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SR ANNETTE SCHNEIDER RSM
Institute Councilor
From 2005 till 2013 I have had the privilege of being involved in eight Mercy Ethos programmes at Mercy International Centre in Dublin. During that time, approximately 200 participants have shared the journey and helped bring the inspirational story of Catherine McAuley to life for me in a myriad of ways. While the core objectives have not changed, new insights from programme facilitators (Madeline Duckett rsm, Deb Kent and Carmel Crawford), from the team at MIC, from our local Irish presenters and from participants’ feedback have been incorporated along the way, culminating in what we experienced in April 2013. This development and enrichment will continue as the feedback from the most recent programmes informs the planning for 2014.

I began my involvement at age 52, (the same age as Catherine when she was setting out on her particular ‘path of mercy’) and I finish it now a much richer person because of the people of mercy I have met along the way. I have always valued the presence of other Mercy sisters on each programme as it is a significant experience for each of us, being in the place where Catherine shaped her response to the Gospel call to be compassionate, merciful and just. I value the friendship and ministerial support of the Mercy leaders I meet when I visit our ministries as part of my new role – many of whom I met for the first time as part of our preparations for Dublin many years ago! I have no doubt that this programme is a significant means of personal and professional learning, one that ISMAPPNG was very pleased to continue to co-sponsor, building on the foundation of the former Melbourne Congregation and Mercy Education Ltd. Our challenge is to enable our growth as Mercy leaders to continue as a result of our participation. The network of participants now extends across Australia, Papua New Guinea, Aotearoa New Zealand and Newfoundland. To borrow from Ursula Frayne and apply it to this ministry of leadership formation: ‘we go on with a sense of God’s call and pray for the strength to keep focused on the journey’.

In 2001, the inaugural Mercy Ethos Program jointly conducted by the former Melbourne Congregation of Sisters of Mercy and Mercy Secondary Education Inc (MSEI) was held at Catherine McAuley’s founding house of Mercy at Baggot Street, Dublin, Ireland. Since that time, many programs have followed and in 2013 the ninth and tenth programs were conducted and led by coordinators, Carmel Crawford and Sr Annette Schneider rsm. While a journey for all ‘pilgrims’ of the program, it has indeed been a special journey for Annette who has played a pivotal role in eight of the ten programs.

Annette concludes her involvement in the program and we thank her for her outstanding contribution over many years. She leads the reflections offered in this edition and joins with a number of participants who share with us their inner thoughts and experience on a journey that took them to the heart of mercy.

While not in the same length of journey, Principals and Board Directors from Victoria travelled to Western Australia in May this year. Hosted by Santa Maria College, Attadale and St Brigid’s College, Lesmurdie our Western Australian Principals extended warm hospitality and offered engaging sessions during the two day Principals’ meeting. Similarly our recent journey to Aotearoa New Zealand for the 11th biennial AMSSA Conference was a wonderful experience of the wider Mercy family coming together to share stories, ideas and practices on Mercy Education.

While not featured in this edition, currently students from our Mercy colleges are journeying across the seas to Dublin and Rome undertaking a Pilgrimage for Young Mercy Leaders. We look forward to hearing of their journey in our next edition.

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LINDA MELLORS
Mercy Health, Melbourne

I feel very fortunate to have been a pilgrim on the 2013 Mercy Ethos Program. The front of our journals for the trip says “Catherine’s Story, Our Story” and this was an apt descriptor of the entire program. We began by meeting most of the other pilgrims in Melbourne and corresponded with our Canadian colleagues. There was much excitement about our pending trip and what we might discover.

The welcome we received in Dublin was incredibly warm and displayed the wonderful hospitality of the Mercy order. We are all indebted to Sr Mary Reynolds rsm and her team for taking such good care of us at the Mercy International Centre and welcoming us to the broader Irish family. We learnt about Catherine’s life, taking in tours of the streets of Dublin, Coolock House and the house on Baggot Street (now the Mercy International Centre). We were also treated to a trip to Glendalough on an Eternal, misty day.

Our expanded knowledge of Catherine, the early sisters and the work of the current Mercy sisters and partners will spur us on in our various Mercy ministries. It was enlightening to discover that Mercy is involved not just in education, health, welfare and spirituality but also in environmental causes, employment pathways and in global justice issues through the United Nations.

I learnt much valuable information about Catherine, her great strengths and her leadership attributes. I particularly liked that her leadership challenges were discussed throughout the program. We were given an insight into the very human Catherine.

My own time at Mercy has been filled with positive and empowering messages about lay people continuing the mission of Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy. This pilgrimage emphasized the changing face of Mercy and the great privilege and responsibility we have to continue this important work. I left Dublin wondering what Catherine could have achieved with today’s knowledge and resources. Her achievements are already remarkable and it is gratifying to see the global nature of the Mercy works and the large numbers of laypeople who want to work in Mercy organisations and continue the Mission.

I would like to particularly thank Sr Annette Schneider rsm and Carmel Crawford. Their thoughtful planning ensured that we had the best possible experience.

SR ANILA ISSAC RSM
ISMAPNG

Who doesn’t like listening to a good story? Carol Wheeler rsm fittingly says in Catherine: A Reflection on Values from the Mercy Tradition “…time to return to our founding stories – for we learn who we are, indeed, we continue to create who we are by the stories we tell.” Story telling has a great significance in my life; it was the story of the Walking Nuns and their response to the marginalized which inspired me to join the religious life as a Sister of Mercy.

The story of Mercy is an unfolding and enduring story about people, throughout history and in present time, people who value the dignity of each person and promote compassion and justice. The theme of the Mercy Ethos Program 2013 – Catherine’s Story, our Story was an appropriate theme for me for I had the chance to revisit Catherine’s story and the founding stories in the HOME and the place where it all began. What a privilege it had been – I had to keep on reminding myself – this is where it began and I am leaving my footprints in the same place. In listening to the stories about the founding sisters and of the new foundations through which our ministries are influenced and connected, encouraged me to continue to appreciate the courage, persistence and foresight of those founding women. These stories became alive as we entered the Mercy House where it all began and from where the Mercy Ministries were taken to new lands.

We received a very warm welcome by the MIC team and community, keeping Catherine’s Story, my story, our collective story. We were given an insight into the very human Catherine, who struggled with day to day dealings of leadership without losing sight of her vision. We looked at a very human Catherine, who struggled with day to day dealings of leadership. We looked at a very human Catherine, who struggled with day to day dealings of leadership without losing sight of her vision. We looked at the contemporary challenges for Mercy leadership and what does it mean to live Mercy today, its challenges, values and direction. We also looked at Mercy in Global Context, Mercy in Action where our contemporary story adds to the richness and complexity as we understand what it means to offer Mercy and hospitality to those we encounter.

During our time together we were aware that many of us who work in Mercy ministries today are called to share the legacy of Catherine McAuley and the early sisters. Catherine’s Story, my story, our collective stories, being men and women of Mercy, provided us opportunity to explore the founding stories and to reflect on how we are called to play our part in leading our communities and work places to become authentic expressions of Mercy in the contemporary world.

I give thanks to God and to all who made it possible for us and for me to have such an enriching experience.

ALISON POWER
St. Patrick’s Mercy Home, St John’s, NL, Canada

I was thrilled to be invited to share in the journey of learning more about Catherine McAuley, our Catherine. It is so amazing by the sense of welcome which I received and the warmth and friendship that developed during our time together. It is amazing to learn of Catherine’s challenges and to see her degree of perseverance. Imagine her mission being alive so many years later. She has affected more lives than I am sure she ever thought possible.

In today’s work, we face challenges that we may perceive as being far more complicated than Catherine would have experienced, but we are very fortunate to have friends and support systems internationally. I was able to draw on experiences and support among our group in Dublin that will remain with me for an eternity. Catherine should be very proud of what she accomplished and I am so very proud to be one “little pebble on her beach” as we move Catherine’s mission forward for many more generations to come.

Catherine’s example shows us that faith and clarity of purpose can allow us to achieve what might otherwise seem overwhelming.
It was a great privilege to represent Santa Maria College at the recent Mercy Ethos Program named ‘Catherine’s Story. Our Story’. I feel very blessed to have had such a rich experience of Mercy in Dublin where Catherine McAuley lived, worked and died.

Ireland’s history and culture made a deep impression on me. I experienced first-hand the warmth of the local people in everything I did. It’s something I found amazing when learning of the constant challenges faced throughout their history, whether invasion and repression, civil war or recurring economic hardship. The Mercy story is entwined with this story of suffering people in need of practical assistance.

The program included excellent course input and first-hand experience of Mercy related historical sites in and around Dublin. Cooklock House, where Catherine made her plan to build a House of Mercy, and the Presentation Convent at Georges Hill, where she took her final vows, were highlights.

Being part of a diverse group of participants was also an enriching experience. Included were Mercy sisters, lay people from education, family services and Health ministries as well as Mercy board members. Rich conversations emerged from workshops about Mercy leadership and values in contemporary contexts. The Mercy Ethos Program provided an opportunity to contemplate the essence of who Catherine was and better understand the challenges she faced. Over the course of the week it was just so evident that Catherine led a life of great meaning and purpose. I came away from the program reminded of the centrality of faith to Catherine’s mission and her amazing resourcefulness and practicality in undertaking her ministry.

The program has gifted me with renewed vision in my role as a teacher and leader of the Religious Education learning area in a Mercy school. Mercy has much to offer young people of today. Catherine’s story challenges us to live a life of meaning and great impact focused on the Gospel. I sincerely thank Carmel Crawford and Annette Schneider for their organisation and facilitation of the 2013 Mercy Ethos Program.

The journals we were given at the start of the Mercy Ethos Program placed the words of Catherine McAuley from our Mercy Constitutions under our group photo: “The tender Mercy of our God has given us one another.” These words took on a new significance for me after the week I spent in Dublin with members of our group.

Being a participant in the Mercy Ethos Program was for me both a privilege and a delight, as this was my first time in Ireland. It was good to be on this amazing journey with Catherine and other participants from Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland and Papua New Guinea. Hearing Catherine’s story, being in the Baggot Street house where she lived reconnected me with the passion of Catherine, her joys and struggles yet her determination to listen to her God enabling her to meet the needs of the poor in her time in Dublin.

By listening again to some of the history of Ireland at that time also helped me understand more of the Mercy story. The journey of Catherine’s story came alive in me to recreate our story, and my story. I was particularly struck by her vision and her practical approach to life. Being in the classroom, the room where she died, walking the streets of Dublin and the house and the stairs grounded me and enabled me to feel that this was sacred space. Visiting Georges Hill where Catherine made her vows was a moving experience as we the Sisters of Mercy present renewed our vows. I have been enriched by attending the Mercy Ethos Program and I enjoyed every moment of the program.

On the Wednesday we went to Glendalough for the day which gave me space to reflect on the previous two days. This was another sacred place and it was good to walk reflectively around the lake. I enjoyed the Mercy hospitality offered by the staff at Baggot St. The Program was excellent and I felt honoured to be a participant. My life in Mercy has been deepened and influenced in a new way.

Maria McGuinness rsm in her input on “Living Mercy Today” defined mercy as “Mercy is that within us that motivates us to respond with compassion to the suffering of others.” This quote is similar to our chapter statement. I know that my ministry too will be enhanced by Catherine’s story, our story.
The first Seeds of Justice student event for 2013 was held at Holy Cross Centre, Templestowe on 23 and 24 May. Students from across fifteen Mercy sponsored and affiliated colleges across Victoria participated in the two days and reflected on the theme “Who is Mercy?” Inspired by keynote speakers, various ‘ministry placements’ across Melbourne and by their own peers, students returned to their schools empowered to act and to make a difference.

 WE THANK THE STUDENTS FROM PADUA COLLEGE, MORNINGTON, FOR THE FOLLOWING REFLECTION WHICH CAPTURES THE EXPERIENCE. 

The first of the 2013 Seeds of Justice Conference explored the concept of Mercy. Along with fourteen other Mercy-associated schools we listened to a range of guest speakers who encouraged us to delve into the question “Who is Mercy?” Guest speakers included Sr Kath Tierney rsm, a former Mercy Congregation Leader; Br Harry Prout fms and Kerry Joyce from the Exodus community in West Heidelberg; Shaku Robertson, PR and Communications Manager from McAuley Community Services for Women (MCSW), and Sr Anila Issac, who also accompanied us on a placement. We also had group activities with the 63 students who attended, only five of them boys.

Sr Kath (pictured below with students and staff) discussed how it can seem quite glamorous to go and do big gestures like going to Africa, but there is help needed in our own backyard. Br Harry talked about West Heidelberg which is rated the sixth poorest place in Victoria. He introduced us to Kerry, who shared with us her inspiring story of courage and forgiveness. She demonstrated the virtue of generosity in the face of hardship through her work in the community of West Heidelberg. Sheku told us that women show up with small children in the middle of the night with nothing but the clothes on their backs. She also talked about the shockingly high number of women who will experience domestic violence in Australia.

Part of the experience was to go on short placements to a range of organisations which provided particular services to people in need. They ranged from aged care facilities to crisis care for women. We went to two different placements. Bella branched off to Fr Bob’s food van in St Kilda. The food van was on the same corner as the Gatwick Hotel. As well as assisting giving out food, water and dinner for the cold evening ahead and for the coming days, we also received a tour through the Gatwick. This was not a great place but still something for those who needed some form of shelter. It was once home to the rich and famous; now it is home to the destitute. The rest of us went to a homework club in the public housing district in Carlton. In this district we found many Somalian families living in poor conditions in small flats. After a little confusion, we went and helped children aged 12–17 with all sorts of homework, from Italian and French to Chemistry and Physics. We were told that often these children came to do their homework here because the flats they were living in were so crowded and noisy.

The conference was a great experience and was truly enlightening. We all felt that we had a glimpse into the lives of those less privileged than ourselves. We were told that the response of the Sisters of Mercy is always changing and adapted to meet the needs and demands at the time. We would also like to thank Mrs Young (pictured below top right with students from Padua College) for providing this wonderful opportunity to experience a taste of a different ‘world’ away from the Peninsula. We all hope now that we can bring back what we have learnt into our school community by spreading the Mercy spirit and making a difference. The Seeds of Justice program was an eye opening and unforgettable experience.

Kate Mililli, Sam Cheers, Jess Kerr, Bella Seal and Hailey Williams – Year 11 Padua College, Mornington
On 13 & 14 May, Principals from Mercy Colleges and Mercy Education Board Directors enjoyed the warmth of hospitality offered by Santa Maria College, Attadale and St Brigid’s College, Lesmurdie. College Principals, Mr Ian Elder and Dr Amelia Toffoli, prepared a comprehensive program over the two days incorporating presentations on current and future developments at the colleges, engaging reports from staff and students on local initiatives and programs and extensive tours of both colleges. Intermixed with this of course were the friendly smiles from staff and students, beautiful catering and the ever-available comfortable cup of tea.

A significant part of the program was meeting and hearing from the new Director of Catholic Education in Western Australia, Dr Tim McDonald. Tim commenced his appointment as Director in November 2012 and succeeded past Director, Mr Ron Dullard, who held the position for the past nine years. Tim has extensive experience in education especially following his most recent professional appointment as an Associate Professor specialising in classroom management at Edith Cowan University for the past ten years. Tim’s presentation to Principals and Board Directors provided an overview on the provision of Catholic Education in Western Australia, and the work of the CEOWA office in servicing the entire state. Tim’s driving ambition is for “Catholic Education to be a system where all people flourish”.

In between the two day program, Mercy Education conducted its annual Public General Meeting on the evening of 13 May and hosted Sisters of Mercy, Principals, staff, College Council members and friends of Mercy Education. The meeting was followed by guests enjoying a beautiful meal in the magnificent surrounds of the McDonald Centre at Santa Maria College and we once again thank Ian Elder and his staff for the wonderful hospitality.

The eleventh biennial AMSSA Conference was hosted with ‘extravagant’ hospitality at Carmel College, Auckland from Saturday 13 – Tuesday 16 July. The theme for the conference was Mercy Alive and the 150 delegates and 53 student delegates lived out the theme over the four days, listening to outstanding keynote speakers and participating in engaging workshops. The concurrent programs provided new friendships, collegial support and networking opportunities for the representatives from the 46 Mercy schools, governing boards and members of the Congregation/Institute of Sisters of Mercy across Aotearoa New Zealand, Samoa, Tonga, Papua New Guinea and Australia.

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2013 AUSTRALASIAN MERCY SECONDARY SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION (AMSSA) CONFERENCE
AUCKLAND, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Top: Keynote speaker Sr Marilyn Lacey rsm with Mr Alex Marcus, Principal of Mercy Secondary School Yarapos (MSSY), PNG. Above: MSSY Deputy Principal, Susan Nianguma and student delegate Vera Rasa.
2013 AMSSA Conference
Auckland, NZ continued

International keynote speakers included Megan McKenna from New York City, Sr Marilyn Lacey rsm from California and Dr Deborah Stevens from New Zealand. Megan is an internationally known author, theologian, storyteller and lecturer. Her stories, the breaking open of the Scriptures and her deep understanding of justice and mercy offered new learnings to all. Sr Marilyn, who visited Australia in March last year, spoke passionately about her work with refugees in the US, Africa and Southeast Asia. She is the founder and executive director of Mercy Beyond Borders, a non-profit organisation which partners with displaced women and children in South Sudan and Haiti to alleviate their extreme poverty. Deborah, a scientist and doctoral researcher at the University of Waikato, engaged her audiences in the discipline of Bioethics and her dreams for New Zealand to become the first country in the world to integrate a dedicated bioethics curriculum at secondary school level.

Congratulations to the AMSSA Executive members, conference organisers and many helpers who put together a wonderful conference. Special thanks to our hosts, Carmel College Principal, Kath Deady, and her dedicated staff for a most enjoyable four days of Mercy coming alive.

Finally, we congratulate Sheena Barber, Principal of Mercedes College, Perth on her election as the new President of AMSSA.