



The Cause for Mary Ward's Canonization

Sr Elisabeth Cotter IBVM, 28th July 2022

“Mary Ward was a Pilgrim who spread the Joy of the Gospel, a Woman for our Times” [Beatification Prayer]

This line from the Beatification Prayer has particularly inspired me as I endeavoured to carry out the mission entrusted to me by General Leadership in 2015. For the ministry was certainly a pilgrimage with its ups and downs, its twists and turns, its surprises and joys, its difficulties and issues. But it was and continues to be a journey full of faith and hope. I felt humbled on many occasions when people shared their pain, their suffering, as well as their joy when prayer was answered, pain relieved, favours or miracles occurred or devotion to Mary Ward described. Mary Ward's relevance for the world of today became more and more obvious.

I am delighted, therefore, to have this opportunity to address you, the Members of Mary Ward's Institute. My written Report on the Cause which accompanies this video, covers in a comprehensive way, the period from November 2015 when I was appointed by Noelle IBVM and Jane CJ to promote the Cause and to bring it to the next level, until the present time. I often recall that initial phone call from Noelle and my immediate response, given, I must admit, without any knowledge of what course the “yes” might entail and the wonderful people I would meet along the way. The Report explains the Cause journey, with its high point, the submission of a possible case in December 2019 and the on-going work which continues. The purpose of this presentation is to bring some particular points to your attention.

During these years, I have returned many times to what the Officials in the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in the Holy See said must happen for Mary Ward's Cause to advance: more was required from US, the followers. As Mary Ward Ignatian women, we need no introduction to “the more.” It is part of our DNA. Or do we? Many times during the last 7 years, especially during those times

of endless waiting for a response from Church Officials, I have asked myself: what more can I do? However, I have come to realise that this is the wrong question. Since this is an Institute Mission Project, the question is: What more can WE do?

When I undertook this role initially, I found that some of us were ambiguous about the undertaking. What is the point of the canonisation process? Why waste time on something we already know to be true – Mary Ward is a Saint. The Church has, in effect, admitted she was wrong about Mary Ward. Surely this is enough? As for “miracles” I am afraid that some of us, particularly in the West, have a somewhat cynical approach, unless, of course, we or someone we know or love, has been the recipient of a “miracle.” As for Novenas and Relics – the modern world has little interest in such things. Our theological progress has moved beyond such old-fashioned concepts. If you recognise yourself in any of these questions, perhaps you might reflect on: what more can I do?

However, the overwhelming response of so many of you was positive; Members were delighted to know we as an Institute were actively taking up the Cause again. I often think of M. Immolata Wetter CJ, that wonderful Mary Ward woman who was first introduced to me when I was a novice in Rathfarnham by another great Mary Ward woman, M. Agnes Walsh IBVM. How lucky I was to be in formation at a time when these great women were carrying out the wishes of Vatican II: return to your sources and reclaim your charism. Mary Ward became alive as we, too, learned how we were called to continue to reveal her charism in our times, circumstances and places. Perhaps it was the strong memory of this time which gave me the energy and enthusiasm to pursue her Cause with confidence and great joy.

There are many myths surrounding the Canonisation process. I would like to dispel one in particular. This concerns Finance. Whatever the truth about the approach in the past, I can assure you of the openness and integrity of the process in the present. Costs are clearly laid out in the Financial Norms issued by the Holy See to guide the process. These relate mainly to the paying of lay medical experts on whose expertise we rely to prove our case. Other costs relate to civil lawyers who obtain medical documentation for us, some medical expenses, e.g., further tests on the person at the heart of the process, obtaining documents, records, together with some small administrative costs. All major potential expenses are given beforehand and there are no “surprises” relating

to cost. Pope Francis ordered a review of the process early in his pontificate and it is thanks to him that we have the current transparent process.

One of the great discoveries for me in this Cause journey was in relation to Friends, Companions, Associates, Collaborators, all who are included in “the Family of Mary Ward.” I was present at the Friends Conference in York in August 2017 when our leaders, Jane and Noelle, making a joint presentation to those gathered, made a deliberate decision to use the descriptor “Family of Mary Ward” as an inclusive term to describe all who are devoted to Mary Ward and /or are engaged in promoting her vision and values. From then on, I, too, used the term when, for example, sending Prayer Request Letters. For me, one of the highlights of my personal journey with the Cause has been to encounter the many wonderful systems and processes which enable so many lay collaborators to call themselves “Friend/Companion/Associate/Collaborator/Mary Ward Circle/Mary Ward Open Circle”, etc. The work of sharing and/or passing on the charism is alive and well across the world and nourishing these bodies a key priority in some places. Perhaps this is one area where we can ask: Is there a vibrant Friends or other lay group in our area? What more can WE do? The Institute in general and the Cause in particular, owes a great debt of gratitude to all, whether religious and lay, who carry out this task throughout the world.

Understanding how to pursue the Cause has been an on-going process for me as well as for all of you. I had to learn how to ensure communication reached everyone. Indeed, this is an on-going challenge. However, we are now in a place where we can assess our progress to date and suggest what more we might need to do. It is in a spirit of deep gratitude for all you have contributed that I make these further suggestions, based on what Cardinal Amato said we need to do:

1. Provide evidence of multiple “extraordinary graces”, i.e., events which are “extraordinary” but fall short of the scientific proofs required for a canonically recognised “miracle.”

42 instances were received up to December 2019 and 17 instances since. I am deeply grateful for the persons who sent me information; some of these might fit the category of “miracle.” At the very least, they constitute “Favours.”

2. Provide evidence of a strong groundswell of support, e.g., multiple letters to the Pope personally from Cardinals, Bishops, Parish Priests and other people significant in the life of the local Church where there is a CJ/IBVM presence. The support of the

Conference of Bishops of England and Wales is particularly important given Mary Ward's nationality.

We received 56 responses initially and 20 subsequently (see Report for Dioceses). I wonder if there is MORE we can do in this area?

3. Provide evidence of very fervent and focussed prayer on the part of all the members for the Cause including the possibility of a "miracle."

The celebration of 23rd provides a monthly opportunity for this; many individuals, some communities and a few Provinces/Regions, have shared their response to requests for prayer; 411 Personal Testimonies were received, and 3 others post 2019. Given our membership and if we include the hundreds of thousands touched by Mary Ward in our communities and ministries, it seems to me that there is much MORE we can do in this area.

4. A direct letter from Mary Ward's Institute to the Pope in due course, drawing attention to all the above together with evidence as to how we have tried to comply.

This action is "on hold" pending the completion of our Cause journey at Diocesan Level. I would hope that when the time comes, I will be overwhelmed by the tsunami of response!

During this journey, I was mindful of CALL 1 of the IBVM GC'14: Reclaim the freshness of the Gospel. This Call was inspired by the Spanish theologian, Antonio José PAGOLA's input. He told us that we have turned Christianity into a religion, a system of structures, rules and regulations; what it ought to be and is, is a relationship with Jesus Christ. This made such an impression on me that it transferred into my Cause work. While systems and structures are important in the work of the Cause, it is the experiences of those who encounter God in and through relationship with Mary Ward which make the deepest impression and provide invaluable evidence. It has been my great privilege to share some of these with CJ's and IBVM's across the globe. For this, I am deeply grateful.

In Mary Ward Week 2022, Elena CJ and I met our Contact Persons via Zoom. These meetings elicited a wonderful response. It is my hope and prayer that this brief "meeting" will generate a similar response, that members, individually and in Community/Province/Region Groups will discern together: What more can

WE do to bring to completion the Cause of our Venerable Mary Ward, a woman who has inspired countless generations and whose vision and values remain as relevant and needed today as in her own time.

As we pray for the Union of her Institute, our prayer for Mary Ward's Beatification/Canonisation becomes even more focussed since the unshakeable bond of our common Founder unites us in the most profound way, making light of our differences and giving us the tools we need to accomplish Mary Ward's and Teresa Ball's dying wishes for union of the Institute.

To conclude, I would like to quote from Saint Pope John Paul's Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Inuente*, 2000: "To understand the Church, we need to be acquainted with the saints who are her most eloquent sign, her sweetest fruit. To contemplate the face of Christ in the changing, diversified situation of the modern world, we must look at the saints who are the living reflection of the face of Christ". We know that irrespective of the technical, canonical situation, Venerable Mary Ward belongs to the Saints. It behoves us, therefore, as requested by the Church, to finish the task, to make visible those things which will enable her to be recognised as Saint by all, so that we can say:

"Saint Mary Ward, pray for us and give us your spirit"

What more can I/YOU /WE do to make this happen?

"Jesus say Amen"

Elizabeth Cotter IBVM JCD

Office for the Cause of Venerable Mary Ward

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