

IPA Legends Spotlight: Sister Maureen O'Connell PBVM

This month, we celebrate Sister Maureen O'Connell PBVM of the South-West Unit, Ireland, whose dedication to justice, collaboration, and care for creation has left a lasting impact both locally and internationally. Sr Maureen has always approached her work with a preference for collaborating with others rather than acting alone and consistently championing the vulnerable—human and non-human alike. Her love for nature finds expression in working with her Parish Care of Creation group and time spent in the garden, protecting what nourishes bees and other species.

Sr Maureen's journey as an IPA Justice Contact began in 1995, when she was appointed to represent the South-West Unit. At a moment when she could focus beyond her regular teaching duties, she embraced the role with thoughtfulness, gathering a small commission of sisters to first educate themselves before raising awareness about justice issues across communities. Their first focus was on Third World Debt, a relevant and pressing concern given the active role of Irish religious congregations, including Presentation, in founding and funding the Debt & Development Coalition Ireland.

In 1999, Sr Maureen joined the newly-formed Nagle Community in Mountmellick, County Laois, a Presentation inter-provincial group drawing members from the South-West, South-East, and Northern Units of Ireland. Over seventeen years, the Nagle Community broadened engagement with justice education and action, forging strong connections with counterparts in England and fostering collaborative relationships with lay and religious colleagues alike.



Her work has taken her across the globe, attending IPA Assemblies and UN conferences—from Brisbane (2003), India (2007), to Newfoundland (2012). In 2009, Sr Maureen was encouraged by Sr Fatima, IPA-UN Representative at the time, to organize a workshop at the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development in Bonn, Germany, showcasing Presentation initiatives in organic farming (Nano Nagle Birthplace), sustainable living, and global development education (Challenge-to-Change schools programme). She recalls that workshop as a particular highlight, observing the spirit of enthusiasm and appreciation from the attendees, as practical and helpful examples of sustainable living were shared.

Over the years, Sr Maureen contributed to numerous projects, including producing an IPA position paper on world trade policies and developing educational resources such as Nagle Community's Living Justly Programme and Sustainable Living Pack. Her leadership extended to the Union's Coordinating Team for Justice (CCT-J) from 2015 to 2025, during which she strengthened networks among Union Justice Contacts, collaborated on the creation of handbooks and reflection booklets, and deepened her lifelong commitment to justice and care for the earth.

Sr Maureen's reflections are both profound and grounded in appreciation of co-workers. She credits the wisdom and support of IPA colleagues, particularly Nagle Community companion, Imelda Carew, and English Justice Contact, Nuala Mottley, for shaping her own journey, calling them "well-deserving of classification as IPA Legends." She also mentions previous IPA Justice Networker, Sr Marlette Black, as "another IPA Legend". Maureen's work continues today through her local Parish Care of Creation Group, as a member of Kerry Diocesan JPIC Committee, and co-leading a Presentation community of ten sisters.

Her enduring hope is that political leaders worldwide will demonstrate wisdom, acting justly and equitably towards all people, while she finds hope in younger generations, who demonstrate increasing awareness of what it takes to bring about meaningful change. Sr Maureen's life and work embody the spirit of Nano Nagle, reminding us that education, compassion, and commitment to justice can transform lives and communities.

"The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the coat unused in your closet belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the one who has no shoes; the money which you hoard up belongs to the poor." — Basil of Caesarea

Sr Maureen O'Connell PBVM, remains an inspiration, showing us that working together, with empathy, courage, and care for all creation, we can truly make the world a better place.