



# AMSSA

AUSTRALASIAN MERCY SECONDARY SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

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## News from the AMSSA Executive

What a great success the first stand alone AMSSA Student Conference was! It was a credit to the organising team from Mercy schools across Australia and New Zealand, the staff at Our Lady of Mercy College Heidelberg and most importantly the students from Mercy schools across Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

Farewell and a big thank you to Sheena Barber the President of AMSSA for her dedication and commitment over the past 18 months. Sheena is retiring from her role as Principal of Mercedes College Perth at the end of 2014. Julie Ryan, the Principal of Our Lady of Mercy College Heidelberg will be taking over as President for 2015.

Thank you to Mercedes College Perth, Sacred Heart College Geelong and Our Lady of Mercy College Parramatta for their articles for the final newsletter of the year.

I wish all of you in Mercy schools, a very happy and holy Christmas and a relaxing and refreshing holiday. I look forward to an exciting 2015 as our Adelaide schools prepare to welcome staff from Mercy schools in August 2015.

Kitty Guerin  
Executive Officer

## AMSSA STUDENT CONFERENCE 2014

The Twelfth Biennial AMSSA Student Conference honoured the beginnings of our Mercy Story, celebrated our growth and unity and challenged students to revitalise Mercy for the future. Our Lady of Mercy College Heidelberg welcomed students from Mercy Schools across Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand and Papua New Guinea to share in a rewarding Mercy experience. This year's conference saw a range of national and international speakers delivering information and insight on contemporary issues and practices in Mercy education.



The first week in October marked the beginning of the Conference with delegates arriving at Amberley Retreat Centre in the Lower Plenty bushland in Melbourne. Students from Australian Mercy schools were very keen to meet their international Mercy companions. Delegates spent the afternoon getting to know one another while the sun shone, the birds chirped and the beautiful Yarra River flowed behind them. The Conference was opened by MutthiMutthi elder Vicki Clark on the Yarra River where delegates listened to the story of the first people to this land and were graciously welcomed. Students were asked to bring water from their local communities to be joined with water brought from the 20th Anniversary of the Opening of the Mercy International Centre in Dublin. On behalf of the Sisters of Mercy, Sr Anna Nicholls from New Zealand shared greetings and best wishes for the Conference. There was a great sense of hope in her message, assuring students that Catherine McAuley's vision of making the world a better place for everyone could be something students could easily put into practice. Their challenge asked students to return home after the Conference and think of ways to be active in their school communities in order to keep the spirit of Mercy alive.

Throughout the Conference students had opportunities to experience engaging trust and leadership activities, share some of their knowledge about the Conference themes and

began to hear the stories that many students brought with them. Students quickly realised what a committed and passionate group they were apart of.

The exciting program known as Generation Waking Up allowed students to explore some simple questions about today's generation and the need to wake up to the call of social justice. Students also looked at incorrect assumptions many privileged people have and took away with them valuable lessons. Students were genuinely "woken up". This year's student program offered students the choice of a number of engaging and challenging experiences. A small group of delegates visited the Exodus community, which is located in the 6th poorest suburb in Victoria, with many socioeconomic related issues that decrease the residents' quality of life. Originally the 1956 Olympic Village, the past 58 years have seen much change in the community. Violence, poor nutrition and hygiene, poverty and mental illness are just a few of the issues facing the community. On their visit we were fortunate enough to hear from Harry, a Marist Brother who has lived in the community for almost two decades and residents who are trying to inspire change within their community. The personal stories shared by the community members inspired students to advocate the uniqueness of individuals, and not to simply accept negative social stigmas that surround certain illnesses.



The time spent in Melbourne provided students with an opportunity to visit the Academy of Mary Immaculate, a place of significance in Ursula Frayne's story. The group was met by Sister Mary Maloney and Claire, the College's Social Justice prefect. Initially time was spent in the Chapel, where Sister Mary described the wonderful contribution Ursula Frayne made to the Catholic communities of both Perth and Melbourne. This was then followed by a tour of the new Science block which contains magnificent stained glass windows that told the stories of creation from Indigenous, biblical and scientific perspectives.

The Melbourne experience continued when delegates dined at Lentil as Anything. At Lentil as Anything customers can choose what they would like to eat, enjoy a delicious meal, have a chat, and listen to some music all in a warm community space. Patrons are asked to reflect on their feelings and decide how much they want and can contribute to this unique experience, and put a donation into one of the boxes in the restaurant. This unique financial model that is centered on the values of trust, generosity and respect gives people the opportunity to eat out and be social regardless of their financial situation. The staff at Lentil as Anything explained to students that they did this because everyone has a right to feel valued and respected, and that money should help bring people together not divide them.

The Justice Marketplace was an incredible display of how students are striving to keep alight the flame of Mercy in the schools across Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

Students were asked prior to the Conference to collect from their schools, photographs, movies, and written materials depicting social justice projects and advocacy initiatives throughout their schools. Students shared stories about local and overseas immersions, awareness raising campaigns, fundraising events, advocacy work on behalf of marginalised groups and Mercy ministries supported in their school communities. Students were challenged to wander the Marketplace and collect ideas for possible projects they could implement in their own communities. The depth of conversation was inspiring and motivating and it is hoped that students will return to their schools with a plethora of ideas.

This Conference invited students to step outside their own local place, situate themselves in the Mercy world and from that perspective look at who Mercy is in the world today, what we are about and see if we can discern anything about where we might be headed. Students emerged from the Conference knowing they are members of this Mercy global community and are shaping and being shaped by all that happens in this community. Students recognized that we are at a significant time in the ongoing story of Mercy particularly in regard to collaboration with the youth of the global family of Mercy as they increasingly undertake responsibility for the continuation and growth of Mercy ministries. We hope that this Conference allowed delegates to reflect on their role in the Mercy educational endeavour, mindful of the evolving growth of our community and dedicated to a strong sense of unity with like-minded students in Mercy Schools across Australasia.

Melissa Trolio

Mercedes College

(AMSSA Student Conference Planning Committee)



## 2014 AMSSA STUDENT CONFERENCE

This year from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> of October we had the honour to attend the Australasian Mercy Secondary Schools Association Student Conference. This was held in Melbourne, Amberley and we were accompanied by Miss Cho. The conference consisted of 75 Mercy students from across Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, who joined together to learn about social justice issues present in our community as well as learn ways on how we could respond to these issues. Out of the 75 students that attended there were 6 boys that were present, so you can imagine who was the most popular.

One of the speeches that we chose to attend was a talk by Sister Monica Whelan who worked with Mercy Works. We chose this talk as there is constant mention of Mercy Works in our school, and it was a way we were able to see how our efforts along with others contributed to increasing the standard of living in countries such as Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea.

One night, we attended a restaurant called 'Lentil as Anything' in which you pay for what you think the meal was worth as it was aimed at the people such as the unemployed or homeless. All the staff that worked there were volunteers and it was great to be able to see what we have learnt about justice put into action in our society.

During the camp we were given \$15 to spend at a massive op-shop in Melbourne city where we had to get something to wear at a dinner the next night, and in an op-shop you can get a lot for \$15. We both went for the regular look, but many people dressed crazily as bacon, fairies and clowns. At this dinner the teachers served us to symbolise to us to go forth and serve the world and how the responsibility is in our hands.



One of our favourite aspects of the conference was when we were able to choose an issue we were personally passionate about and form groups in which we worked to create an action plan for our school. Between us we focused on mental health and refugees and asylum seekers. It was amazing to see how much each group was able to come up with in such little time and they were so passionate and dedicated to the issue they chose.



One of the special guests that we were able to catch up with was our very own Mrs Guerin who is the Executive Officer of AMSSA. It was great to see that she was continuing to inspire and support young children in their participation and contribution to social justice within their school and community.

Overall we had a fantastic time and it really opened up our eyes to many new things we could bring back to our own school. It was an honour to be chosen and we hope that whatever ideas we present, the school will support, embrace and become fully on board as we are the ones who can make the difference!

Rebecca Ibrahim and Megan Wiblen  
Our Lady of Mercy College Parramatta

## **FAREWELL TO SHEENA BARBER**

### **AMSSA PRESIDENT 2013-2014**

Sheena Barber has contributed extensively to Catholic Education for over 40 years and undertaken a diversity of roles in both Victoria and Western Australia. Sheena has assumed leadership responsibilities spanning strategic, academic, pastoral and religious portfolios including positions as a Head of Music, a Year Coordinator, the Head of Religious Education and the Head of Secondary Curriculum.

For the last six and a half years Sheena has been the Principal of Mercedes College, Perth. Sheena has also performed in the role as President of AMSSA -Australasian Mercy Secondary Schools Association for the last eighteen months. As a member of the Catholic Secondary Principals' Association in Western Australia, Sheena has chaired the Industrial and Management Committee for five years and the Professional Development and Pastoral Care Committee for one year.



Sheena herself was educated by the Presentation Sisters for ten years and then by the Sisters of Mercy at Mercedes College for her final two years. She completed her undergraduate degree majoring in Music at the University of Western Australia and later pursued and completed post graduate work in the area of Religious Education.

Her first teaching role in Western Australia was at Santa Maria College, and she later taught at St Norbert College as the Religious Education Coordinator, and St Brigid's

College as the Head of Secondary Curriculum. In addition, Sheena has worked for the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia for a total of twelve years as a Consultant for Religious Education, and for four years was the Regional Officer in the diocese of Geraldton where she supported principals and teachers in the twelve schools in the diocese. On her return to the Office in Perth, Sheena was Coordinator of Curriculum for all Catholic Schools for four years and then the Strategic Integration Manager for two years. She has served on a number of cross-sectoral committees and participated in national forums on different curriculum issues.

In a life and career that has essentially led full-circle, Sheena returned to Mercedes College as the Principal to shape and lead the very Mercy school that had formed her as a young student and woman. On appointment to the College Sheena articulated her vision clearly and then set about achieving it in action. 'I have the greatest respect for the history and tradition that is the foundation of Mercedes College and I look forward to journeying with the whole College community in moving Mercedes well into the twenty-first century to become the absolute Catholic school of choice for girls in Perth.'

Whilst Sheena retires from education at the conclusion of 2014 and relocates to Tasmania with her husband Rob, she will continue to nurture and sustain her vital connections to Mercy through involvement in Mercy community projects, particularly in the area of human trafficking.

Beyond all these achievements, Sheena is a devoted wife, and the proud mother and grandmother of four children and nine grandchildren.



## **SACRED HEART COLLEGE GEELONG**

### **EAST TIMOR IMMERSION**

In early April of this year 15 girls from Sacred Heart College were given the amazing opportunity to travel to Baucau and Dili in East Timor, to help support the empowerment of young women in a developing country.

In Baucau, we spent just 5 short days with the beautiful girls from the CTID Women's College. The CTID is a fantastic boarding school, that takes in 100 of the poorest girls in Timor each year hoping to further support these young women through education and opportunity. We set out with the goal of learning from these girls and giving them what they needed and not what we thought they needed and I can 100% say that by the end of our stay we had succeeded in completing this goal.

During our stay at the CTID these girls aged from 18-24 enriched us with stories about their lives outside of CTID. These stories moved us in ways that you wouldn't even imagine possible. They gave us an insight into what life really can be like, the type of life that we would not find back home in Australia. The way the girls were able to triumph in times of such loss and hardship is incredible.



During our 5 day stay at the CTID we ran numerous activities for the girls, to help them further their knowledge and understanding when it came to life skills. We ran workshops such as cooking, customer service, water safety, drama, sewing and English. Grateful doesn't even begin to describe how the girls felt towards us at the end of each day and the smiles on their faces brought us to tears on more than one occasion.

East Timor and the beautiful girls at the CTID have allowed we Sacred Heart girls to realize just how important happiness is. We learnt that happiness doesn't necessarily stem from wealth or opportunities. We have learnt that true happiness develops from

within. The girls in Timor shared this with us alongside how easy it is to be brave and confident even when everything around us seems dark.

The girls at CTID have inspired us to try and do something different, and I know that I speak on behalf of everyone who had this amazing opportunity when I say that the bond that the 15 year 11 students from Sacred Heart College in Geelong, Australia have with the 100 girls from CTID in Baucau, East Timor is unbreakable.

Lucille Fennell



East Timor was the most unforgettable experience and I am so privileged to be able to have gone to a country with a different culture, a different way of life and met some of the most beautiful people.

Although under the rule of Indonesia only a decade ago, the re-establishment of East Timor is phenomenal and they have taken such pride in restoring their country. I can honestly say on behalf of the entire group that they are the most genuinely happy people we have ever met and truly inspire us to do more with our lives.

Travelling to East Timor with such a great group of girls made it so much more enjoyable and the girls we met through the College will definitely remain in our hearts. Their happiness, bubbly personalities and overall outlook on life made me realise the importance of being so grateful for what we have. These girls have shown us the true meaning of friendship, love and the importance of empowerment of women. Not only have we helped to instill in these girls life skills that will remain with them forever, they in turn have also instilled within us qualities that make us better people. Living with only the basics, these girls were the happiest people I have ever met, truly the happiest people on earth. They deserve so much and I am so thankful the CTID has given them the opportunity to make their own differences in the world, but I am also thankful that we were able to witness this.



East Timor has empowered not only me but all of those involved and empowered us to make a difference in the world. Our trip to East Timor was so unbelievable and I just want to take this opportunity to thank all those who made our experience possible; Ms Gillett and Mrs Caruana and the team at Destination Dreaming. The work you did to make everything happen was incredible and I just want to thank you for all your hard work and dedication to ensure the trip was so memorable.

Meg Blood