

MERCY IN ACTION
9th BIENNIAL AMSSA CONFERENCE 2007

All Hallows School Brisbane welcomed one hundred and twenty delegates from Mercy schools across Papua New Guinea, Samoa, New Zealand and Australia. Also among the guests was Anne Kelleher, The CEO of the newly formed Catholic Education Irish Schools Trust (CEIST), the trustee body for the schools of five religious congregations including Mercy schools.

Sr Anne Hetherington, in opening the conference on behalf of the Brisbane Mercy Sisters, reflected that Catherine McAuley and the Mercy women who began education in our part of the globe, all saw education as a practical solution to help women break out of a cycle of poverty and its accompanying threat of moral danger. This Mercy “usefulness” is the fruit of contemplation and reaches out to others in compassion. It is the inheritance for Mercy educators today as we live it in our own lives and offer it to the students who look to us as models of Mercy in Action. Briannon Stevens, a recent ex-student of All Hallows, spoke about this example of her teachers and how her experience of volunteer work while a student gave her the foundation of her present commitment to the homeless in Brisbane. “I hope you rejuvenate at this conference”, she said. “Your work is important. It does make a difference and extends into the adult lives of your students, as it has done for me”.

In the conference presentations and activities there was ample scope for rejuvenation. The students from All Hallows and St Saviour’s Toowoomba gave creative expression to all that is good in educating through their hospitality and their musical and dance performances, and the All Hallows chorale assisted at the conference liturgy. The conference prayers and Eucharistic liturgy were deep expressions and experiences for us as Mercy educators, and the Eucharist included Margery Jackman’s reflection on the Beatitudes.



Mercy Keynote Presenters
l-r Deirdre Mullan rsm, Carol Rittner rsm, Adele Howard rsm, Jan Grey rsm

International guests Sister Carol Rittner and Sister Deirdre Mullan, from Mercy Global Concern, which represents Mercy International at the United Nations, both affirmed and challenged Mercy education as Mercy in Action in the present local and global context. That primary education is still not available to so many children in the world is a reproach to us all, as was their overview of the halting progress towards the U.N. Millennium Development goals. Carol and Deirdre both conducted workshops at the conference and gave us many informal chances to tap into their vision and vantage point as educators.

Professor Erica McWilliam, from Queensland University of Technology, teased out what high equity schooling might be in this conceptual age. This was both an affirmation of teachers and a challenge to adapt to the new world of young people, to make good use of our discomfort and lack of knowledge and to find out more about how students go about learning. Sister Adele Howard took us into the world of Web 2.0 technology, into the new social networking places our students inhabit. What Mercy Action is needed as we respond to this, colonise it ourselves, and use it for our own educational and relational purposes and responsibilities? Sister Jan Gray tapped into biblical and theological themes to consider a spirituality for Mercy educators, and gave us some contemporary musical expressions of hope and of mercy.

The conference workshops were hands-on times: for follow-up on the presentations, and for looking at Mercy in action in the schools: what is possible in developing young Mercy leaders, in the use of IT, in developing our own educating community. Along with Carol, Deirdre and Adele, a number of Mercy educators and students from among the Association schools ran the workshops.

The Brisbane Mercy Sisters welcomed us to their ministries in the area. We visited the Mater Hospital Health Services and Medical Research Institute, the Romero Center, the Mercy Heritage Centre, and the Mercy Disability, Aged Care and Family Services. In meeting an extraordinary group of dedicated professionals supported by the Mercy Sisters to live out Mercy in Action, we reflected on how this support might be better coordinated throughout the Mercy schools in our Association.

Thanks go to the All Hallows School community, to Lee-Anne Perry and the Conference Committee, to the All Hallows Canteen Staff, whose hospitality was superb, and to Conference sponsor, Catholics Church Insurances.

The Biennial General Meeting was held during proceedings and Jane Holloway, from St Catherine's College Kilburnie, was elected president. It is hoped that the 10th Biennial Association Conference, in 2009, will be held in Perth.