Mercy Leadership Program and Dublin Pilgrimage

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FORMED AND REFORMED FOR MISSION

A reflection on the 2014 Mercy Leadership Program and Dublin Pilgrimage

CARMEL CRAWFORD

Institute Mercy Ethos Coordinator

For each person attending the Mercy Leadership Program and Dublin Pilgrimage the exact moment, experience, story, challenge or example which sparks the spirit anew is unique. For some it’s immersion in the story of Catherine: walking the streets she walked, hearing the stories of the joys and struggles of responding to the needs of the poor and the privilege of being ‘at home’ in the beautiful Baggot Street house. For others the long program affords space and time for reflection allowing the hospitality, compassion and justice already within to find a ‘home’ in the Mercy story and mission. For others inspiring presenters, contemporary women of Mercy, among them Mary Reynolds, Maria McGuinness and Denise Boyle call participants to be formed and reformed to respond to the needs of the poor in our own situation.

In 2014 Karen Donnellon RSM and I facilitated the program. Across Australia and Papua New Guinea the mission of Mercy is found responding in many ministry settings and so participants this year were drawn from the leadership of MercyWorks, six Mercy schools, Mercy Health and Mercy Support Services. From ISMAPNG Sisters Anne Foale, Shirley Garland, Helen Glasheen and Duyen Nguyen themselves in diverse ministry responses, joined the group. The experience was also enriched by the participation of a Sister of Mercy from the North Sydney congregation and participants in the education and health ministries of the Sisters of Mercy North Sydney, Parramatta and Aotearoa New Zealand.

To augment the experience in Dublin and ensure that the formation and inspiration gained from the program was able to play a role in forming and reforming the sponsoring ministry for mission, participants were invited to undertake a project. The brief was to design a project that was specific to the participant’s ministry and leadership role, deliverable and directly fostered and developed the Mercy Ethos or mission within that ministry setting.

On 14th August this year’s group gathered in Sydney for Module 3 of the program to reconnect with each other, reflect on and integrate the experience and share the fruits of learning from their projects. Projects included units of work for students in Mercy schools on ‘Catherine’s Approach to Leadership for Social Justice Student Leaders’, ‘Movements of People – How Mercy Globalised the World’ a history unit; ‘Human Trafficking & The Role of the Sisters of Mercy in a Humanitarian Response’ to name a few. In the health sector a project inspired by Maria McGuinness RSM took up ‘Working on Core Purpose’ for board, executive and staff; ‘Presenting Catherine McAuley’s Story’ to staff in a public hospital and a longitudinal project to include the large staff group working in home and community care in mission and values formation.

It is a great privilege to be entrusted with the work of forming and reforming leaders for Mercy mission, however I am mindful of Catherine McAuley’s understanding “it is God’s work not ours.” It is the Mercy of God that has in some way already touched the hearts of women and men that finds expression in a desire to make the world a more hospitable, compassionate and just place. May we continue to work together to form and reform ourselves and those we work with to take our part in the mission of Mercy.

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It has given me the opportunity to reflect on Catherine’s story and to consider where I am on my journey in leading our mission forward today as well as into the future. Our experience began in Melbourne where we got to meet our fellow pilgrims for the first time. It was like finding family when a few of us happened to bump into each other in an exceptionally busy foreign airport on our journey to Dublin. The feeling of warmth and friendship was tangible. The hospitality experienced throughout the program would have made Catherine very proud.

Time spent in Catherine’s house on Baggot Street provided plenty of time for quiet reflection as well as robust discussions. The tour of Coolock house and walking through the streets of Dublin was an opportunity to appreciate the era in which Catherine’s work took place and recognise what courage and resolve these women must have had to have immersed themselves in this work during this time. The day at Glendalough was exceptional. The periods of pouring rain added mystique and splendour to this incredibly beautiful and spiritual place where we visited other spots around Ireland including the Cliffs of Moher.

The minute I set foot into the Mercy International centre in Baggot Street, Dublin on Sunday, 27th of April, I could feel the presence of the legacy that Catherine McAuley has left in the Sisters of Mercy. To walk in the rooms where she would have many of her formative years and walking the streets she would have prayed in, visiting the house in Coolock where she spent her last days. The presentations at the Mercy International Centre on Baggot Street created a great context for our sense of mission. I felt especially challenged by the presentation from Sr Maria McGuinness rsm about Mercy Identity. We now have an image of Catherine McAuley in our house at St Augustine, Down Under. Sr Denise Boyle Fdmin talked about the action to protect women from exploitation in human trafficking in Ireland’s motels... training staff to spot the tell-tale signs with customers. The visit to Coolock and Glendalough were highlights. Some of us visited other spots around Ireland including the Cliffs of Moher and the Neveryange tunnel tombs (older than the pyramids and only uncovered in the 1960s). These were truly amazing.

The program offered many challenges and I continue to process them. I am now building into my daily routine a time for quiet and reflection. I am also delighting in finding amongst the Dublin pilgrims new links for my counter human trafficking work. One aspect of my counter trafficking work, building resilience in vulnerable communities, especially amongst young women and girls, echoes the work of Mercy Works, whose board I joined four years ago.

In a final session in our Dublin program a Mercy sister asked the challenging question: Where do we, Mercy people, meet the poor today? One answer to this question presented itself when, enroute for home, at our stopover in the Dubai airport, I sought out the massage centre I had noticed on my Dublin-bound flight. It had seemed to me that the staff were all Filipinas, a long way from home. I booked a massage and engaged the young woman massaging my shoulders about her work. As I work for ACRATH, a counter human trafficking NGO, I am conscious of human trafficking and labour exploitation vulnerabilities, and I wanted to know more about the Filipinas doing massage in the middle of the night in the Dubai airport. I discovered that the Filipino masseur had small children back in the Philippines and that she had a two year contract to stay in Dubai working long hours, mostly through the night. I was very moved when she said to me, ‘I feel so sad that I have to leave my children in order to raise them.’ Perhaps this woman represents some of the poor on our planet in the 21st century. The woman, a mother, believes she must leave her children and travel half way round the planet in order to earn sufficient income to raise her family. My encounter with the Filipino masseur, on the final day of my pilgrimage, has left me with renewed energy to address labour exploitation and to work for just working conditions planet-wide.

Where do we, Mercy people, meet the poor today?

I am well back from the Mercy Leadership and Dublin Pilgrimage, and have picked up my home and work life again. So what is now different for me? The program offered many challenges and I continue to reflect on their impact. I am now building into my daily routine a time for quiet and reflection. I am also delighting in finding amongst the Dublin pilgrims new links for my counter human trafficking work. One aspect of my counter trafficking work, building resilience in vulnerable communities, especially amongst young women and girls, echoes the work of Mercy Works, whose board I joined four years ago.

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Dublin reflections cont.

Jonathan Campton
Executive Officer Ministries

I had the great pleasure of attending the Dublin pilgrimage as part of the Mercy Leadership Program this year. I was reminded at the commencement that a ‘pilgrimage is a ritual journey with a hallowed purpose’ where ‘new and old places in the heart are visited.’ The pilgrimage allowed me to connect places in my heart with the founding story of Catherine McAuley.

The group of 27 participants enjoyed visiting the House of Mercy on Baggot St. We stood witness to the scale of this grand house and the vision that Catherine held for her ministry. We climbed the stairs that so drained Catherine and her fellow sisters after working tirelessly all day. We prayed in the chapel where Catherine would have sought confidence from her Father. In all the activities we connected ourselves with the inspiration of the founding story.

While the experience of visiting the House of Mercy was great, three other components of the pilgrimage remain with me; the visit to Coolock House, the time at Glendalough and listening to the challenge set by Maria McGuinness RSM. I think these experiences remain because they were all so deeply personal.

The visit to Coolock House reminded me of a house that I loved to spend time in as a child. I thought of all the love that must have been present in Mr and Mrs Callaghan and Catherine as they lived at Coolock House for more than 20 years. The same love that extended its hospitality to shelter women and children and educate local children in a nearby building. This house was an early template for Catherine’s later ministry.

The visit to Glendalough connected me with the natural beauty of my home state, Tasmania. However, it also connected me with the fact that our faith is an ancient faith. In the ruins of the old churches at Glendalough is the truth that the founding story of Catherine is but a recent chapter.

Finally, listening to Maria McGuinness set the challenge as we prepared to conclude the pilgrimage. The mission is about the poor. Poverty remains today and we must work in all our ways to eradicate it. We are not on business, but rather on a mission.

The pilgrimage was a fantastic experience that I will carry forward. The challenge I took from this experience is how do I connect with our founding mission and how do I look at opportunities to work globally.

St Aloysius College, North Melbourne
Building on our past, investing in our future

Mary Farah, Principal

Official Blessing of the Refurbishment of the St Aloysius College Year 7 building

One of the most significant developments this year at St Aloysius is the renewal of our Year 7 area which was officially blessed by Father Max Vodolo, on April 30th. The Year 7 renewal will define education and classroom practice for years to come and forms part of a greater vision to create a unique learning experience for our students. Symbolically, this renewal reinvests the School’s heritage while investing enormous faith in the future of the school.

In designing and developing this area we considered the following; Creating an environment which enables the opportunity for students to collaborate, discuss and exemplifies learning environment for girls in the 21st century. With plentiful use of natural light, with refurbished break-out spaces, this area will be a vibrant hub for learning and student engagement, and insures the technology.

Mary Farah, Principal
125 years is a worthy celebration for any institution, in particular a school here in Australia with our short history of such institutions. The history is not lost on our students who have a growing awareness of the significance of the past and the rich tradition they share in this place of Mercy education. We continue to draw upon the spirit and legacy of Catherine McAuley and all the Sisters of Mercy that have led us to this point in our journey. Together with the effort and vocation of the lay members of staff, the character of Sacred Heart College has been forged. As Stewards in this place of Catholic education, the staff, College leaders and myself as Principal, are only too aware of the mission we must uphold as we create a vibrant learning environment where we wish to see our students thrive.

The day arrived, 29 July, 2014. At the front of the College, Ambulance Victoria Pipers welcomed students and visitors alike. The pipers then led the procession of Class Captains, Ambulance Victoria Pipers welcomed students and visitors alike. The day arrived, 29 July, 2014. At the front of the College, where we wish to see our students thrive.

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The old convent was destroyed by fire. In February 1902 there was another move and by 1908 Sacred Heart College had 30 boarders and an equal number of day girls. A new wing was another move and by 1908 Sacred Heart College had 30 boarders and an equal number of day girls. A new wing was added in the following year.‘

Extract from Homily:
‘The first Nuns arrived with Archbishop Carr on the Saturday evening express train in the midst of winter on 21st July 1889. There were four Sisters. Kyenton had always been a remarkably Catholic area – eight years earlier there were no less than 25 Catholic schools operating within Kyenton parish with a total of 1,355 children on the rolls. No other parish in the Diocese could make such a claim.

When they arrived the Archbishop was met by the parish priest, Dean Greghan, Father Daly, and a large number of prominent ladies and gentlemen. The Archbishop blessed the convent and the school which had been once the Robert Burns Hotel, and the convent school was opened in what had previously been the bar of the hotel. Music was always part of the College and Archbishop Carr frequently visited the parish, spoke to the Nuns, observing their work, encouraging them to be close to their Rule and close to each other.

By 1892 Kyenton was a Mercy Convent in its own right and a niece of Catherine McAuley, the Foundress, was the first novice received in Kyenton. Further schools expanded in Molansby, Larnston, Woodend and Trentham. By 1901 the College had been growing and moved to High Street. The old convent was destroyed by fire. In February 1902 there was another move and by 1908 Sacred Heart College had 30 boarders and an equal number of day girls. A new wing was added in the following year.’

Denis J. Hart, Archbishop of Melbourne

Principal, Mr Craig Holmes, was joined by Sr Berenice Kerr and Sr Madeline Duckett, in cutting the 125th cake. After this, three past Principals were called upon to likewise come forward and cut the cake to represent their contributions or slice of history, to Sacred Heart. The three past Principal’s included Sr Carmel Pascoe (January 1972–75), Sr Nancy Freddi (Jan 1987–93) and Sr Mary Moloney (1993–2005).

We officially opened our Mercy Heritage Trail on our 125th Anniversary. This is a visual reminder of our history, symbolic via the artistic interpretations of our history and culture, moving from Catherine's Dublin to a vibrant life beyond our 125th anniversary as a Mercy school.

We recognise the effort of College Archivist, Sharon Lanteri, who has been a driving force in this project. Our two local artists, Ron Davis and Kathryn Portelli, have patiently delivered their contribution to the trail in the lead and metal sculpture representing the arrival of the early sisters here in Kyenton, and the mosaic wall tracking our journey to the current celebration today. It is intended that our incoming Year 7 students will in future navigate our Mercy Heritage Trail as part of their orientation program to gain knowledge about the College history and heritage. The trail combines new installations and existing buildings, art works and icons.

We hope to continue to build upon the trail, expanding it in the future.

Students performed in our 125th production: Stories from the Heart. This was the story of our College based on a play by former student, Adrian Black. It came about from the idea of wanting to tell some of the history, with some licence; stories that may stretch the truth just a little and memories which may strike a chord with the audience, whether they be young or older. Stories from the Heart was a celebration of our rich history from the time the Sisters of Mercy stepped off the train at Kyenton Station to today where we are settled on High Street. Those women must have been amazing and we now benefit from their legacy.

Sacred Heart College is the culmination of all those people who have gone before us. This was a very special and memorable day, one that we know the students of 2014 will remember with pride. The College wishes to thank our staff and students, both past and present, Mercy Sisters, Members of Parliament, the Catholic Education Office, Mercy Education Board and all parents in attendance for their support on this most significant occasion of our Quasquicentennial Foundation Day.

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The Young Mercy Leaders Pilgrimage to Dublin and Rome took place in July 2013 but the fruits of that special time in Dublin at Catherine’s House are still with us today. Before the pilgrimage group left Dublin an Action Plan was developed to be brought to life in their own school environments.

At a reunion of the pilgrimage group in April 2014 it was obvious that much was happening in the schools and the hopes and plans were becoming a reality. The fact that so many of the student participants were elected to Positions of Leadership upon their return was testament to the calibre of the students but it also provided them with the opportunity of leadership and the challenge of making a difference and being and living mercy.

One aspect of the Action plan contained a hope that the students thought might never become a reality. They decided that they wanted to issue an invitation to Sr Karen Schneider, one of the keynote speakers, to visit Australia and share her story, a story of hope, of compassion, of mercy to the most vulnerable of all, the children of Haiti, Kenya, Nigeria and Guyana. Sr Karen graciously accepted the invitation, arriving in May 2014 and journeying from school to school. We were blessed by the presence of Sr Karen, a Sister of Mercy of the Americas and a pediatrician, who, in addition to her work at John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, USA, spends time each year, accompanied by young Doctors in training, providing medical assistance to children in great need.

Now and again life offers experiences that shake complacency, engender hope and are never forgotten. I believe our encounter with Sr Karen was one such experience. Staff and students alike were deeply moved by the story of her work and the people who have touched her life. Likewise we were challenged to action by the realization that so little can mean so much to children in those areas. In Sr Karen we saw the life giving power of mercy. We look forward to continuing to support her work.

Sr Mary Moloney
Young Mercy Leaders Pilgrimage Co-ordinator

Visit by Sr Karen Schneider RSM to Academy of Mary Immaculate

The two day forum provides the ideal setting for Mercy business managers, who hold important leadership roles in our schools, with the opportunity to come together and share their ideas and experience as a collective group. The first day of the forum was held at St Brigid’s College in Lesmurdie, and it began with a welcome from Principal, Dr Amelia Toffoli, and a tour around the College. After a number of formal sessions we relocated to Santa Maria College in Attadale, and enjoyed another College tour led by Principal, Mr Ian Elder who also hosted the group for dinner.

The second day of the forum began with a reflection in the Heritage Chapel at Mercedes College in Perth. The group was welcomed by Principal, Mrs Sheena Barber before touring the first Mercy College established in Australia. We were also able to take in the majesty of St Mary’s Cathedral in Perth which is just over the road from the College.

From this awe-inspiring site we then had to settle down into more mundane reflections upon Fringe Benefits Tax and the Common Financial Language!

All the visiting schools were grateful to our West Australian hosts for their wonderful hospitality exhibited over the two days. As facility management professionals we always get a great deal out of visiting other schools and seeing different approaches to different issues.

On Thursday 7th and Friday 8th August, the annual two day Mercy Business Managers Forum was held in Perth. The event was facilitated by members of the Mercy Executive team and among those attending were business managers from Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia. We were also joined by the business managers from the three Victorian affiliated Mercy Colleges.

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The first student event for 2014, “Where We Meet Justice” began with a welcome, introduction to the program and prayer. Students from twelve Mercy sponsored and affiliated colleges across Victoria participated over two days and were challenged and inspired. Students and staff embraced the theme and after an engaging presentation prepared themselves to go out into the community to experience short placements over a range of organisations which provided particular services to people in need. The opportunity to reach out to the community proved to be a rich experience which students described as being thought provoking, inspirational and encouraged them to further explore how they could continue at a school level.

Both students and staff described the powerful impressions made by our keynote speaker, Mark Clarke, Executive Officer - Office for Justice and Peace – Archdiocese of Melbourne. The following selected comments from students and staff are testimony to Mark’s powerful presentation:

“Mark was an absolute inspiration. Students and schools should have more contact and interaction with him”

“Mark’s talk was very confronting and made me think about the type of people there are in our world”

“Confronting in the best way. Messages really sunk in”

“I found the way Mark delivered his concept was engaging and made me feel compelled to change my attitude and do something”

“It was all very informative and a really eye opening experience”

Following a relaxed late night reflection and a good night’s sleep, students and staff began the next day with presentations on McAuley House- Mercy Links by Bernadette Inman (YML Coordinator), Rachel Prince (YML member), Mairead Kennedy (Seeds Committee member and former YML member) and Rosanna (McAuley House resident).

We give special thanks to our sponsors Catholic Church Insurances and Catholic Development Fund Western Australia for their ongoing support of the Seeds of Justice Program Victoria, Seeds of Justice Program Western Australia and Seeds of Justice Staff Formation Program.

The theme for the 2014 Staff Formation Day was that of “Fostering Mercy beyond the school gates”, and such a key issue explored throughout the day was the global injustice of human trafficking.

Participants began the day in conversation with Sr Angela Reed rsm, as she shared the insights she has gained through research and time spent living in the Philippines. She also introduced the group to the concept of ‘problematisation’ and encouraged those present to exercise critical reflection when discussing vulnerable peoples or presenting an issue of injustice.

Later in the day, the group spent time with Sr Carole McDonald rsm as she spoke about the work conducted by ACRATH and assisted participants to explore the excellent school resources available at www.acrath.org.au.

While the material presented by both Sr Angela and Sr Carole was confronting, all participants were able to leave the Formation Day feeling empowered and well informed as to how they might examine and respond to the issue of human trafficking within their school communities.

During the day, participants also had the opportunity to hear from Bernadette Inman, Coordinator of Young Mercy Links (YML), along with two members of YML, Kathryn Dowling and Isabella Farchione. Kathryn and Isabella spoke candidly about their experiences as members of YML and encouraged all present to promote this post-high school Mercy youth group to senior students in their respective schools.
Notre Dame College is a Catholic, co-educational Secondary college with an enrolment of approximately 1,700 students, across two campuses and three programmes (mainstream, Year 9 Programme and the McAuley Champagnat Programme), located at Shepparton in the Goulburn Valley. We value the living tradition inherent in the Catholic story and we go forward with a sense of the work accomplished by our predecessors. We appreciate our identity and we strive to further build upon the faith and commitment of the Mercy and Marist congregations.

As in all Catholic schools, there is genuine care and compassion shown for each pupil and the College has a dedicated and passionate staff who work in cooperation with families to support the development of each student in all facets of their schooling. We are committed to providing an inclusive education for all, with particular emphasis on multiculturalism and for individuals, be they gifted or of special needs and we believe in the nurturing of the individual as a whole person. This entails spiritual, physical, psychological, social, aesthetic and emotional development within a caring environment.

Linking all our religious, scholastic, social, cultural and sporting pursuits is a strong faith in the Risen Jesus and a spirit of trust in His Mother, our patron. Working under the name and patronage of Mary, Notre Dame, we encourage all to see the person of Jesus in the members of the school and broader community. We boldly face the future, knowing that Notre Dame will guard and guide us as She has in the past.

Mr John Cortese, Principal

Notre Dame College, Shepparton

In 2014 Mercy College, Coburg (Vic) became an affiliated school of Mercy Education Limited. This milestone is a significant step in our journey as a regional College and reflects the importance we place on our living mercy heritage. We are continuing to embed the charism of the Sister of Mercy in our Mercy Story, drawing on the rich tradition of the past to colour our present and innovate our future. Catherine’s original work offers us a blueprint for shaping our future based on a long tradition of seeing, hearing, understanding and actively responding to needs. As a Catholic, girls’ school in the northern suburbs of Melbourne we aspire to be people of mercy by particularly bringing to life the mercy values of excellence, hospitality, justice and compassion in a way unique to our education setting.

We strive to open doors that inspire our students to a world of lifelong learning experiences. In the many and varied forms that learning takes in the day to day, as well as in their hopes and dreams for life after school, we support our girls to be people who shape their world. Our alumni have laid the stepping stones in this regard, influencing education, law reform, sciences and technology to name just a few.

In our golden jubilee year next year, we will celebrate 50 Years of Mercy education in Coburg, showcasing the past and present whilst looking strategically to the future. The journey so far has been stewardled by an expert, skilled, caring and committed staff that places a premium on their own learning and development. Their efforts and dedication are witnessed in our academic curriculum and outcomes and the value placed on being a close knit and connected community.

Mercy College has proudly been formally connected with Mercy Education for the past forty nine years. From the foundation sisters of the College in 1965 to the current day we aspire to all that is mercy.

Dr Michelle Cotter, Principal

Mercy College Coburg

Mercy Education
In 2014, Mercy Regional College begins its fifth decade as a leading Catholic co-educational College in South-West Victoria. Located 200km west of Melbourne, Mercy Regional College is a dual campus school with Year 9–12 students at McAuley Campus in Camperdown and Year 7 and 8 students at the O’Keeffe Campus located in Noorat, about 25km west. Our 2014 enrolment was 506 students.

Mercy Regional College is proud of its twin parish and Mercy heritages. The Sisters of Mercy had a long history in our parish primary schools in teaching and leadership roles with generations of Mercy students influenced by their commitment to education. It was the decision of the Sisters of Mercy to move away from secondary education in the parish schools that drove a group of determined Catholic parents, families and clergy to found Catholic Regional College in 1973, a courageous move that went against the advice of many including the diocesan education authorities. The vibrant, growing and faith-filled school we enjoy today is testament indeed to the foresight of our founders.

Priorities for the 2014 school year include:
- Planning and consultation ahead of the commencement of building works: the next twelve months will see the construction of three new Science labs, Prep room and four GPLAs as the first of three stages in the College’s 2013–2017 Master Plan.
- The development and launch of a new Vision for Learning and Teaching at Mercy. This vision will direct and inform most areas of the College in the next 3–5 years. Associated with this vision is the development and trialling of local feedback and appraisal model for all teaching staff.
- The College’s continued focus on building leadership capacity across both campuses with particular emphasis on our 2015–2017 POL structure.

Yours in Mercy,
Dr Darren Egberts, Principal