

# IPA Legends: Beth Kress PBVM – Putting a Face on a Global Charism

For this edition of IPA Legends, we had the privilege of speaking with Sister Beth Kress, PBVM from Dubuque, Iowa, USA. A Presentation Sister, communications professional, musician, and passionate advocate for justice, Beth played a foundational role in the early years of the International Presentation Association (IPA) as its very first Coordinator from 1989 to 1995.



When IPA was established in 1988, it brought together Presentation congregations from around the world under a shared vision inspired by the charism of Venerable Nano Nagle. Beth was appointed as the first Coordinator and given the unique task of helping transform this new international vision into a living reality.

Reflecting on those early years, Beth describes IPA as an opportunity to live out a belief that has guided much of her life: *"We can do best together what we can't do alone."* Drawn to collaboration from an early age through education, faith formation, and international scouting experiences, she saw IPA as a chance to strengthen

connections among Presentation people across the globe and deepen a shared commitment to Nano Nagle's mission.

As the first IPA Coordinator, Beth's role was both practical and pioneering. She travelled to 14 of the 16 countries where Presentation Sisters ministered at the time, visiting communities, schools, ministry centres, and local projects. Through videos, photographs, and print media, she documented the diverse expressions of the Presentation charism and shared them across the international network.

Her travels allowed her to witness firsthand the many ways Presentation Sisters and Associates were responding to the needs of their communities. Through meetings with leadership teams, participation in congregational gatherings, and visits to ministries, Beth helped Presentation people see themselves as part of something much larger than their local context — a truly global family united by the spirit of Nano Nagle.

Looking back, Beth is most proud of helping to establish the foundations upon which IPA continues to grow today.

*"I am proud of being able to make the way by walking," she reflects. "Organising a first office and role, collaborating with the Council and others, and then being able to let go so that the seeds planted by many people could grow in the next phase of the IPA story."*

Among her many responsibilities were helping to develop IPA's foundational statements of Identity, Vision, Charism, Spirituality, and Mission; coordinating international projects and communications; organising prayer resources shared across congregations; supporting the growing justice network; and assisting with the planning of the 1991 IPA Assembly in Perth, Australia, and the 1995 Assembly in Portarlington, Ireland.

One of the most significant outcomes of the 1995 Assembly was the decision to pursue consultative status with the United Nations. Beth played an important role in preparing the documentation, records, and resources that would support the next phase of IPA's journey and eventually lead to the organisation's presence at the UN today.

What left a mark on Beth the most was the people she encountered during her travels. One memory that remains especially vivid took place during a visit to Pakistan. Arriving in Islamabad, she awoke before dawn to the sound of roosters crowing, followed by the call to prayer from a nearby mosque.

*"I remember thinking that there is one Lord of us all and we must start each day with a blessing," she recalls. The beauty of the people, the landscape, and the experience of encountering different cultures deepened her appreciation for God's presence across the world.*

For Beth, one of the greatest gifts of IPA has been discovering the radical hospitality that lies at the heart of Nano Nagle's vision. Through her encounters with Presentation Sisters, Associates, and communities around the globe, she has witnessed people striving for justice, dignity, and a better world.

Today, Beth continues to live out that commitment through her involvement with racial equity initiatives, community communications, and social justice advocacy. She believes that listening to one another's stories remains one of the most powerful ways to build understanding and create meaningful change.

When asked about the future of IPA, Beth's response is filled with hope. She delights in seeing younger generations stepping forward with fresh energy, diverse perspectives, and a willingness to embrace new possibilities.

*"We are called together to keep the flame burning," she says. "Intergenerational, intercultural, interfaith - we are called to keep moving forward together."*

Beth believes that while structures and forms may evolve, the spirit that inspired Nano Nagle continues to guide the Presentation family today. The challenge for each generation is to remain open to transformation while remaining faithful to the mission.

Among the reflections that had shaped Beth's life was a quote by Sr Raphael Considine PBVM, about Nano Nagle. It speaks of a woman who dared greatly, trusted deeply, and followed God's spirit beyond what was comfortable or familiar.

*"She was a woman who, in her simplicity yet dared greatly ... Dared to let herself be guided by the spirit of God. And when He, 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 beyond the security of the familiar tried and proven, she followed with laughter in her heart. For she had caught a glimpse of the Divine delight in reversing human logic, in drawing power from weakness, wisdom from folly, life from death. In this lay her strength. This is NANO NAGLE."*

- Sr Raphael Considine, PBVM, *One Pace Beyond*

That same spirit has clearly shaped Beth's own journey. As the first IPA Coordinator, she helped give a global face to a growing movement and laid the foundations that continue to support IPA's mission today. Her legacy reminds us that the Presentation story has always been one of connection, courage, hospitality, and hope - and that, together, we are called to keep the flame alive for generations to come.