Farewell to Principals

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Tributes and Farewells
Darren McGregor
– by Sr Mary Moloney rsm

At the 2013 Mercy Education Dinner, Board Directors hosted Principals, senior leadership team members, spouses and Sisters of Mercy. Amongst the special guests were Institute Leader, Sr Berneice Loch rsm and Institute Councillor, Sr Annette Schneider rsm. The dinner was enjoyed by all and provided an opportunity to pay tribute to and farewell two outstanding principals: Mr Darren McGregor, Principal of Catholic College Bendigo and Mr Darren Atkinson, Principal of St Joseph’s College, Mildura. The following extracts were taken from the speeches delivered by Board Directors, Sr Mary Moloney and Mr John Shannon.
Darren is a leader in every sense of the word, a charismatic leader. Leadership exudes from Darren. As a gifted wordsmith and an inspirational speaker Darren’s eloquence is able to capture the imaginations of staff and take them with him on the journey. And what a journey it has been for Catholic College Bendigo over the last ten years led by a true visionary.

During his time as Principal of Catholic College Bendigo, Darren has always been aware that he is Principal of a school with two significant charisms and he has ensured that both charisms – the Marist and the Mercy – are recognized and celebrated by all members of the Catholic College community. Coming from a Marist background himself Darren has wholeheartedly embraced the Mercy charism.

At the end of 2012 the Marists withdrew their governance of Catholic College Bendigo and thus in 2013 the College became a Mercy school in its own right. Appropriately the theme chosen for the 2013 year was “Grow in Mercy.” Over the years, this is what we have witnessed in Darren.

Darren leaves Catholic College Bendigo to take on his next challenge – Foundation Principal of Marist College in Maiden Gully, Bendigo. We wish Darren, Jane, Caitlin, Liam, Emma and Sarah well for the exciting journey ahead and ensure him of our prayers and support. Darren, as you leave us, carry with you the legacy of Mercy.

In the words of Catherine McAuley, “Put your confidence in God and, above all things, pray constantly.”

And again in the words of Catherine McAuley, “May God make you an instrument of His glory.”

Before going further about Darren, I will digress. When I thanked the spouses, husband/wives earlier this evening, I had Tracy Atkinson in mind. Tracey, you have been an amazingly supportive, loving wife and I know Darren would agree that he could not have fulfilled his duties as Principal without your encouragement, a listening ear, your own sense of hospitality and sometimes that reality check. The Board and Executive thank you tonight also.

Darren, you will be remembered for much more however than your hospitality. Your passion for teaching and learning stands out amongst your peers, colleagues and school community. The emphasis on technology, a love of yours, including the introduction of SIMON, CITRIX, remote login access, wireless accessibility and introduction of tablets and e-textbooks next year, are just some of the ways you enhanced student learning. A further focus on Professional Development for staff on engaging students in the classroom enhanced your standing in the Mildura community as an outstanding educational leader.

You have also been a builder, maybe didn’t see yourself that way, but as the need arose you seized the opportunity. The completion of the Trade Training Centre, a major achievement and undertaken in conjunction with other Mildura educational interests, must be very satisfying. It included much needed Commercial Kitchen, Restaurant and Hair Salon. A legacy you must be very proud of. And we are all looking forward to the completion of the Maths/Science Centre along with upgraded Canteen and staff facilities, currently underway.

After five years as Principal and six years as Deputy Principal and a total of eighteen years at St Joseph’s College, you should be justifiably proud of all you have achieved. Your authentic witness as a Catholic, your affection and respect for the Sisters of Mercy, their school and all they have worked for in the past, were patently evident in your principalship and the Board says humbly, thank you.

We wish you every success in your new venture, a position you have thoroughly earned and in the words of the Irish, May the Lord keep you in His hand, and never close His fist too tight on you.
Institute Leader, Sr Berneice Loch rsm, is pleased to announce the appointment of Mr Max Fletcher to the Board of Mercy Education. Max is very well regarded in Catholic Education in Victoria and has held a number of senior positions in the dioceses of Sandhurst and Ballarat. He has recently retired and has concluded his term as Deputy Director – Catholic Identity & School Improvement, CEO Sandhurst.

As Deputy Director, Max worked closely with the school communities to ensure progressive quality Catholic education and continuous improvement. His role involved liaising with government and non government authorities at diocesan, state and national levels and overseeing the communication of relevant information to schools and CEO personnel. Prior to his work with the CEOs at Sandhurst and Ballarat, Max was principal of Gagen College, Wangaratta for eleven years.

Max comes to the Board with a rich understanding of the Mercy charism and with significant leadership experience and expertise in Mercy governance in Ballarat. Max will commence his role with Mercy Education in December and will attend his first Board Meeting on 6 December.

I am very pleased to have recently joined the team at Mercy Education at Alphington having over seventeen years’ experience working within the Victorian Catholic secondary education sector. Starting in the Finance Office at the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne, moving to Star of the Sea College, Gardenvale as Assistant Business Manager and eventually stepping up to the position of Business Manager at Siena College Camberwell in 2004.

My responsibilities in schools, especially during my time at Siena have been wide ranging, from looking after many of the financial aspects of the organisation through to overseeing the constant upkeep of the building and grounds. Over this time I have developed a keen passion for further improving the educational environment for the safety and wellbeing of all who enjoy it.

These responsibilities have brought with it a greater need to understand the complex and every growing compliance requirements within the school environment and the need to continually explore and mitigate against the risks that it attracts.

I have a very keen interest in meeting the challenges of this exciting new role that will see me develop systems and structures designed to ensure our Mercy schools continue to increase their awareness, and are able to address the complex and growing requirements surrounding risk and compliance in the educational setting. I am fortunate to come armed with many practical experiences that prepare me for this exciting and challenging role.

I have been made to feel very welcome at Mercy Ed and look forward to engaging further with you in my role.
For just under two sublime weeks, 5 teachers and 27 students, including ourselves, were blessed to represent Australia on a pilgrimage to the Mercy International Centre and the Vatican. The whole experience was truly memorable and we hope that we can now share this positivity and vibrancy about Mercy and our faith, with all those in our communities.

Our first stop was Ireland. There, we attended the conference part of the Young Mercy Leaders Pilgrimage, held at the Mercy International Centre in Baggot Street Dublin. We listened to our four keynote speakers, Aíne Barrins rsm who spoke to us about our friend Catherine; Dr Karen Schneider rsm who runs medical missions in Guyana, Haiti and Kenya; Sr Adele Howard rsm, the only Australian presenter, spoke about how technology can be harnessed to spread the good works of Mercy and finally, Sr Mary Reynolds rsm, Director of Mercy International Association, who spoke to us about how ‘a leader is a dealer in hope’. We also learnt about other works of Mercy, means of prayer and of course, we all learnt a lot about ourselves.

Despite coming from 12 different schools across Australia, we were a very tight knit group. This showed during the more sociable events, when we Aussies managed to hold our own against our fellow pilgrims from America, England, Ireland and Belize (Central America). That diversity mixed with a common purpose, led to the creation of an electric atmosphere throughout. On the last day, we prepared our action plans and hopefully this time next year we’ll be writing about Dr Karen’s visit to Australia.

Whilst sad to be parting Dublin, we were soon swept up again in the buzz of a new city. On our first visit to St Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican, we were almost moved to tears by how incredible and grand it was. Again on the final day of the pilgrimage, we revisited St Peter’s Basilica where Fr Peter Varengo sdb, college chaplain at the Academy said Mass.
for us in, quite fittingly, the Irish Chapel of the Papal Crypt. It was a beautiful way to end our journey, one that we will always cherish!

Whilst in Europe we also took some time to get to know each other whilst touring. In Ireland, we visited the nearby countryside in County Wicklow which took our breath away, St Patrick’s Cathedral, Glasnevin Cemetery, Phoenix Park, Trinity College with the Book of Kells and cruised down the Liffey River. We had great adventures in our Paddywagon bus and loved learning about the rich history of Ireland from our guide, Don. In Rome we spent time at the Colloseum, Sistine Chapel and Trevi fountain, this time guided expertly by Lucianna. We also went to Florence for a day, experiencing the great street culture, history and authentic Italian pizza!

We were incredibly blessed to be part of such an amazing and life changing experience. Our new friendships, amongst our little family of 27 and those with people all around the world will last a lifetime, as will the memories of a wonderful experience. Between us, we have learnt countless things, ‘the little lights of ours, we are learning to let them shine’, and now we can ‘fan into flames’ the gift of Mercy in all our lives.

Clare Martin & Jessica Incoul
– Academy of Mary Immaculate, Fitzroy

Put your whole confidence in God

If someone had asked me what it means to be part of a Mercy school before I went on this pilgrimage, I would most likely reply with a shrug and vaguely mention Catherine McAuley and Mercy Day. Yet throughout the pilgrimage, I gradually realised what it means to be part of a Mercy school. It is far greater than just being founded by Catherine McAuley or participating in Mercy Day. I realised that Mercy cannot be defined by just one thing. Mercy is a kind of spirit, something within all of us, beyond the different denominations of religious faith in our school. It is warm, inviting and able to enrich our lives.

Mercy doesn’t have to be a huge project where people are on a mission to solve the world’s problems or end poverty; we can perform acts of Mercy in our everyday lives. After all, “there are things the poor prize more highly than gold: the kind word, the gentle, compassionate look, and the patient hearing of sorrows.” The spirit of Mercy feels alive to me because of all the friends we have made, all the inspirational people we met and all the amazing experiences that we can’t wait to share with the rest of the school community.

I’d also just like to thank everyone who was involved in providing us with such a wonderful opportunity to enrich our faith in such a unique, hands-on way. It has been an unforgettable experience and I’d recommend it to any students interested.

Mary Nguyen
– St Aloysius College, North Melbourne
Mercy doesn’t have to be a huge project where people are on a mission to solve the world’s problems or end poverty; we can perform acts of Mercy in our everyday lives.

Above: Whole group in front of our Paddywagon.
Below: Caitlin Smart, Mercy Regional College Camperdown, Madeleine DeGrandi, Sacred Heart College Kyneton, Jacinta Ryan and Laura Zarb, Sacred Heart College Geelong and Courtney Gee, Catholic College Bendigo at St Kevin’s Monastery, Glendalough, County Wicklow.
Seeds of Justice

During the second semester this year, three Seeds of Justice programs have been held, including the inaugural chapter in Perth, Western Australia. We acknowledge and thank the contribution by Rosa Speranza, Mercedes College; Helen Chaffer, Santa Maria College; and Sam Weir, SHC Kyneton for their commitment and tireless work in bringing this inaugural chapter together. Similarly we thank Jo Saunders and Darren Egberts and the committee members for their leadership in bringing together the second program in regional Victoria.

A brief account of the three programs follows:

Student Conference – Western Australia
The inaugural WA Seeds of Justice Program was held 29 and 30 July, 2013 at the St John of God Retreat Centre in Safety Bay. The theme used at the 2012 Victorian program, that of “Boundless Plains to Share?. Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Seeking a Merciful Response” was selected for the WA program.

Students and staff from Santa Maria College, Mercedes College, St Brigid’s College and Aranmore College attended the program which was facilitated by Rosa Speranza, Mercedes College, Helen Chaffer, Santa Maria College, Catherine Symonds, Brunswick Women’s Theatre and Sam Weir, Chair of Seeds Committee from Melbourne.

The theme of the program was particularly relevant as a social justice issue for Australia today. The students were presented with firsthand accounts of refugee stories with the challenge to respond in a merciful way. The inclusion of students from Aranmore College, students who are refugees seeking asylum in Australia and attending a Mercy school in Perth, was particularly meaningful as were the stories of Yomal and Margaret.

The interactive manner in which the students could engage in the shared stories and the information presented to them brought the program to life.

On 29 and 30 July, a group of Year 10 students and I attended the Seeds of Justice Conference at Saint John of God retreat, Safety Bay, where we were joined by students from Mercedes, St Brigid’s and Aranmore Colleges. The overnight conference was focused on the theme of asylum seekers and refugees, and through the course of the two days, we heard shocking yet exceptional, first hand stories from refugees themselves. The presentations, workshops and stories we uncovered, heard and discussed, dramatically changed many opinions of the students and there were many times throughout the course of the two days where there was not a dry eye in the room. Our first intensive day was twelve-hours long and as we listened to the many eye opening stories, we felt compelled to change the views that refugees and asylum seekers were perceived as in society. The second day was about putting our knowledge into action and we hope to build a strong connection with the intensive English centre students at Aranmore College. Along with the workshops, we met many new friends and built great relationships with all the students, and are excited to have a reunion eventually to see how our progress has played out in our respective schools. Overall, the Seeds of Justice Conference was a great success and a life-changing experience.

Kate Robertson (Year 10, Byrne)
Santa Maria College, Attadale

After attending Seeds last year, I feel re-inspired to passionately pursue this human rights matter.
The program was better than I expected. I learnt a lot and gained a better insight into the way asylum seekers and refugees are treated and what they go through.

REGIONAL VICTORIA CONFERENCE

Schools that attended the regional event in September included, Mercy Regional College Camperdown, Notre Dame College Shepparton, Damascus College Ballarat, Emmanuel College Warrnambool and Trinity College Colac. A total of 27 students and eight staff were booked to take part in the event and there was a good ratio of male to female students.

Our presenters for the two days included an icon to the Homeless in Melbourne; Les Twentyman OA and Sr Assumpta Kent rsm who works in St Kilda with those who battle in the street as well as Briar Terrace and the City Mission. Br Peter Walsh (Marists) and Jacinta Holffar represented St Vincent De Paul and the incredible work of the Soup Kitchens and programs that St Vincent De Paul advocate for the homeless both locally, nationally and world wide. The issues of addictions influencing the number of homeless or disengaged community members living on our streets in both city and rural settings was highlighted by each of the speakers. Their stories touched the hearts of the participants and the responses they offered showed how much they had been surprised yet inspired by the experiences our speakers shared. Whilst the problem seems so endless, the students were also presented with positive ways to help a number of different organisations continue their valuable work.

Staff from each school were actively involved during the event; from planning to booking speakers and leading prayer or facilitating group activities during the Event. Notre Dame College provided a wonderful wakeup call of team building activities in the morning and Damascus College set a beautiful prayer space, helping us to begin in a prayerful and reflective manner. One of the other major activities was the ‘hypothetical’, ably facilitated by John O’Sullivan from Emmanuel College. Each school including Mercy Regional College and Trinity College also took a role in welcoming and thanking our guest speakers.

The mixed school group activities resulted in some very creative responses to the topic and were definitely inspired by each of the speakers. Finally of course there was the time for staff to sit with their own College students to plan for the future, to present ideas to nurture both awareness and active responses to the concept of ‘homelessness’ in their schools.

Jo Saunders – on behalf of the Seeds of Justice Regional Planning Team 2013.
OCTOBER STUDENT CONFERENCE

The second Seeds of Justice student event in Melbourne was held at Holy Cross Centre, Templestowe on 24 and 25 October. Students from Mercy sponsored and affiliated colleges across Victoria participated in the two days and reflected on the theme ‘Paving the Road to Refuge’.

On 24 October, Elizabeth Haigh, Ally Curnow and Ms Cross participated in a Seeds of Justice Conference. Representatives from Mercy Schools throughout Victoria met in Melbourne to further enrich our understanding of people seeking asylum throughout the world. Keynote speakers included Sr Brigid Arthur csb from the Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project, young law student, Ms Dana Affleck, who is the founder of Road to Refuge website for young people.

Throughout the stories told over the two days, we learnt more about the struggles and misfortunes that asylum seekers and refugees have to endure on their journey to a place of safety. Learning and bonding with other like-minded young people gave us a greater understanding of how important this issue really is. Sr Bridget and Ms Affleck dispelled a number of myths and mistruths surrounding the issue and particularly de-coded the language used in the media and by governments to distance us from the real stories. We discussed how we can help play a part in welcoming asylum seekers and assisting them with their settlement in Australia. It was a thoroughly informative, enlightening and energising two days.

Ally Curnow – Catholic College Bendigo

Congratulations to the Mercy Ed network. Seeds of Justice is a magnificent initiative that must continue as an integral feature of our connection in the Mercy tradition.

Thanks.
Frayne Speech Festival

The 2013 Frayne Speech Festival, hosted by Our Lady of Mercy College Heidelberg was held on Friday 30 August. Once again the festival proved to be a wonderful occasion with spirited competition and students showing incredible talent in their oral communication skills.

Sincere appreciation to host principal, Ms Julie Ryan, festival coordinator, Marie Jenkins, her many helpers and to all the OLMC staff and students for their warm hospitality.

We congratulate the winners of the 2013 festival:

**Voice Choir**
1st place – Catholic College Bendigo
2nd place – Academy of Mary Immaculate

**Public Speaking**
1st place – Caitlin Elie-McGovan, Catholic College Bendigo
2nd place – Monica Do, Academy of Mary Immaculate

**Debating**
1st place – Mount Lilydale Mercy College
2nd place – St Aloysius College, North Melbourne

**Best Overall Debater**
Felicia Torcasio, Our Lady of Mercy College, Heidelberg

Below right: Mrs Lucy Molony, Mercy Education Deputy Chair, presenting awards to Festival winners
Below clockwise: Debating; Best Overall Debater, Public Speaking and Voice Choir
There has been a most marked Providential Guidance which the want of prudence, vigilance, or judgment has not impeded, and it is here that we can most clearly see the designs of God.

Catherine McAuley, Letter to Elizabeth Moore, January 13, 1839