

Seeds of Justice 2016 Annual Report



Keynote Speakers, Kaillee Dyke & Penny Underwood from McAuley Community Services for Women surrounded by students at the Seeds of Justice Conference in Melbourne





Seeds of Justice Annual Report

2016 School Year

While the Jubilee Year of Mercy has now drawn to a close, Pope Francis has reminded us in his recent Apostolic Letter, *Misericordia et misera*, that mercy “must continue to be celebrated and lived out in our communities.” As we do so, we may do well to consider the gentle wisdom of Sr Mary Wickham RSM, as she contemplates our relationship with mercy in her poem “The Door of Mercy”:

*The Door of Mercy is double-hinged,
swinging in, opening out,
sturdy, yet easily moved.
My friend says: You only have to knock once,
and you only have to knock lightly.
The God of Mercy, whose door it is,
is always home.*

In 2016, the image of the Mercy Door became a central symbol at each of our staff and student events. Each program invited participants to consider their role as an agent of hope and hospitality in our world, and to contemplate the God of Mercy who calls us forth to stand in solidarity with the vulnerable. It is a humble joy to be present as students and staff from our many participating schools experience moments of awakening, as they come to truly recognise themselves as an integral part of the Mercy story. It is also a joy that is shared by each of our Committee members, and I take the opportunity to thank each of our members for the time and talent that they have offered throughout the year.

Melbourne Committee 2016:

- Suzanne Moran (Academy of Mary Immaculate, Fitzroy)
- Franca Caruana (Sacred Heart College, Geelong)
- Catherine Burke (Our Lady of Mercy College, Heidelberg)
- Mairead Kennedy (Mercy College, Coburg)
- Bernadette Inman (Young Mercy Links)
- Eugene Lynch (MEL)
- Sr Anila Isaac RSM (ISMAPNG and Mount Lilydale Mercy College, Lilydale)
- Sam Weir (Sacred Heart College, Kyneton).

Regional

The student events held in regional Victoria and Perth, Western Australia are now well-established parts of the annual Mercy calendar. Mercy Education is pleased to continue its annual sponsorship of each event (Regional VIC: \$500 and WA: \$2000). You will find an overview of the 2016 programs held at each of the regional Victorian and Western Australian committees within this report.

It is important also to acknowledge the wonderful work of those who maintain these committees, in particular the efforts of Jo-Anne Saunders (Mercy Regional College, Camperdown), Rosa Speranza (Mercedes College, Perth) and Helen Chaffer (Santa Maria College, Attadale WA).

We are blessed to have the ongoing support of the administrative team in the Mercy Education office. Warm and heartfelt thanks are offered to Pam de Kort who has once again worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that our events run smoothly for all concerned.

WA Seeds of Justice May Conference – 12 May 2016

Following the 2015 Seeds of Justice experience, the four Western Australian Mercy schools Seeds of Justice group met on 12 May 2016 at Aranmore College to discuss issues around slave labour, human trafficking and the recognition of Fair Trade Fortnight. Presentations about the importance of fair trade were given by Robert Roberts from Fair Go Trading and Antonia Taylor the Oxfam State Manager. The group was able to see the handiwork of artisans locally producing in developing countries and how buying fair trade products help marginalized people overcome their captivity.

Melbourne Student Event 1: 19-20 May 2016

Theme: “*Mercy: The Door I Walk Through*”

Venue: Holy Cross Centre, Templestowe



Our May event began with time devoted to promoting networking and relationship building amongst the students present. Participants made a series of six “appointments” with their peers from other Mercy schools. Across the course of the opening two sessions, our participants met with each other at these appointment times to enter into a range of conversations and activities. Some of the appointment activities included a letter writing workshop addressing social concerns in the lead up to the Federal election, and a light-hearted competition to compose a song about walking through the “Mercy doorway”.

In the evening, our participants were invited to take part in a placement session at a community outreach organisation, as has long been the norm at our May events. In 2016, we drew upon a smaller number of placement locations than in previous years. This was in part due to the earlier decision from the Society of St Vincent de Paul to place a temporary hold on school students visiting their soup van operations across the wider Melbourne area. The placement locations that we drew upon in 2016 were:

- McAuley House, Flemington
- Mercy Care, East Melbourne
- Mercy Care, Parkville
- Olympic Village Exodus Community, West Heidelberg



Sr Carmel Flanagan RSM (RIP) at Mercy Place, Parkville

On the second day of the program our participants entered into conversation with Kailee and Winter from McAuley Community Services for Women. Each presenter spoke about their work with MCSW and spent time responding to questions about how our participants might respond to the issues of family violence and violence against women in our school communities. The emphasis of their presentation was one of hope, as they encouraged a proactive approach to tackling some of the social concerns that we face in contemporary Australia.

Comments from the event:

- “*The workshops were amazing. It was such an eye opener to trying to make a change.*”
- “*The program was very eye-opening and in conjunction with issues prevalent in society.*”
- “*It was a worthwhile experience because it was eye-opening and I gained many relationships and connections for future projects.*”
- “*I felt very motivated to go out and do work within my school.*”

- *“The program was an excellent opportunity to see how students can make a difference to the world from school.”*
- *“The program was great for raising awareness and inspiring change.”*
- *“I enjoyed meeting everyone, learning more and making friends.”*
- *“The program was amazing! The placement was a great experience for me.”*
- *“The program was way better than I expected. The presenters from McAuley Community Services for Women were amazing!”*
- *“I enjoyed the program. It brought so many youth together and it was amazing to see how many people want to make a change.”*

Staff Formation Day: 1 August, 2016

Theme: *“Opening Our Hearts to Doors of Mercy”*

Venue: The Mercy Hub, Carlton



We were quite excited by the opportunity to hold our 2016 Staff Formation Day at the Mercy Hub in Carlton. It was wonderful to make use of this new facility as a space for conversations about social outreach in our schools, and all participants and speakers were made to feel very welcome. Plans are already afoot to return to the Hub for our 2017 Staff Formation Day.

Theologian, Sr Jan Gray RSM spent the first two sessions of the day in conversation with our participants on the nature of what it means to pass through a “Door of Mercy”. All present responded warmly to Sr Jan’s unique blend of social insight, theology and humour, with many participants commenting on how they felt awakened and nourished by her presentation.



Sr Jan Gray RSM



Sr Marg Moore RSM

In the wonderful spirit of her characteristic sense of hospitality, Sr Marg Moore RSM offered our participants an overview of the how and why the Mercy Hub came to be and led those present on a tour of the three distinct buildings within the Hub’s precinct.

In the afternoon session, our participants entered into a rich conversation with Kailee and Winter from McAuley Community Services for Women. Kailee and Winter took the opportunity to explain the important work of MCSW and invited participants to consider how our schools can be powerful environments for responding to the issues of family violence and violence against women in contemporary Australian society.

Comments from the event:

- *“Great discussion and dialogue. A wonderful session on ‘opening the doors.’”*
- *“Great having the time to learn and reflect on how ‘Mercy’ is enacted in the world – locally, nationally and internationally. Lovely having the doors opened for us.”*
- *“I feel renewed in my work and my purpose.”*
- *“I feel nourished and inspired. Jan’s presentation was wonderful. Learning with scripture and social context.”*
- *“A great day of reflection, sharing, networking and advocacy. Jan’s presentation was excellent.”*
- *“The ‘doors’ reflection was excellent. The McAuley Community Services for Women presentation was inspirational.”*
- *“The program was fantastic. It really put into perspective what we work towards every day in the Mercy tradition and the path of Catherine McAuley.”*
- *“I came away from this inspired and ready to share my knowledge.”*
- *“My highlight is certainly the passion I witnessed in each of the people involved today. It is nourishing and reassuring to see Mercy in action.”*

WA Seeds of Justice Student Conference - 17 - 18 August, 2016



On the 8th of August, ten Year Ten students embarked on a Seeds of Justice conference in Safety Bay, alongside students from Aranmore, Mercedes and St. Brigid's. The theme for 2016/17 is Eco - Justice "Saving our Common Home." We had the opportunity to listen to Nigel Haywood from Catholic Earth Care. He educated us about different Eco-Justice issues that included the destruction of our environment. The presentation was eye-opening and we learnt a lot about how our planet is being mistreated.

With partners, we walked around the gardens of the Conference Centre and shared our opinions on what our family, friends and peers think of us and our future. This was interesting to see how others interpret the world and got us thinking about how others may think of us. Back inside, we split into groups and brainstormed what environmentally friendly aspects our schools are involved in, what we could have, what could be improved and then put into place how we could improve these issues and raise awareness of the problems facing our 'common home'. The ideas really got us motivated and inspired to make a difference in our own communities.

After lunch, we drove to the Naregebup Environment Centre and learned about conservation and the use of the earth's resources in a sustainable way. After dinner we experienced a wonderful mass with Fr. Hugh. The mass was very reflective and meditative and we learned about forgiving and apologising for the hurt we had received and caused to others and to God's creation. After mass we made rosary bead bracelets made out of recycled wool and magazine strips.

After an early start and delicious breakfast, we climbed aboard the bus and went to Shoalwater Bay to plant seedlings on the coastal dunes. The purpose of this activity was to stabilise the dunes to prevent dune erosion. Volunteers taught us how to plant the seedlings, and put bamboo poles and plastic around the plants to protect them from wind and collect moisture to water the plants. It was a very rewarding and therapeutic experience, even though the weather was quite windy and we got a bit wet.

Coming back to the Centre, we split into our school groups and brainstormed our particular school's needs and what we could do to improve our environment. For Santa Maria, this included paper recycling bins, LED lights, Earth Day, air conditioner and heater use, sustainable waste usage and other ideas that we are inspired to put into place in the following Seeds of Justice meetings.

Lastly, we used recycled plastic soft drink containers to pot seedlings in soil that had little notes we had written for the future. In the concluding ceremony, we received our Seeds of Justice badges and finished off with a pledge, prayer and thank yous. Tired but excited for what was to come in the following terms, we drove home and thought about all the experiences that we had undertaken. We made lots of new friends and enjoyed being part of planning to sustain our environment in God's Creation.

Regional Victoria Seeds of Justice Student Conference: 25 & 26 August 2016

The Regional Seeds of Justice Event was held at Araluen camp in Anglesea on 25th and 26th August 2016. The Theme of the event was "Speaking for those who are kept silent". The theme was especially pertinent to the guest speakers who were from ACRATH (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking of Humans).



Sr Therese Power RSM

Students from six Mercy schools joined together to discuss the difficult issue of Human Trafficking and the heard keynote speakers: Sr Therese Power and Liz Payne both representing ACRATH. Sr Therese shared her journey and the stories of those whom she works with on a daily and weekly basis as a support and advocate. Her stories of real people suffering and recovering from the plight of trafficking struck a chord with the students and helped them to see that one person can make a real difference.

Trafficking, involves the act of recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring or receiving a person through the use of force, coercion or other means for the purpose of exploitation. People are trafficked for sexual servitude (prostitution), forced labour (sweat shops and itinerant work), forced and servile marriages and domestic servitude and organ transplants. Worldwide the situation involves as high as 27 million people.

The second keynote speaker, Elizabeth Payne, was appointed to the position of Forced Marriage Project Worker at ACRATH at the start of April 2015. By sharing legal definitions and statistics, Liz was able to enlighten the attendees, providing insights into the situation on a national and global scale. The statistics were interesting and daunting, but awareness and hope are the key.

Students engaged in some reflection on scenarios and real life stories of trafficked people and the effects they suffered. Yet as always, hope endures and the students were able to contemplate how they might make a closer connection between ourselves and all in our global community in such a way that they felt encouraged to share the vision and to spread the word back in their school. Whether raising awareness to research or even fundraising – to make a difference and bring the information into the forefront of conversations with the whole school and wider community.

Particular changes which were initiated at the Seeds Regional Event included each student leaving with a pledge card which had a QR code on it. The code linked to a site with the presentations and clips shown during the event. There was also links to the Mercy story and ethos as well as ACRATH. This initiative will help students and social justice coordinators to access the information they need quickly and easily when they return to school and promote awareness of the Human Trafficking issue.

Through liturgy, music, reflection and interaction, the eight staff and forty students from Mercy Regional College Camperdown, Damascus College Ballarat, Emmanuel College Warrnambool, Trinity College Colac, Notre Dame College Shepparton and Sacred Heart College Kyneton gained new insights and made new friends.

Jo-Anne Saunders



Regional Seeds of Justice students at Araluen Camp, Anglesea

Melbourne Student Event 2: 20–21 October 2016

Theme: *“Homelessness: Finding a Merciful Response”*

Venue: Holy Cross Centre, Templestowe



Small group participation

Our October event invited participants to open their hearts to the issue of homelessness, and to meet with those who work daily as advocates for social change. Our guests on the first day of the program were from Anonymous X, an organisation focused on offering clothing and companionship to those experiencing homelessness in Melbourne. Our three presenters spent time delivering an overview of the work that Anonymous X undertakes, using this as a platform to discuss the many

and complex factors that may impact on the lives of those who experience homelessness. Later in the day, our three presenters invited our participants to spend time with them in smaller groups. These small group “Q&A” sessions allowed for intimate conversations and provided our presenters with an opportunity to share their own personal stories and insights.

The response to our guests from Anonymous X was overwhelming, and we were fortunate that they were happy to continue the conversation with our participants over lunch, and during the afternoon ‘break’ time. In the evening of the first day, participants worked together in groups to generate their own creative responses to all they had seen, heard and felt over the course of the day. During these group work sessions, some emotive prayers were composed and shared, a sample of which I am pleased to share in this report:

A prayer for a Merciful response to homelessness:

*On our streets,
on buses and subways
in classrooms,
in shelters,
in doorways and back ways,
lost, invisible, hungry and hurting.*

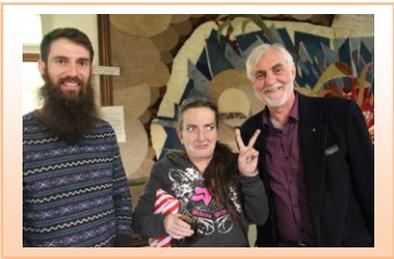
*Lord God, help us remember
“home” is more than four walls and a roof.
It is warmth in a cold time.
It is comfort in a difficult world.
It is safety, love and companionship.*

*Call us to stand in that place of solidarity,
call us all home,
Lord God, call us all home.
Amen*



St Joseph College Mildura Principal, Mrs Marg Blythman, together with SJCM staff and student participants

On the second day of the program, we welcomed Br Harry FMS and Sam from the Olympic Village Exodus Community as our guests. Br Harry offered a compassionate overview of what life can be like for those living with significant economic and social vulnerability, while Sam spoke candidly about the challenges she has overcome in her life. In the course of their presentation, Br Harry articulated his vision of “Enough-ism”, explaining that to his eyes the Kingdom of God involves a world where everyone has “enough”. Later in the day, the plans that our participants began to make for social outreach initiatives within their own school communities were testimony to the power of Sam and Br Harry’s presentation, and all participants finished the event feeling empowered about their own capacity to bring about positive changes in our world.



Sam Weir (SOJ Committee Chair) together with Sam and Br Harry from the Olympic Village Exodus Community

Comments from the event:

- *“I found the program amazing! It was so informative. I am very blown away by this event and I am privileged to have had this experience.”*
- *“I think the program was very worthwhile. The speakers were very engaging and informing.”*
- *“I have learned so much from this program and I would happily do it several more times!”*
- *“It was an amazing experience and I will carry it with me for the rest of my life.”*
- *The program was definitely worthwhile and informative. We all learnt so much and gained so much valuable insight into other lives.”*
- *“The group was creative and thoughtful and the guest speakers were genuine and honest.”*
- *“I have come away with new ideas and actions that I can bring back to school.”*
- *“This program has opened my eyes to the issues in our community. People have inspired me to take action and doing whatever I can to help out people in need.”*
- *“It is amazing to be inspired by such influential and dedicated people who want to make a change and are successful in doing so. It makes me believe that we can make a difference.”*

Dates for 2017:

The dates for each event are as follows. Please note that our second Melbourne student event will be held in November in 2017.

May Student Event:	18 th – 19 th May (Holy Cross Centre, Templestowe)
Staff Formation Day:	24 th July (Mercy Hub, Carlton). <i>Please note that this is an <u>earlier</u> date than in previous years.</i>
Perth, WA Student Event:	TBC (Perth, WA)
Regional Student Event:	10 th – 11 th August (Araluen Lutheran Camp, Anglesea)
October Student Event:	2 nd – 3 rd November (Holy Cross Centre, Templestowe). <i>Please note that this is a <u>later</u> date than in previous years.</i>

Closing Comments:

As the year draws to a close, we bid fond farewell to Mairead Kennedy. Mairead has been a much valued member of the committee over the past two years. She has used her time on the committee to develop innovative and engaging workshop routines, which have enlivened our events and drawn our participants into a deeper encounter with the issues at hand. Mairead's capacity to present material in a manner that engages young people at an intellectual, emotional and spiritual level is a wonderful attribute, and our events have been environments for lively discussion and debate thanks to her efforts. She is warmly thanked for her many contributions during her time as a Committee member and we wish Mairead well for 2017 and beyond.

Finally, it is with pleasure that I offer a vote of thanks to the school communities who support the Seeds of Justice project by offering students and staff the opportunity to attend each of our events. Particular thanks are offered to those schools who support our committee members by allowing them time to attend meetings and events. Your ongoing support is a blessing that we warmly appreciate.

Peace,

Sam Weir

On behalf of the Seeds of Justice Steering Committee
December 2016

The Seeds of Justice Committee acknowledges our generous sponsors.

