

MOUNT ST ANNE'S

RETREAT & CONFERENCE CENTRE



STRATEGIC PLAN 2019–2023

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FOREWORD

Sister Margarita Ryan, Provincial Leader, Presentation Sisters North East Province, Ireland

The Vision Statement for Mount St. Anne's outlines the aspiration that the Centre will be a place where community values are nurtured; people accompanied; deep questions of faith, spirituality, justice and meaning explored; and opportunity provided for reflection, education, prayer, conversation and dialogue. The ultimate vision is that the Centre will endeavour "to bring hope, strengthen faith and open all up to the love of God and all creation".

By any standard, this is a lofty and challenging vision, and I think it is fair to say that, in the times we live in, incarnating such a vision calls for great commitment, clear focus and a high degree of courage. Among the cultural winds sweeping across our country at the present time there are those which unmistakably would dispel the aspirations set out above.

However, seen from a different perspective, it is possible that the current maelstrom of scepticism and uncertainty has created an existential and spiritual vacuum, that is awakening in the hearts of people from across all social strata a greater hunger for truth and for something deeper than the prevailing, largely relativist liberal narrative. The inner spirit of our people is calling out for meaning.

From either view point, it is clear that Mount St. Anne's, if it is to fulfil its vision to be a nucleus where hope, faith and love prevail, must ensure that robust, well-researched and relevant programmes are on offer at the Centre.

From its inception, Mount St. Anne's has supported the faith and nurtured the souls of young and old, religious and lay people alike. Those who lived and served at the Centre have honed the very special ethos of hospitality, reflection and inspiration that has come to be associated with Mount St. Anne's, and they can be heartened by the knowledge that, over the years, hundreds of participants, residents and guests have found nurture for "body, mind and spirit" at the Centre.

Long may what they have created continue to flourish!

However, conscious of the winds of change and of the emerging challenges of our time, the Trustees of Mount St. Anne's recognised the need for an up-dated Strategic Plan to follow the original Development Strategy for 2011 to 2016. The new plan focuses not only on the success of the past but expands the attention of the Centre towards the locus of new challenges, including the consequent need to re-structure in so far as this is necessary to address these emerging needs. It is a time for new strategies, for employing new technologies and engaging with social media in the hope that these tools may facilitate the outreach and appeal to a wider audience.

Within the context of the new Development Strategy, the scope of the Centre will reach beyond the familiar, the tried and tested, and will endeavour to explore new approaches to programmes, marketing, delivery, working in partnerships and networking.

In the current climate, it is also intended that the Centre will focus on inviting participants to engage in deep reflection and dialogue not only in the Christian tradition but to extend this reflection into an inter-faith and intercultural context. The hope is that such integrated dialogue

may help people to penetrate the depths of '*Laudato Si*' and bring them to a greater unity in the cause of our common cosmic home.

Sincere gratitude goes out to all who live and offer a service at Mount St. Anne's. I thank our resident Sisters and, in particular, our Presentation Sisters from outside the North East Province and Sisters from other Congregations who have come to enrich the community and support the life and work of the Centre. I thank the CEO, all staff, the volunteers and those who come from time to time when help is needed. And, I express a special word of thanks to the Management Committee for your amazing commitment and dedication.

All of you have made Mount St. Anne's what it is today, and you can take credit for the impact your contribution has had on generations of participants and guests. The journey ahead is entrusted to you as you unwrap the vision through the implementation of the Strategy. Our prayer is that you will be blessed in your endeavours. You are engaged in a sacred task, but I am confident that through your commitment and faith-filled lives, you will ensure that the vision of Mount St Anne's will always be animated by the breath of God.

Margarita Ryan, PBVM
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CEO'S INTRODUCTION

Dr. Oonagh O'Brien, CEO, Mount St Anne's

Mount St Anne's Strategic Plan 2019–2023 articulates the future continued development of our distinct ministry both in terms of our vision and objectives and also the principles and priorities that will guide and direct us.

This Strategic Plan is founded in the ongoing charism and tradition of the Presentation Sisters and their commitment to collaborative education and formation, engaged spirituality and celebration, along with a commitment to justice, contemplation and caring for the earth.

Through the strategies and objectives outlined in this plan we will build on previous achievements, including a new and refurbished centre, and be guided to both evolve our current work as well as developing new services and offerings.

In a challenging and rapidly changing external environment a key value and working principle will be our openness and ability to collaborate with others along with our readiness to build community and relationships through practices of trust, equality and respect.

A related immediate challenge is the communication of our message. There can be no doubt that alongside our current clientele there are many people throughout Ireland and beyond who seek lives of authenticity, reflexivity and contemplation. Introducing them to our beautiful centre and ensuring that we provide appropriate services and opportunities will be key in the implementation of this Strategic Plan.

The consultation necessary to produce this plan has meant many meetings and for their tireless efforts I thank the sub group of Mount St Anne's Management Committee: Mr Gerry Fagan, Sr Bernadette Flanagan (Trustee Rep), Mr Ciarán Fogarty, Sr Elizabeth Maxwell, Sr Anne McDermott, Sr Lillie O' Reilly, Sr Mary Rossiter (Trustee Rep). Thanks also to the consultants at Mazars, most especially Dera McLoughlin.

Finally, for supporting the undertaking of developing this Strategic Plan, my very grateful thanks to our Trustees, the Provincial Leadership Team of the Presentation Sisters, North East Ireland.

Dr. Oonagh O'Brien
CEO
Mount St Anne's

CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

The Presentation Sisters were founded in Cork by Nano Nagle in 1775. There are approximately 2,000 Presentation Sisters working in a variety of education, health, pastoral and social justice ministries across the globe.

In Ireland, the Presentation Sisters are organised into two Provinces – the North East and the South West. In 2015 there were 365 Sisters in the North East Province

Mount St. Anne's has been intrinsically linked to the Presentation Sisters for nearly 90 years.

Before being sold to the Presentation Sisters in the 1930s by Dr Cullen, Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, Mount St. Anne's, or Mount Henry as it was formerly known, was the property of the Skeffington Smyth family between 1823 and 1922. In 1922, it was sold to a Mr Burke who then sold the land to Dr Cullen in the 1930s.

In July 1935 on the feast of St Anne, the Presentation Sisters established a central novitiate here for the eleven communities of the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin. Following this, the site became known as Mount St. Anne's.

The house and lands at Mount St. Anne's have served several functions since 1935, including the formation of young women in the Presentation Sisters way of life, housing the National Centre for Liturgy, and finally in 1978, becoming a retreat and conference centre.

Since becoming a retreat and conference centre in 1978, Mount St. Anne's has offered many services to religious, lay and non-religious people. These services include the provision of retreats, sabbatical programmes, spiritual direction as well as providing conference and meeting room facilities.

An inter-congregational community of Sisters currently resides at the Centre. They are supported by a team of staff and volunteers who run programmes and courses in Mount St. Anne's throughout the year.

In 2011, Mount St. Anne's launched a Development Strategy to guide the Centre for the period 2011–2016. Significant thought and effort was put into this Development Strategy as it determined the direction Mount St. Anne's would take in the coming years.

In recent years, a number of changes have taken place both at Mount St. Anne's and in the environment in which Mount St. Anne's operates. These include the appointment of a full time CEO/Programme Director, the decline in numbers of religious and the changing social and religious climate in Ireland. All of this indicated the need for Mount St. Anne's to consider how best it might serve its mission in the changing environment whilst remaining true to the ethos of the Presentation Sisters and the mission of Jesus.

In 2017 the trustees i.e. the Leadership Team of the North East Province, decided that a new Strategic Plan for Mount St. Anne's should be devised to help guide the Centre through the next phase of its development. In this regard, Mazars was commissioned to facilitate the development of a Strategic Plan for the five-year period from 2019 to 2023. Through a consultation process, benchmarking exercises and extensive research, this Strategic Plan was finalised in late 2018.

This plan will be used to guide the direction of Mount St. Anne's for the period 2019–2023.

PROGRESS ON STRATEGY 2011 – 2016

In 2011, Mount St. Anne's launched its previous Strategic Plan. Mount St. Anne's Development Strategy 2011–2016, to guide the Centre between 2011 and 2016. Included in this "Development Strategy" were a number of direction statements and key targets.

Notwithstanding a challenging external environment, Mount St Anne's has been successful in achieving the goals set out in this strategy.

Key successes since the last Strategic Plan include:

- ✓ Implementation of a planned building programme to increase general circulation and meeting capacity, improve kitchen and dining facilities and add residential accommodation with ensuite facilities.
- ✓ Engagement with the Operations and Retreat Teams regularly to identify their training needs and provide training as appropriate.
- ✓ The review of staffing and management structures in the light of the development of services and facilities and make additional appointments as required.
- ✓ The training and Garda vetting of all staff and volunteers prior to assigning them duties.
- ✓ Identification of feasible new outreach opportunities and implementation of them as resources allow.
- ✓ Production of an annual report which gave account of the outcomes for the previous year, of developments undertaken over that time and of developments planned for the coming year.
- ✓ Feedback on client satisfaction regarding activities.

VISION AND OBJECTIVES

The Strategic Plan to 2023 sets out a unique vision and objectives for Mount St. Anne's.

Vision

The vision for Mount St. Anne's is that of a Centre:

- where community values are nurtured and people are accompanied on the journey of life,
- where deep questions of faith, spirituality, justice and meaning are shared and explored,
- where opportunity is provided for reflection, education and prayer, for conversation and for dialogue,
- which endeavours to bring hope, strengthen faith and open all up to the love of God and all creation.

Objectives

Mount St Anne's seeks to offer nourishment for body, mind and spirit in an environment of natural beauty and simplicity:

- Informed by our vision, we are committed to supporting education, formation and creating reflective spaces and opportunities which encourage and support people to explore and deepen their spirituality as they search for truth and meaning in their lives.
- The Centre seeks to reach out in a spirit of hospitality, compassion and simplicity to all seekers on a spiritual journey.
- Mount St Anne's seeks to deepen the practices of the Christian contemplative tradition amongst all age groups, while honouring diverse spiritual traditions.

VALUES

Our work in Mount St. Anne's is underpinned by a set of core values which are as follows:



Acting with justice and integrity

We remain faithful to our objectives and our core guiding values. We follow in the tradition of the Presentation Sisters, providing education in matters of faith and solidarity with those most in need.



Building community

We strive to build communities through our programmes, initiatives, activities and interactions with others. We provide a welcome for all who cross our path, building relationships of respect, trust, equality and inclusiveness, sharing our faith and life.



Practising stillness and contemplation

We practise stillness and contemplation in our own lives and include opportunities for this in our programmes and activities. We create the space and ambiance which nurtures reflection, contemplation and a sense of the sacred.



Collaborating with others in developing and delivery of our programmes and activities

In developing and delivering our programmes and activities we engage imaginatively with one another and we reach out to do likewise with other agencies, individuals and groups to identify needs and to co-create programmes.



Promoting joyful celebrations

We promote the Good News of the Gospel and we celebrate joyfully the wonder of life and the amazing gift of God's creation.



Caring for the earth

We care for the earth by providing a sustainable way of life at the Centre in how we operate and how we deliver our programmes and services.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Our work in Mount St. Anne's is underpinned by a set of core principles as follows:

Christian ethos

Any new services or facilities that are to be considered must be in keeping with the Christian ethos held by the Presentation Sisters.

Faith and social justice

The Centre will be a place that supports faith and social justice.

Ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue

The Centre will be a place that supports and nurtures ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue. It aims to be a place where those of different faiths can come together and share in harmony.

Sharing of faith and life experiences

Mount St. Anne's will encourage and nurture an exploration and sharing of faith and life experiences that enable personal and communal transformation.

Evolve

While valuing the services already offered, it is a priority for Presentation Sisters that the services of Mount St. Anne's would evolve and expand into further areas.

Safeguarding children and vulnerable people

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults who are involved with Mount St Anne's is of utmost importance.

Safeguarding the Centre

Safeguarding the Centre itself and its reputation is important, and the aspiration is that there will be no service offering or guest/ student/ participant to Mount Saint Anne's which places the Centre in any danger (physical, reputational or otherwise) that threatens its existence or vision.

New explorations of being Christian

As we move towards changing times in Ireland and internationally, the Centre aims to be a place that is open to new explorations of being Christian.

Supporting the environment

The Centre aims to ensure it operates in support of the environment, ecology and more sustainable ways of living.

Self-funding

The Centre aims to be self-funding by the end of this Strategic Plan.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES TO 2023

This plan identifies six strategic priorities of equal significance which will support Mount St. Anne's in achieving its strategic vision.

The six priorities that have been identified for this Strategic Plan are:

1. Delivering Our Services

We will continue to deliver the services that are currently provided at Mount St. Anne's. We will build upon these services and the manner in which we deliver them by exploring new and evolving ways of being Christian.

2. Collaborating With Others

We will look to create new relationships and further develop existing relationships with regional, national, and international stakeholders and will seek opportunities to collaborate with them in the areas of education, research and service/ programme offerings.

3. Engaging & Supporting Our Clients Staff & Volunteers

We will deepen our understanding of current and potential clients by engaging with them and ensuring that high client satisfaction levels are achieved through the support provided to those clients and the valued team of Mount St. Anne's staff and volunteers.

4. Communicating Our Message

We will enhance our communication channels, increase and tailor our marketing and communications activities to ensure that the facilities, services and programmes offered by Mount St Anne's are widely recognised and known about by specified target client groups.

5. Building Our Community

We will endeavour to build a community at Mount St. Anne's that operates and delivers services and programmes which are in keeping with the values and guiding principles of Mount St. Anne's and the Presentation Sisters.

6. Managing Operations

We will review and develop internal processes and structures at Mount St. Anne's to ensure that the Centre is operating effectively and efficiently in order to benefit all who use the services and facilities provided at Mount St. Anne's.

Under each of these strategic priorities there are a number of strategic objectives that Mount St. Anne's will strive to achieve over the duration of this Strategic Plan.

These strategic objectives are detailed in the following pages.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1 – DELIVERING OUR SERVICES

We will continue to deliver the services that are currently provided at Mount St. Anne's. We will build upon these services and the manner in which we deliver them by exploring new and evolving ways of being Christian.

Strategic Objectives:

To support the achievement of this priority, we will:

1. Continue to organise and facilitate retreats for religious and others
2. Promote and provide retreat offerings to schools/ youth groups/ university students
3. Explore the development and delivery of youth leadership courses
4. Explore collaborating with Nano Nagle Place, Cork, the International Presentation Association and Friends of Nano with a view to developing an education portal supported by 3rd party funding
5. Explore building further on the success of the sabbatical programme by extending the frequency of the current 30-day sabbatical programme and developing a new sabbatical programme of a longer duration
6. Explore incorporating new ways of expressing Christianity into retreat programmes and retreat days for participants and develop an annual programme of retreats
7. Explore the further development and organisation of Christian mindfulness, meditation and time out type days at the Centre for participants
8. Explore organising programmes/ retreat days for participants that are focused on the earth/ sustainability/ ecology
9. In partnership with the Dioceses, explore the possibility of thought leadership discussions in terms of what it means to be Catholic in today's Ireland
10. Mount St Anne's CEO will write to identified Higher Education Institutes in Ireland and the UK to offer Mount St Anne's facilities to support funded research projects for specific targeted initiatives
11. Continue to cater for events that utilise Mount St Anne's conference and meeting rooms and proactively communicate its availability for such events.
12. Enable the Centre to be a venue which caters for celebrating specific appropriate events (e.g. jubilees, anniversaries and funerals) and providing hospitality services for specific events in the area (e.g. National Ploughing Championships)

Strategic Outcome

Mount St Anne's has a defined list of services and programme offerings consistent with the vision of the Centre which are formally expressed and promoted through relevant channels.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 – COLLABORATING WITH OTHERS

We will look to create new relationships and further develop existing relationships with regional, national, and international stakeholders and will seek opportunities to collaborate with them in the areas of education, research and service/ programme offerings.

Strategic Objectives:

To support the achievement of this priority, we will:

1. Engage with all relevant Irish and a nominated list of international higher education institutions with a view to the development and co-delivery of programmes in nominated areas of theology/ spirituality / religion/ catholic studies/ conflict resolution/ social justice, peace studies etc. which are consistent with the vision of Mount St Anne's
2. Engage with all relevant Irish and a nominated list of international higher education institutions with a view to providing a venue for the delivery of modules of specific programmes which are consistent with the vision of Mount St Anne's
3. As a means of devising collaborative relationships, and in conjunction with other centres, develop an annual schedule of relevant lectures delivered by Irish or international guest lecturers whereby they come to Mount St. Anne's and deliver standalone lectures, support retreat programmes or any educational offerings provided by the Centre
4. Engage with all relevant Irish and a nominated list of international higher education institutions, in particular those with "study abroad offices" with a view to providing retreat offerings to the students on these programmes
5. Engage with Pilgrims Paths with a view to developing a new accredited pilgrim path in St. Brigid's Way / Aghaboe Abbey. Provide both accommodation and / or tailored retreat offerings as part of a Mount St. Anne's Pilgrim Paths package
6. Engage with a nominated list of professional bodies (e.g. Teaching Council) with a view to exploring the possibility of co delivery of CPD (continuous professional development), providing for retreats/ reflections, or providing a venue only service
7. Engage with the full Presentation Sisters network as well as with other Congregations inside and outside of Ireland with a view to promoting the Mount St Anne's sabbatical programme

Strategic Outcome

Mount St Anne's has developed partnerships with stakeholders which have resulted in the development of new programme offerings and services consistent with the vision of Mount St. Anne's, these in turn have increased attendance levels and utilisation of the Centre.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3 – ENGAGING & SUPPORTING OUR CLIENTS, STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

We will deepen our understanding of current and potential clients by engaging with them and ensuring that high client satisfaction levels are achieved through the support provided to those clients and the valued team of Mount St. Anne's staff and volunteers.

Strategic Objectives:

To support the achievement of this priority, we will:

1. Identify the potential client groups that Mount St Anne's seeks to cater for with our service offerings in a structured fashion appropriate to each
2. Develop an annual plan and supporting policy for all full time and part time staff in particular, when new services or methods of delivery are designed
3. Establish a defined list/ register of those who can deliver programmes on behalf of Mount St Anne's and agree a standard approach to the delivery of programmes in Mount St Anne's and provide feedback on a programme by programme basis back to those who deliver these programmes
4. Measure client satisfaction with the services and facilities offered at Mount St Anne's following the delivery of all services and feed that back into the development and delivery of subsequent programmes
5. Develop a policy for volunteers at Mount St Anne's
6. Organise an annual staff and volunteers' event to recognise the contribution of those who are involved in Mount St Anne's
7. Regularly engage with staff working at Mount St. Anne's. This includes consulting with both employees and volunteers working at the Centre to determine staff development and growth needs
8. Periodically review staffing and management structures to ensure they are appropriate and cater for the delivery of services at Mount St. Anne's
9. Continue to screen and develop all Mount St Anne's staff and volunteers
10. Showcase the Centre to the local community – engage with them to make them aware of what Mount St. Anne's can offer

Strategic Outcome

Highly motivated staff and volunteers who are engaged with regularly and are provided with sufficient support and training that allows them to deliver excellent services to clients, resulting in high levels of client satisfaction and repeat client attendance on Mount St Anne's programmes.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4 – COMMUNICATING OUR MESSAGE

We will enhance our communication channels, increase and tailor our marketing and communications activities to ensure that the facilities, services and programmes offered by Mount St Anne's are widely recognised and known about by specified target client groups.

Strategic Objectives:

To support the achievement of this priority, we will:

1. Engage with existing and prospective clients in a proactive manner to make them aware of the services and facilities available at Mount St Anne's
2. Update, modernise and actively manage the website for scheduled programmes and retreats and proactively use social media channels to make people aware of Mount St Anne's and what it has to offer
3. Introduce, manage and maintain a suite of social media accounts for Mount St. Anne's
4. Proactively communicate the agreed schedule of programmes and retreats through multiple channels – e.g. AMRI, newsletters, parishes, Irish publications, international publications
5. Proactively communicate Mount St Anne's facilities in the local community via community groups, sports clubs, parishes, charities etc. and target attendance at specific events for dissemination
6. Schedule events for the community. In particular, schedule a series of ongoing community communication events
7. Where capacity gaps become apparent in the Mount St Anne's calendar, proactively organise events to fill these gaps
8. Continue to develop a comprehensive database to help communicate Mount St Anne's message to a targeted group of clients and supporters
9. Produce an annual report and use it both as a governance/ accountability mechanism and a tool to communicate Mount St Anne's message to a wide variety of existing and target future stakeholders and clients
10. Publish regular eNewsletters to all staff, volunteers, clients, key stakeholders, target clients
11. On an ongoing basis (annually) update and upgrade the quality of marketing materials

Strategic Outcome

Proactive and successful communication and marketing activities, through specific and appropriate channels which result in a material increase in attendance and utilisation levels.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5 – BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY

We will endeavour to build a community at Mount St. Anne's that operates, delivers services and programmes which are in keeping with the values and guiding principles of Mount St. Anne's and the Presentation Sisters.

Strategic Objectives:

To support the achievement of this priority, we will:

1. Explore increasing the number of people, including sisters and other religious, available to Mount St Anne's who can deliver retreats and programmes/ other services at the Centre
2. Explore the options available to Mount St. Anne's with regard to having a community who delivery programmes on a recurring and frequent basis but don't reside at the Centre
3. Build a community which is in keeping with the Mount St Anne's value of "Caring for the Earth"

Strategic Outcome

An on-site community living at Mount St. Anne's that is complemented by staff, volunteers and guests who deliver services to clients which support the values and guiding principles of Mount St. Anne's.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 6 – MANAGING OPERATIONS

We will review and develop internal processes and structures at Mount St. Anne's to ensure that the Centre is operating effectively and efficiently in order to benefit all who use the services and facilities provided at Mount St. Anne's.

Strategic Objectives:

To support the achievement of this priority, we will:

1. Develop an action plan, together with indicators of success, and key actions assigned to specific individuals to facilitate the monitoring of the delivery of this strategy
2. Agree and organise an annual calendar of fixed date programmes in advance and staff them accordingly
3. Develop a costing model for all programmes (existing and new) and price based on full information
4. Undertake a limited facilities investment programme (depending on the service options selected)
5. Further establish and implement appropriate financial reporting processes and reporting structures in the Centre
6. Review Mount St Anne's staffing and management structures in the light of the development of services and facilities and make additional appointments as required
7. Create guidelines for programme review and review all programmes / activities regularly on a pre-agreed cyclical basis reporting the results back to the Management Committee
8. Establish and track minimum utilisation targets for each Mount St Anne's resource type (conference, meeting rooms, beds etc.)
9. Update, modernise and actively manage the system for taking and scheduling bookings for Mount St Anne's
10. Introduce a welcome area in Mount St Anne's from where all those coming into and leaving the Centre can be managed and monitored

Strategic Outcome

The implementation of operating systems and structures in Mount St. Anne's which result in the efficient and accurate management of staff and facilities, scheduling, costing and utilisation of the Centre and appropriate and timely reporting on financial, operational and service matters.

APPENDIX I: STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

The following stakeholders were consulted with to inform the strategic facilitation process:

- Members of the Mount St. Anne's Religious Community,
- Mount St. Anne's Management Committee,
- Mount St. Anne's CEO,
- Mount St. Anne's Operations Manager,
- Presentation Sisters North East Province Provincial Leadership.

APPENDIX II: RESEARCH

The following research was undertaken as part of the strategic facilitation process.

- Review of Mount St. Anne's current operations including programmes offered and services provided, centre facilities, capacity and utilisation rates,
- Review of retreat centres operating in Ireland, the UK, Europe and internationally,
- Benchmarking of Mount St. Anne's programmes and services against competing centres,
- Benchmarking of Mount St. Anne's prices against competing retreat centres,
- Benchmarking of Mount St. Anne's accommodation rates against competitors,
- Benchmarking of Mount St. Anne's meeting and conference room rates against competitors,
- Review of potential alliances for Mount St. Anne's in the areas of education, research, philanthropic foundations, catholic publications and new ventures.

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