



AMSSA

AUSTRALASIAN MERCY SECONDARY SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

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Newsletter June 2014 No. 02/14

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News from the AMSSA Executive

The Mercy Student Conference will take place from October 3 – 7 2014 at the Amberley Centre near Melbourne. You will find the registration brochure and form attached to this newsletter. The organising committee has developed an excellent conference that will excite and challenge our students. The AMSSA Executive has agreed to generously subsidise the conference to support schools in sending their students to attend the conference.

I encourage all schools to send 2 representatives so that our students have the experience of meeting and mixing with fellow Mercy students from across Australia and New Zealand.

Thank you to St Brigid's College Lesmurdie who contributed two articles on their immersion experiences, OLMC Parramatta for their articles on their special 125 celebrations in 2014 and St Aloysius College Adelaide for their articles on their social justice activities. All schools are invited to send in articles on any special events early in Term 3.

Kitty Guerin
Executive Officer

CAMBODIA MERCY OUTREACH IMMERSION 2013

Three years ago I left part of my heart in Cambodia and the longing to return to this beguiling, exquisite country never leaves me.

The people have enriched my life with their love, their warmth and profound gratefulness. Not only is Cambodia rich in beauty, but so too are the Cambodian people who are deeply generous, patient, forgiving, respectful and gentle.

They have blessed me with their spirit, good humour and charm and one can't help but become enchanted and moved by the beauty of Cambodia and its people.

Fortunately, I have been able to share this beauty with our students each year on our Mercy Outreach Immersion trips and having just returned from another successful and incredibly interesting immersion, I find myself eager to engage more students to experience the beauty of these people.

After eight months of preparation and fundraising, our fifteen students and five staff members left Australian shores for what was to be an incredibly busy, confronting, challenging and rewarding ten day immersion in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

We arrived at the hotel in Phnom Penh in the morning after a tiring overnight flight from Perth, unloaded our luggage and the enormous amount of donations before heading directly to the Tuol Sleng (S21) Prison and one of the Killing Fields. Formerly a High School, in 1976 the Khmer Rouge turned it into a torture, interrogation and execution centre. More than 14,000 people entered and only 7 survived, one of whom we were fortunate to meet.

The girls were shocked and horrified by the atrocities carried out in the prison, the photographs showed despair, sorrow and death and needless to say some found it hard to come to terms with. It gave them a chance to fully understand what the Cambodian people had been through during the Khmer Rouge regime.

Following on from the Prison was a trip to one of the many Killing Fields, just outside of Phnom Penh. Here the students were able to walk through the fields and witness the graves and indeed old fragments of bones and teeth which have been unearthed over the years from flooding. It was difficult to understand the terror that the Cambodians suffered during the years of war and the girls were certainly shocked to experience the enormity of it all.

We enjoyed dinner at a local restaurant and an early night before our early start the following morning, when we drove further South to Takeo Province on the Vietnamese border.

The morning was spent at a school engaging in activities with over 100 children from age three to sixteen. They all loved the games our students played with them and took away plenty of supplies of paper, masks and textas. During the course of the morning we also helped to pack up some food stuffs which we were able to purchase from funds raised by our Home Economics Department. We walked to the local village houses to distribute this food to the poorest of poor families. Our students were touched by the

respect and absolute joy of the families whom we helped with food. It was sad to leave them and I know that many of our students will have fond memories of helping the villagers and making a small difference to their lives.

The Widows and Orphans Weaving Project was our next stop in the same Province. Here we witnessed young teenage girls and widows weaving silk into the most beautiful colourful scarves, using old bicycle wheels as spinning wheels and old wooden batons and rope for the weaving of the thread. The ingenuity and resourcefulness of the Cambodians never ceases to astound me.

Our third day was a great contrast. The morning was spent on the rubbish tip meeting the elderly – one of whom was 103 years old and very thankful for her quilt. The girls were shocked by the conditions in which these people live, rubbish surrounding their homes, causing potential deadly disease. They could not believe that young and old sift through the rubbish to find scraps of food and items to recycle and sell.

Fun and frivolity followed in the afternoon when we took a group of 30 children from Stitches of Hope Children's Development Centre to a hotel swimming pool. The children and students had the most fantastic time, playing games in the pool and laughing at crazy antics. This was followed by some hot chips and ice creams which we purchased for the children. I reassured Narith, the owner of the Development Centre that the children would sleep soundly that night!

Monday saw us battling through the mud and rain once again as we boarded small boats to head to the River of Life School. Once again our students engaged in activities of many sorts with the 120 children from the village school and we were also able to hand out more sacks of rice and food stuffs to the villagers. Our girls also handed out lunchboxes to each of the children as we all sat down together to share lunch. The villagers were humble and eternally grateful for the food we had donated and sat patiently for 45 minutes until all the speeches were finished and the food handed out to each and every family.

After heading back on the boats in the rain our students decided to do as the locals do and all went barefoot through the mud to return to the bus. Our delightful bus driver washed our feet in a bucket of water before we boarded his bus!!

A visit to the art and craft market in Phnom Penh and dinner at a local restaurant concluded what was the most remarkable day of sharing our gifts with the Cambodian villagers.

The following day was spent mostly in the bus travelling from Phnom Penh to Siem Reap which was a journey of seven hours. Thanks to Ms Beard we had a spotto activity to keep our eyes on the beautiful countryside. We arrived at the peaceful Jesuit Reflection Centre and settled the girls into their dormitories before heading off to a local restaurant for dinner.

The morning was spent at a local village playing games outside with the village children and handing out school books and bags for the start of their new school year. In the afternoon the children came to the Reflection Centre to have fun with our girls there. They loved the Play Doh, bubbles, masks and macaroni necklaces. Despite the heat and sleeping under the mosquito nets I think our girls slept well!

Before we headed off to Honour Village we met in the Chapel for a beautiful liturgy and reflective time. The girls had time to reflect on their Outreach work and activities as well as reflecting on their own thoughts and feelings about Cambodia and its people.

Once again we were able to see the fruits of our labours when we visited Honour Village Cambodia and some of the wells that had been put in place in the poor village. The girls were confronted with having to walk through mud, cow dung, flooded villages in order to see the wells. It was so heart-warming when we were able to see clean water being pumped out of the wells for some of the poorest people in the village who have never had clean water before.

Our visit to Srei Vibol school was preceded with a stop at a local fruit market and bread stall to purchase fruit and baguettes for the children's morning tea. We believed we were purchasing enough for 120 children. Imagine our surprise and delight when we were met at the village by a 'guard of honour' of 400 children. These children had come to school on one of their most important holidays of the year in their school uniforms to engage in activities with our students! Dedication indeed! We had a beautiful morning with these children and shared the food around so that everybody received bread and fruit. They took us to a beautiful temple just up the hill in the village and we shared some wonderful moments there with them all. It was truly an amazing morning.

Our final day was spent as tourists visiting the famous Angkor Wat temple, the largest Hindu temple in the world. Our guide was sympathetic to our feelings of tiredness after an incredibly busy and full immersion and spent only two hours guiding us through the labyrinth of areas and steps in this amazing temple. We also had a chance to visit the famous Ta Prohm temple (the tree temple) where Tomb Raider was filmed.

Alas, after spending the afternoon in reflection and prayer we had our final dinner together in Cambodia. We left the hotel in the morning with great sadness at having to say goodbye to these beautiful people.

It seems that no words can really ever explain the sights, sounds, smells, emotions we experienced in Cambodia. This immersion has changed some of the students' outlook on life. It has changed their perspective and some feel completely different, they say it has changed them. They all feel that they have made a difference in some way and a few wish to return.

The Cambodians live in the depths of poverty but they have been freed from their horrors of the past. They live together in harmony, thankful to be alive, thankful to those who love and care for them. They feel that they are here to serve us and yet we want to serve them. It is from the fullness of our hearts that we may fully give to them. This immersion trip shows us that we can put love and kindness into action by helping the Cambodians in a very small way. We can never forget what we have done and we can never forget the Cambodian people.

Debbie O'Hara
Mercy Outreach Coordinator
St Brigid's College
Lesmurdie

Cambodia Mercy Outreach Immersion

Takeo Province Village School



Takeo Province School



Widows Weaving Project



Rubbish Tip



Donating food and rice to the villagers



Sharing lunch with the village children

Donating water and school books



SreyVibol School pupil



SreyVibol school children



ST BRIGID'S NORTHWEST IMMERSION 2013

On Friday 28th June at 9:30pm 7 students and 4 members of staff returned from an extremely successful cultural immersion trip to the Dampier Peninsular in the Northwest of WA.



Middle Lagoon



The Team

During the course of the six day immersion trip, the group had opportunities to learn about the local culture of the aboriginal people in this part of WA as well as being fully involved with some of the local schools and their activities.

We spent a day with Kathleen Cox from Goombaragin learning about the wildlife, nature, the ocean and its inhabitants as well as having an opportunity to make clapping sticks with her and her 14 year old stepson, Jack, who stole the girls' hearts!

After scrambling down the rugged cliffs with Jack and Kathleen we all enjoyed a much needed swim before beginning the arduous journey back up the cliffs! At 4:30, after having spent 7 hours with Kathleen and Jack we reluctantly said our goodbyes promising to visit again next time.



Making clapping sticks at Goombaragin



With Kathleen Cox at Goombaragin

The following day we rose at 5:00am in order to pack up and drive to Beagle Bay where we attended the 7:00am mass at Sacred Heart Church. It was the most beautiful mass with only ourselves and four other parishioners in attendance at the stunning 'shell' church. After a picnic breakfast we arrived at Sacred Heart School to assist in their Sports Carnival. Although a long and tiring day, the immersion team enjoyed some wonderful experiences with both the local children and staff alike. Once again, we were sad to say goodbye to these wonderfully friendly folk. A welcome short trip to the beach at our next destination, Lombadina, helped us all to recover from a tiring and hot day.



Beagle Bay Church



The Shell altar at Beagle Bay Church



Presentations to Sacred Heart School, Beagle Bay



Sacred Heart Sports Carnival

The Lombadina community were extremely friendly and accommodating and on our fourth day we experienced a great adventure when we spent the morning mud crabbing in the mangrove swamps with our local guide. Despite the torrential tropical rain, we all managed to catch some mud crabs whilst immersing ourselves thigh deep in sticky, smelly mud. It was an adventure not to be forgotten and with plenty of fun along the way! The afternoon was spent exploring the Cape Leveque area and One Arm Point before we returned for a feast of mud crabs for dinner which our wonderful, friendly guide, Robert, cooked up for us.



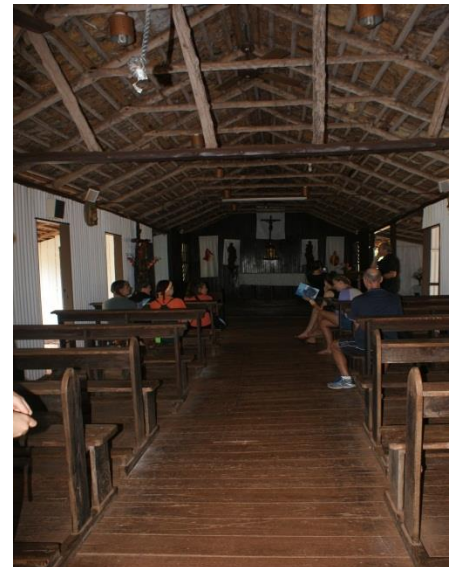
Our catch of mud crabs



One Arm Point



Mud crab Dinner



Lombadina Church

On Thursday we had to pack up and say goodbye to the beautiful people of Lombadina but before doing so, we had a tour of the community, stopping at the school, local craft workshop and artefact shop and the beautiful little wooden church.

As we realised we only had one more day of our immersion trip left, we made the most of enjoying the dirt roads on the journey back to Broome.

Our final day was spent at St Mary's College, Broome, in the Year 2 and Year 3 classrooms assisting the teachers with their morning literacy and numeracy programs. The students were all allocated a class and thoroughly immersed themselves in assisting the teachers with their program. When it came time to leave the students reluctantly said goodbye to the children hoping that they could return again next year!



Helping at St Mary's Catholic Primary School in Broome

After washing the very dirty 4WD cars and returning them to the car rental office, we reluctantly headed back to the hotel where we packed up in preparation for our departure back to Perth.



“

This trip was amazing especially when we went to the schools, I had so much fun and learnt lots”, Steph Borowiec

“Everywhere we went was absolutely amazing, I have made so many more friends”, Emily Guerinoni

“I really loved learning about the culture and spending time with the kids, I also liked how we stayed at lots of different places”, Bec Gill

“I loved the Aboriginal people and getting to really know the culture, this trip has had a huge and good impact on me”, Jess Clarke

“I really developed a sense of living in a remote area, it allowed us to explore different areas and learn about life in those areas”, Emma Wignell

“I loved how involved we got with the schools and how we learnt so much about the aboriginal culture”, Demi Payne

This was, by all accounts, an incredibly successful immersion trip, both in terms of the students forging new friendships and also learning so very much about the culture of indigenous people in the Dampier Peninsular. Many of them agreed that they would like to return to the Northwest and will definitely have many happy memories for years to come.

Debbie O'Hara
Mercy Outreach Coordinator
St Brigid's College
Lesmurdie



SPECIALLY COMMISSIONED PIECES PREMIERED AT OLMC PARRAMATTA'S 125 YEARS CONCERTS

Two special pieces, commissioned by Ars Musica Australis were performed for the first time at the Our Lady of Mercy College Parramatta's 125 Years Anniversary Concerts on June 5 and 6, 2014 at Parramatta's Riverside Theatre.

The pieces entitled *A Vision of Mercy* and *Sweet Mercy*, composed by two of Australia's most celebrated composers, featured in the special concerts which mark an important milestone for the College; 125 years of Mercy Excellence at OLMC Parramatta.

The College's Music Coordinator, Paul Witney, says it is an honour to have these pieces created for this special event; "This is truly an historic event in the College's long history so it's wonderful, and a great privilege to have this occasion marked by these great compositions which capture the essence of the rich story of OLMC Parramatta. We are very excited about the performances which featured current and ex students and staff singing in the choir, in solo pieces and performing with ensembles".

These pieces were commissioned by Ars Musica Australis, a charitable foundation supporting the creative arts, on behalf of OLMC Parramatta. Mr Witney said the College is extremely grateful to Rev Doctor Arthur Bridge AM, parish priest of St Oliver's Plunkett at Harris Park and CEO of Ars Musica Australis, for the commissioning.

A Vision of Mercy was written by Daniel McCallum, a composer for film, television, theatre and concert music. Daniel has acquired a strong foundation of musical skills through his studies, allowing him to work flexibly in various musical fields and has written for many different events and occasions. Daniel has worked on a number of large feature length films including *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*, *Hyde Park on Hudson*, and *Two Days in the Smoke* as well as many short films. His music has been performed by a number of ensembles including the Philharmonia Orchestra (London), the Omega Ensemble, the Sonic Arts Ensemble and the London Contemporary Orchestra amongst others.



OLMC Orchestra and Choir conducted by Mr Paul Witney

Sweet Mercy is an a cappella choral work based on text attributed to Catherine McAuley, the founder of the Sisters of Mercy. Composer Matthew Orlovich has written pieces which have been performed by Australian and international artists including BBC Singers, the San Francisco State University Chamber Singers, the Sydney Philharmonia, the Choir of London, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Sydney Conservatorium Chamber Choir, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and many more.

A CD featuring the music performed at the concerts (including the specially commissioned pieces) is available to purchase online through the College's website.

OLMC PARRAMATTA FORUM HIGHLIGHTS WORK OF MERCY WOMEN ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

On Saturday March 8, 2014, four ex-students from Our Lady of Mercy College Parramatta returned to their Alma Mater to participate in a special forum to mark International Women's Day and the College's 125th anniversary in 2014.

'Four Women, Four Voices, One Mission' was the theme of this inspirational forum which drew men and women from the College community including students, staff, parents and ex-students to the Edith Angel Hall at OLMC to listen to Sharon McLean, Ann O'Brien, Brigid Glanville and Lani Barnes discuss their time at the College and what Mercy means to them.

The speakers demonstrated the variety of paths Mercy Girls choose to pursue once they leave the College and how the Mercy Values, particularly excellence, impact their lives and careers.



Brigid Glanville, Sharon McLean, Ann O'Brien and Lani Barnes at the Forum

Sharon McLean attended OLMC from 1967 to 1972 and is currently Head of Geography at Saint Ignatius' College, Riverview.

Lani Barnes is an Aboriginal woman from Darug country who graduated in 2009. She is currently completing research in limestone caves in Southeast Asia and is involved in high school Indigenous science programs.

Brigid Glanville graduated in 1994 and is an ABC reporter who has reported on national and international stories throughout her career. Most recently, she has been the NSW Political Reporter for TV News working from State Parliament.

Ann O'Brien is currently the Director of the Marriage Support and Specialist Services Directorate of CatholicCare Social Services at the Diocese of Parramatta. Ann has been appointed to various boards and committees including the Australian Catholic Life Council (an advisory body to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference).

Stephen Walsh, Principal of OLMC Parramatta, said it was fascinating to hear these women discuss how OLMC prepared them for their future; "It is so important that, on International Women's Day, we reflect on the importance of empowering our young women and girls, through education, to have the courage and strength to stand up against injustices they see and experience. This is absolutely core to our Mercy tradition."

Director of Mission, Claire Thomas, says the forum was truly an OLMC event marked by words of wisdom from dynamic and inspirational women, respectful conversation, big

picture reflection and practical ways we can all make a difference coupled with the chance to share a cup of tea and some Mercy hospitality; “To me, life is about the footsteps we leave behind, the doors that we open and the conversations and actions we initiate to provoke a change. Through events such as this, we challenge our community to think: what will my impact be on the world?”



ST ALOYSIUS COLLEGE, ADELAIDE SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVITIES 2014

On Wednesday 7 May 2014, four students had the opportunity to attend World Vision' Annual Global Leaders Convention at the Adelaide Entertainment Centre. Representing SAC were Justice and Mercy Leaders Grace Monaghan 11RT, Philippa Good 11RT, Alifia Balacco 10EH and Adele Beaumont 10PA.

The students reflected on the issue of global poverty with a particular focus on Rwanda and were captivated by the speakers' contagious passion and desire to make a difference in our world.

The girls' reflection below reveals the impact that the convention had on them. "We were a group of four and had little knowledge of what was really going on in the world around us. We didn't realise that this conference would give us the insight into all the horrible effects of poverty, leaving families fighting for their lives and working as hard as they can without justice."

We came to realise how serious poverty conditions are and what can be done about them. As Lucinda, Youth Ambassador 2014, said *"Poverty is not a fact of this world, it is a fault. And we shouldn't accept it."* Inspiring speakers and youth leaders sent the crowd of over 600 school students on a rollercoaster of emotion.

It was an incredible experience and it motivated us to spread the word about the fantastic things World Vision does to improve people's lives."

**Alifia Balacco 10EH, Adele Beaumont 10PA,
Grace Monaghan 11RT and Philippa Good 11RT**



Girls sorting postcards

In recognition of Fair Trade Fortnight, Justice and Mercy Leaders held their annual '*Fair Trade Hot Chocolate*' stall at recess on Tuesday 20 May. In addition, Year 7 students sold lolly bags, kindly donated by Hahndorf Sweets, with anti-slavery campaign postcards attached to them to raise awareness of the problem of child labour.



Making Lolly Bags

Sadly, for many children on the Ivory Coast of Africa, treats such as lollies and hot chocolate represent fear and pain.

Through awareness raising we can and are making a difference!

Ms Madeleine Kelly
Student Welfare Support Officer
St Aloysius College
Adelaide

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNER IS INSPIRATIONAL

Last week, Year 11 and Year 12 students were privileged to hear Sr Denise Coghlan talk about her life and work in Thailand and Cambodia. Sr Denise is a Sister of Mercy from Brisbane who has devoted her life to working with refugees, first in the camps in Thailand where many Cambodians sought refuge during Pol Pot's reign of terror and for the last twenty years in Cambodia.

Sr Denise is part of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which is a coalition of non-government organisations working towards a world free of landmines and cluster bombs. In 2008 she was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia and she was part of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) which, together with coordinator Jody Williams, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997.



Most importantly, Sr Denise is an amazing storyteller who used the photographs on her PowerPoint presentation to introduce us to the refugees and asylum seekers who have inspired her.

Sr Denise's accounts of the lives of many Cambodian people, particularly those who have suffered the effects of landmines, are truly inspirational and her hard work leading the Jesuit Refugee Service in Cambodia is phenomenal.

It was a fantastic opportunity for us to listen to Sr Denise. Her pursuit of social justice, refugee rights, poverty alleviation and the banning of landmines and cluster bombs is impressive, but what is particularly striking about Sr Denise is the joy she finds in her work.

I know that every student gathered in the auditorium was inspired by Sr Denise who says that every day is an opportunity to show mercy as well as to live justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with our God.

Philippa Good 11RT
St Aloysius College