



AMSSA

AUSTRALASIAN MERCY SECONDARY SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

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Welcome to the AMSSA Newsletter.

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A Message from AMSSA President, Jane Holloway

Our first newsletter for 2009 has two accounts of pilgrimage with a strong 'Mercy' theme: students who visited Ireland and trod in the footsteps of Catherine McAuley, and Kath Deady who ventured on the most travelled of pilgrim trails, to Compostela.

The electronic version of the invitation to our 2009 AMSSA conference, in Perth, from July 1 – 4, is included with this letter. I encourage you to circulate it as widely as you can.

Jane Holloway, Saint Catherine's College Kilbirnie janeh@stcatherinescollege.school.nz

10th AMSSA Biennial Conference

1 – 4 July 2009

Perth, Western Australia

*The blessing of unity dwelling amongst us
is the true spirit of Mercy flowing on us*

Invitations to the 2009 conference are being posted to schools on Monday (March 9). Soon afterwards you will also receive in the mail the conference registration forms.

Among our guest speakers are Sr. Mary Duffy, Sr. Sophie McGrath, Sr. Mary Reynolds, Anne Kelleher and Professor Celia Hammond.

Each participating Mercy School will also be invited to bring up to two student representatives, as part of their leadership skills development.

There will also be many opportunities to meet and network with those from Mercy schools around Australia, New Zealand and Oceania.

All the way to Santiago – Kath Deady, Carmel College Milford NZ

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It took a month of my life, it was the biggest challenge and the greatest adventure, and every day I try to hold on to a little of the experience. The pilgrimage across the top of Spain, from the French Alps to the great cathedral of Galicia, in whose crypt lies the putative body of St James the Apostle, was the fulfillment of a dream and so much more.

In term 3 of 2008, I was granted a sabbatical by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand - a scheme that has been going for several years now, and for which principals of 5 years or more can apply. There is a requirement that one spends a portion of the time in educational pursuits, so for three weeks I worked in our sister school, Paul VI College in Leulumoeaga, Samoa, alongside Sr Fatima Lemisiorism. That's a story in itself, and one that I hope will be the opening chapter in the ongoing relationship between our two schools. My stated aim was to lead professional learning in literacy strategies with the teachers of Paul VI, and that is a challenge still continuing. However, my own learning was so much greater than any I passed on, and I will never forget the warmth of the Mercy welcome. I stayed in the convent with Sisters Ake, Fatima and Tulili, so everyone in the village - even the parish priest - assumed I was a nun and greeted me with a cheerful "Talofa Sister." They may have been surprised when I spoke about my six children, but they were too polite to show it. I returned to New Zealand with the resolution never again to complain about underfunding or staffing difficulties, and knowing how privileged our schools and students are by comparison with their Samoan counterparts.



After three days back in Auckland, I was out at the airport again, heading for Spain. I had read about the pilgrimage which I soon learned to call the "camino" in novels and travel guides for the last ten years or so, and never believed I would have the time or opportunity to do it. And I didn't, at least not completely. The Way of St James can be started at several points throughout Europe, but the most heavily traveled route is the Camino Frances, which stretches from St Jean Pied de Port, just on the French side of the Pyrenees to the city of Santiago, about 800 kilometres away. I realised quite early that I would not be able to walk the whole distance in the time available, so I crossed the middle section by train. That meant I missed challenge of the 'meseta' or high plateau, where the path crosses endless fields of wheat, barley and oats, with little or no shade. Some find the meseta intensely spiritual, and others just find it boring, but I guess I will have to return another day to discover my own opinion.

My pilgrimage, which amounted to about 500 kms, began on September 2nd, walking through the Cize Pass over the Pyrenees from St Jean to Roncesvalles. The Liber Jacobi, one of the earliest texts about the pilgrimage, has this to say: "Here in the Basque country, the way...goes by a high mountain path called the Cize Pass. It is so high that those who climb up there believe they can touch the sky with their own hands." It's hard to recapture the exhilaration of walking in the clouds, surrounded by soaring eagles and the tintinnabulation of sheep and cattle bells. It's equally hard to describe the relief of reaching Roncesvalles in time to get a bed in the ancient monastery, now converted to a dormitory that sleeps over 100! That evening I attended my first Pilgrim Mass, and was delighted to hear New Zealand's name read as part of the blessing.



The pattern of the days became established very quickly: wake around 5.30 (whenever the first of the 100 or so people with whom one is sharing sleeping quarters starts stirring and rustling), get up, put on your boots and start walking; breakfast maybe an hour later at a convenient bar, café con leche and tostada, walk some more, lunch at another bar on the famous bocadillo con jamon - sounds so much better than a ham sandwich! - rest a bit in the heat of the day, then keep walking till you reach your destination for the day, after walking anywhere between 20 and 30 kms. That destination could be any of the hostels in any of the villages and towns along the way - sometimes for a

small donation, sometimes for a fixed price of 5-9 euros. Once a bed had been secured, the first priority was to shower and wash one's walking clothes, put on the clean set, and head out looking for dinner, usually the 'pilgrim menu' of three courses, with bread and wine, in a bar or restaurant, but on occasion something grander. Then back to the hostel, before the 10 pm curfew, and into bed, wearing the same clean clothes you would walk in the next day. Pilgrims travel light and don't care greatly about fashion!

The great gift of pilgrimage is the people you meet, and to whom you become reasonably close; the great joy is the sense of walking with those fellow pilgrims through the history of our culture and faith, with all the time in the world to reflect on one's own position in the face of that history. The story of St James is definitely myth and legend - beheaded by Herod on his return to Jerusalem after a fairly unsuccessful time of evangelisation in north-west Spain, then returned to Spain by his disciples, buried in an unknown field for about 800 years, then discovered by the local bishop who had a dream of 'a field of stars', or Compostela, and adopted as the patron saint of Spain at a time when Christian Spain was trying to drive out the Moors who had colonised Spain so successfully over the intervening period. The church he was buried in became, over centuries, the great Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, which in the Middle Ages was the third most popular pilgrim destination, after Jerusalem and Rome, and today attracts more than 200,000 people each year. The two most common depictions of St James on the camino are as pilgrim/peregrino and as Matamoros/ Moor-slayer - one very spiritual, the other very bloodthirsty, and hard to reconcile the two.

After 30 days of walking, I arrived at Santiago, having sustained a black eye from a fall, and a painful "musculo contracto" for which the Spanish doctor's suggested cure was to stop walking! The Pilgrim Mass, celebrated daily at 12 noon, gave a real picture of the universal church, and though much of the statuary and many of the customs were mediaeval, they were given a modern twist by pilgrims arriving in Goretex with Leki poles! So many memories, and so many contrasts ... and the Mercy connection? In 1223 the Mercedarian Order was constituted at Barcelona, and the feast of Our Lady of Ransom was established on the Sunday closest to August 1st. On this day, the Blessed Virgin was believed to have appeared to St Peter Nolasco, who undertook similar work to that of Catherine McAuley many centuries later. In 1696 the feast - solemnitas descensionis B. Mariae V.de Mercede - was extended to the whole Latin Church, and the date was changed to September 24th!

If you would like to know more about the camino, I recommend the Camino Frances guidebook - A Practical and Mystical Manual for the Modern Day Pilgrim, by John Brierley (Findhorn Press 2008). If you would like to see something of the splendour of Santiago, type "botafumeiro Santiago de Compostela" into Google, and see the elaborate ceremony of incensing pilgrims with a censer that takes 7 men to swing! But, if you get the chance, there is no other experience like that of being a pilgrim yourself. **Adios! Hasta luego y buen camino!**

OLMC Parramatta Students' Mercy Trip to Rome and Ireland January 2009

Rome: *by Mary-Ellen Brierley, Nicole Muscat and Bethany van Dort (Year 11)*

On 7th January we arrived at late night Rome, at a very chilling 8 degrees. It is a beautiful city which still holds its ancient history. We were told that Rome was like a lasagne: it has many layers. We had a wonderful tour guide, Mario, who taught us the history and significance of the city. We began our journey at the Vatican museum where one of our favourites among the artworks and sculptures was the Sistine Chapel painted by Michelangelo. We also went to Mass, in Italian, at St. Peter's Basilica. Many bishops, cardinals and altar servers took part, and immediately afterwards we were fortunate enough to see the Pope and receive a Papal blessing.

Our visits included Saint Paul's, Saint John's, Pope Benedictus XIV, Santa Maria Maggiore and Saint Pudentiana's (which housed the original painting of Our Lady of Mercy). At St John Lateran's we climbed the Holy stairs. This was difficult to climb up the 28 hard wooden stairs on our knees while saying prayers. In the end our knees were sore, but it was a very moving experience.

Another beautiful place was Pompeii which is about three hours away from Rome. The scenery was full of snow topped mountains and hillside villages, a contrast to the bustling city of Rome. In Pompeii we witnessed the ruins from Mount Vesuvius' destruction in 79AD. It was amazing to see the ruins of an ancient civilisation through our own eyes.

We also went to the Colosseum, the home of the Gladiator, and the Roman Forum, the political centre of Rome where Julius Caesar and other emperors ruled, and the Pantheon. One of the oldest buildings of Rome, it has one of the biggest domes without centre support, which shows how advanced Roman architecture was.

The night tour of Rome took us to the illuminated Trevi fountain where we tossed a coin if we wanted to return to Rome and two coins if we wanted to find love. We also went to the Mouth of Truth where we had a photo taken with our hand in the sculpture, re-capturing a scene from the Audrey Hepburn classic, *Roman Holiday*. We all still have our hands which can only mean that we're very honest ladies.

Overall our trip was full of unforgettable sights, delicious Italian food, gelato and hot chocolate. Even though we experienced action-packed days that felt like they were 36 hours long (which indeed one was with the time difference!) we still had a wonderful adventure that we would never forget!!

Kilkenny *by Erin McSweeney and Miriam Clarke (Year 11)*

On 13th January we landed in Ireland. Here we had another fantastic tour guide by the name of Eunan, who accompanied us through our entire time in Ireland; he seemed to know everything there was to know about Ireland, from folk tales to general knowledge! After an overnight stop at the Mont Clare Hotel in Dublin, we headed to Kilkenny via the Waterford Crystal factory, where we were given a guided tour and we were lucky enough to have to owner of the company as our guide. She showed us around and we were even able to see the crystal being made and engraved. After our tour here we stopped at the gift shop to pick up gifts for our families (luckily there was a sale on).

Before we arrived at Hotel Kilkenny we were given the opportunity to visit Kilkenny Castle. Kilkenny Castle has been restored so the public can see what it was like hundreds of years ago.

The next day we had another long bus trip ahead of us: a visit to St. Brigid's in Callan, home to the Sisters of Mercy, and so of particular significance for us. When we arrived we were met by two girls from the school. They took us to their main hall where we made St. Brigid's crosses together. Unfortunately because the crosses were made out of reeds we could not take them home with us. The

next part of the day was the Convent of the Sisters of Mercy. Here we meet all the Sisters, who were very excited to meet “the Australian Mercy girls”. After morning tea and tour of the convent we went back to the school where some of the Irish girls displayed their talents. They sang songs, danced and played instruments for us: it was really beautiful. When they asked us to show our talents, we sang the Alma Mater. However, this didn’t really compare to the show they put on for us. After lunch there was a tour of the boarding house. We were shocked to see how small the rooms they slept in were! We were sad to leave our new Irish friends, go, but we left with many e-mail addresses.

The next day was our last full day in Kilkenny. We visited the Blarney castle where we kissed the Blarney stone (after climbing a lot of very small steps) and received the gift of eloquence (all though Mrs. Patrick claimed some of us didn’t need it, considering how much we talked). We also visited the Blarney Woollen mills where we did a lot of shopping! Our time in Kilkenny will be remembered fondly by all of us, although we were looking forward to seeing more of Dublin, we were sad to say goodbye to Kilkenny.

Dublin *by Christy Tannous and Jessica Gordon (Year 11)*

On January 19th we made our way to Baggot Street which houses the Mercy International Centre. This has special significance to our school as it was opened by Catherine McAuley in 1827. On arrival we were greeted by some very enthusiastic nuns, one of whom was Sister Mary McEneaney, and she was our tour guide for our stay at the Centre. We spent some time looking through the hallways of the now restored building; it was quite emotional when we realised that Catherine McAuley had also walked those hallways.

We were shown into a room where we watched a short documentary on the amazing life of Catherine McAuley. Sister Mary showed us the International Room which holds artefacts and documents from other Mercy countries all over the world; she showed us a vase that was made in Australia with a few native Australian animals on it. It was then that we were taken outside to Catherine McAuley’s grave. We all crowded inside and said a quiet prayer, it was an experience that won’t be forgotten. Sister Mary prepared a special liturgy for us. Our experience at the Mercy International Centre was certainly memorable and we met many hospitable nuns who made us all feel very welcome.

Later that day we made our way to Coolock House. It has been restored and is now used as a convent, and Catherine McAuley lived there for a large portion of her life. After a brief history of the house we all signed the visitor “sign in” book and were taken on a tour of the various rooms and the restored chapel. Upstairs, we were shown Catherine McAuley’s room where we all sat down for a quiet reflection. It was an enlightening experience. Downstairs, where the kitchens used to be, we heard interesting stories about the cooks who used to live there.

Dublin is a beautiful city with so much character. The streets are lined with hundreds of coloured doors (that signifies that the houses are privately owned) and the people were welcoming. We went on many strolls around the area where we were staying (known as Dublin Four), and it was just our luck that Grafton Street happened to be 10 minutes walking distance from the hotel and we think it’s safe to say our bags were considerably heavier after our many shopping trips around Dublin. Mention must also be made of the fabulous food, in particular a restaurant called Captain America’s where the food was awesome and the people were a lot of fun.

Our time in Dublin, although very wet and very cold, was amazing. We experienced so much of the culture in so little time and met so many lovely people along the way.

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A SAINT PATRICK'S DAY PRAYER

(Adapted from Morning and Evening Prayer of the Sisters of Mercy)

O God, Saint Patrick led the people of Ireland to faith in you.
Inspired by his teaching, may we know and love you
in the mystery of the Trinity.
Creator, Redeemer and Spirit, continue to reveal yourself to us
in your infinite variety.
Help us to rejoice in the diversity of your creation
so that we may come to know you in the fullness of your being.
God, three in one, hear and answer our prayer. Amen.



RESOURCE AVAILABLE FROM SR DEIRDRE MULLAN:

Just Imagine...

**if this
girl were
YOU**

In many parts of our world the girl-child remains powerless, invisible and neglected throughout her life-cycle.

She is repeatedly denied her political, economic, legal, social, cultural, and religious rights and is routinely subjected to many forms of physical violence, emotional harm and discrimination.

All children, but especially girls, should be able to fully enjoy their human rights. Here are three true stories of girls and the experiences they are forced to endure.

MERCY GLOBAL CONCERN 

Sister Deirdre has published this brochure – four pages, with the stories and a list of practical suggestions about how we can help.

Deirdre has copies available for schools who can pay postage, but the supply is limited, so hurry with your order to her at Mercy Global Concern mercyun@aol.com.