023 for stopping her own child marriage with the support of KMWSC.*



Left: The wonderful staff at Darjeeling Mary Ward Social Center. Right: A poster creating awareness on child labour produced by DMWSC.

**Casestudy:** Darjeeling Mary Ward Social Center (DMWSC) runs a project that trains community members as “Barefoot Lawyers.” In 2024 they supported 378 people in accessing documentation that enabled them to receive services and entitlements from the government (e.g. old age pension, caste certificates, birth certificates, disability certificates). A total of fifty-seven cases were dealt with on issues related to domestic violence, human trafficking, child marriage and one case of rape. It included a case where a mother discovered her husband was sexually assaulting their adopted child. Shocked and distressed she immediately reached out to the Barefoot Lawyers for legal intervention. Upon receiving the report, the Barefoot Lawyers promptly escalated the case and engaged with the police leading to the swift arrest of the perpetrator. The child was sent for medical assistance and psychological support.



Meeting the community members in Darjeeling where the MDC heard about the impact of the work done by DMWSC.

# UPDATE ON SOUTH SUDAN

## Projects supported in Rumbek

**Misean Cara - €115,000:** This project aimed to support adult education and the upskilling of untrained primary school teachers in the newly constructed Education Center. 923 people in total attended courses in areas like adult literacy, English, computer skills and a range of short courses enhancing soft skills including trauma healing, stress management, women leadership, career guidance, peace building and conflict resolution. 100 untrained teachers from 12 local primary schools attended Inservice teacher training.

**CASE STUDY:** Mary Nyankok is a kindergarten teacher at Aber Primary School. Her journey to teaching has not been easy. Without formal training, she took up her role after completing only primary school, driven by her love for children. Now married as a second wife with three children, Mary balances the demands of work and home life. Over the six months of training at the Loreto Education Center, her perspective on teaching has completely transformed. She has learned new strategies for interacting with young learners, understanding their needs, and tailoring lessons to engage them effectively. *“I now see teaching in a whole new way,”* she says. *“I understand that working with young children requires a special approach, something I didn’t have before. This training has given me the tools to teach more professionally and to help my learners truly thrive”.*



*Newly constructed education Center at Loreto Rumbek.*

**Misean Cara - €45,000:** A second project was focused on contributing to sustainable health services in South Sudan by supporting graduates from Loreto Rumbek to continue their education at 3<sup>rd</sup> level in a health-related field. It was also to support interns in completing 1 year in the Loreto Health Clinic. A second focus was on improving the health outcomes and wellbeing of the students who attend the Loreto primary and secondary school as well as marginalised and vulnerable members of our community – in particular the children who are malnourished, including their families, and people with epilepsy.

**World Mercy Fund - €15,900:** The main goal of this project was to reduce malaria infections among the 385 students attending the Loreto Secondary school and to facilitate access to prompt treatment among malaria infected students. The main project activities were the installation of mosquito nets on beds of boarding students, boosting the stock of malaria test and treatment kits and health education for students.

**CASE STUDY:** *My name is Athieng and I am currently in senior two. This term I got sick with malaria about two weeks after we opened school. Since the start of the rainy season, I have been consistently using my mosquito net but somehow, I still got the infection. Being sick affected me a lot because I wasn't able to attend some of my classes. On the onset of the symptoms, I visited the school clinic where it was confirmed that I had malaria and I was put on immediate medication. This really helped me because once I started to take the medication, I was able to resume my classes and keep up with the others in learning. Malaria is a serious disease in our community and has even led to the death of some of my relatives. I hope that in the future, the community will also have access to treatment like we do here in order to lower the number of serious infections and even death.*

**Support from Loreto Schools and Supporters - €100,472:** 2024 saw a significant increase in the amount of donations received from both Loreto schools and supporters. This funding is vital as it is not generally designated for any specific purpose, enabling the team in South Sudan to address pressing needs. This funding was used for a variety of purposes, including scholarships for students attending both the Loreto primary and secondary schools.

## Loreto Sisters Expanding in South Sudan – Aweil

In 2022, five graduates of Loreto Rumbek, now working mothers in the North of South Sudan, returned to the Loreto School in Rumbek with a proposition. They invited Loreto to open a new school compound with a primary day school for boys and girls and a secondary boarding school for girls in their hometown called Aweil, about a 10-hour drive from Rumbek. After much consideration and discussion, the Loreto Sisters agreed to start this exciting new mission and in 2024 launched a fundraising campaign.



Sr Barbara Murphy, Sr Priyanka and two interns on the road from Rumbek to Aweil



Help me  
build a new  
school.

**“If I hadn’t  
attended Loreto, I  
would have likely  
dropped out after  
my first year and  
faced a life of early  
marriage and  
mistreatment, like  
many women  
here.”**

**Mary Nyanarop Ameklai and Regina Ajok  
Deng – Graduates of Loreto Rumbek**

## ALBANIA – FIGHTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING

MWI Ireland supports the Mary Ward Loreto Foundation in Albania in their fight against human trafficking. A key part of their strategy is to strengthen local authorities including the police and border control. In 2024 MWF trained 214 officials which enhances the quality of services provided to the community, especially for victims and survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence. In a district called Saranda, a member of the project team acts as a mentor to the newly-appointed Child Protection Unit Worker, ensuring effective support for children in need.

Imelda Poole IBVM is the founder of the foundation. In July 2024 she was conferred a Doctor of Humane Letters at a graduation ceremony held at Liverpool Cathedral. She received the award in recognition of her internationally recognised work to combat human trafficking and her dedication to ending modern slavery through her work in Albania and the charity she co-founded, 'Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation' (RENATE).



Sydney Thorne, the author of “Mary Ward: First Sister of Feminism”, and Kevin Hyland, the UK’s first Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, state in an article published on Independent Catholic News that *“an unbroken thread runs between Mary Ward’s mission in the 17th century and Imelda Poole’s work in Albania, almost 400 years on. The central strand is their vision of the unique worth of every single human soul, regardless of gender, their commitment to help each individual to fulfil their potential and be the person they were born to be. And they draw strength from a faith that is joyful, confident, not lost in dogma but rooted in addressing the pressing, practical needs of people they see around them.”* It is a fitting tribute to a remarkable person.

## CONCLUSION

The Loreto missionary approach is based on values, reaching out to the marginalised and going to where the needs are greatest. At its heart is a compassion that compels the mission to be present, to live among community and participate in community events. A personal touch informs the mission's way of life and its efforts to address the vicious circle of poverty, where marginalised people are being exploited generation after generation. It was a privilege in 2024 to visit the Loreto Sisters in South Sudan, India and Kenya and to witness this compassionate approach in action. It was an honour to meet some of the people they work with and get a glimpse of the possibilities when human dignity is restored, and a sense of hope is felt.

We would like to thank all those who supported this work throughout 2024. The extent of the impact of the work simply would not be possible without it. Mísean Cara continues to be a very encouraging and supportive donor. The Loreto schools are very engaged and have organised fantastic fundraisers, particularly for the new mission in Aweil. Individual well-wishers have also been extremely generous, many of whom have been supporting us for many years.

The Irish Province Leadership Team has been exemplary in their support over the year. We thank the General Leadership Team and all the Provincial Leadership Teams, as well as the Project Teams, for their understanding and cooperation throughout the year. We look forward to the year ahead and building on the achievements in 2025.

Peace is not a utopian ideal. Peace is a humble path made up of daily actions, and is woven with patience, courage, listening, and action. Today more than ever, peace requires our vigilant and creative presence.

**Pope Leo XIV**

**Anthony Hannon**  
**Missionary Development Coordinator - MWI Ireland**