SEEDS OF JUSTICE

2011 ANNUAL REPORT
Photographs

Front Cover:  Seeds of Justice Staff and Students, October 2011
The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that birds of the air come and make nests in its branches” (Mt 13:31-32).

It is a humbling experience to sit amidst a group of students and to listen as they speak with courage and with hope about their desire to seek justice and mercy in their world. And it has again been the privilege of the Seeds of Justice Steering Committee to have played a role in providing the environment and the context for conversations such as this to have taken place.

In 2011, the Committee has run three Gospel-centred programs that challenged the thinking of participants, and that were grounded in the founding goals of the Seeds of Justice project:

- to form students and staff from Victorian Mercy schools in the Mercy charism;
- to raise awareness of contemporary issues in social justice;
- and to facilitate new links between students and staff to promote mercy and justice in their own contexts.

On each occasion, it has been the role of the Committee to plan, facilitate and then review each program. In 2011 the Committee has comprised of the following members:

- Marlo Drake (Sacred Heart College Geelong)
- Michael Haywood (Mount Lilydale Mercy College)
- Bernadette Hogan (St Aloysius College)
- Eugene Lynch (MSEI)
- Jacki Patterson (St Aloysius College)
- Natasha Pisotek (Mount Lilydale Mercy College)
- Nicole Rotaru rsm (Congregation Councillor)
- Sam Weir (Our Lady of Mercy College).

Of the three programs run this year, two were for students, while another was focused on the formation of staff from Mercy schools. An overview of each program is provided below.
The first event for the year saw over 50 students and close to 20 staff from across the state gather together at the Holy Cross Centre in Templestowe. For the two days of the program, participants took up the invitation to explore the place of social justice in their lives and in their communities.

The program’s theme, “Connecting Our Hearts in Mercy”, called on participants to consider themselves, and those that they met, as emotional and spiritual beings; and to recognise the inherent dignity of the human person. The challenge given throughout the two days was for students and staff to re-evaluate their understanding of outreach work. To see it not as an unbalanced relationship where one party is only ever a ‘giver of help’ to another party who is only ever a ‘receiver of help’; but as an opportunity for individuals to connect and to build relationships that celebrate the unique gifts that we each have to offer.

Day 1 began as the group gathered for a prayer of welcome, an acknowledgement of the land, and an introduction to both the overall aims of the Seeds of Justice project, and to the theme of the event.

With this context in place, our speakers for the day were introduced: Sr Cathy Solano rsm and Sr Kaye Evans rsm. Both women spoke candidly, and with deep compassion about some of their many experiences working in a range of outreach settings. Many students found the story of Sr Cathy’s scarf particularly moving, and it served as a tangible reminder of her point that social justice begins with meaningful relationships where stories, laughter, hopes and fears can be shared.

Sr Cathy and Sr Kaye led two sessions with the group, offering them a framework to approach their experiences later that evening, when each participant would spend time at a community placement. The group was then also briefed on what to expect at each of the placement locations (see below) and each participant was given the chance to choose the location that they wished to visit. As in previous years, the process of selection was conducted with maturity and considerateness by the group. The placement locations were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father Bob Maguire</td>
<td>South Melbourne</td>
<td>8 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regina Coeli</td>
<td>North Melbourne</td>
<td>6 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercy Place East Melbourne</td>
<td>East Melbourne</td>
<td>6 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercy Place Parkville</td>
<td>Parkville</td>
<td>6 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baily House</td>
<td>North Melbourne</td>
<td>12 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Catholic Ministry</td>
<td>Thornbury</td>
<td>8 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exodus Community</td>
<td>West Heidelberg</td>
<td>8 students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On returning from placements participants took time to debrief their experiences, before the day was closed with an evening reflection.

Day 2 began with warm up activities and an opening prayer. The group then heard from Sr Marie Doolan rsm, who spoke of her experiences working in Bangladesh and Cambodia making pressure bandages for acid victims. The stories shared by Sr Marie were particularly moving, and her message – that we are each called to share the gifts that we have been granted – built upon the wisdom shared by Sr Cathy and Sr Kaye, and the experiences had at the community placements.

Following Sr Marie’s address, the group took part in an open forum, and met in school groups to discuss what they would take back to their own communities. The event then concluded with a closing prayer, the commissioning of the Seeds of Justice badges and ‘the Pledge’ to work for a just world - taken by all participants.
Participants’ Comments

- Fantastic from a personal perspective, and a great preparation for students prior to placements that were excellent in choice.
- It is my first Seeds and it is a great energy that is created in the coming together of young men and women from Mercy Schools.
- I was really looking forward to this experience and it proved to be worthwhile. I will definitely be telling everyone of my experience and encourage them to come along.
- It definitely got further than my expectations!! I didn’t want Tuesday to end! Such a fantastic, inspirational retreat!
- It went above my expectations. The stories shared were amazing and very inspirational. The placement was excellent and I will definitely be going back.
- The program exceeded my expectations as it made me really understand what we are trying to achieve in social justice.
- It went beyond my expectations. I got so much more out of it than I thought I could. This was a brilliant experience and an amazing opportunity.
- Had a wonderful time and met some fantastic people and connections. The theme really suited the whole conference and linked in well.
- This program has given me more confidence and before this I didn’t know exactly how many different kinds of human beings, with many different kinds of stories, there would be. I now feel there is so much more I can do. I would have liked to be able to go to another placement, but I guess I will just have to come back next time.
STAFF FORMATION DAY:  Monday 1st August

“Growing the Seed of Mercy”

This year’s Staff Formation day looked at Mercy education as a place for the spiritual formation of both students and staff. Guest speakers were invited to explore the connections they had found between a formation in mercy, and the call to act for justice. Alongside of this, and as well as offering an insight into the purpose of the Seeds of Justice project, the day also pursued the following aims:

- to share in the experiences of participants in the ‘Teachers Across Borders’ program
- to hear from members of Young Mercy Links speak about their experiences working on community projects in Cambodia.
- to foster an understanding of the depth and breadth of the work that occurs in the ‘Mercy world’.
- to encourage networking and to share resources and ideas in order to assist one another in promoting Mercy and Justice in our schools.

Following a welcome and prayer, the first session was led by two staff members from Our Lady of Mercy College. Cenza Basile and Mark Jenkinson told of their recent experience in Cambodia, where they had volunteered with ‘Teachers Across Borders’ to run workshops for teacher-trainees at a regional training centre. As they shared stories and photos, Cenza and Mark spoke of the humility of service, and the generosity of spirit that they encountered on their journey.

The second session was led by three members of Young Mercy Links; Carla Rossimel, Elisa Rossimel & Melissa Anania. The three women spoke of their experiences in Cambodia, working with a range of outreach groups, including those run by Jesuit Services and the Marist Brothers. They also spoke of the role that their education in a Mercy school had had in forming their faith, and developing their understanding of social justice.

Drawing on positive feedback from previous years, the final session took the form of a resource sharing workshop, where staff were invited to pass on ideas and resources that they have used in their own schools. As well as swapping ideas for awareness/fundraising events, contacts, prayers and web-resources, staff took the opportunity to exchange contact details so as to keep the conversation going beyond the day itself. The day ended with a closing prayer (and a flight back to Mildura for one participant!).

From Left: OLMC past student/presenter, Carla Rossimel, Seeds of Justice Committee Members, Natasha Piotrek, Michael Haywood, OLMC past student/presenter, Elisa Rossimel, Committee Member, Bernadette Hogan, OLMC past student/presenter, Melissa Anania, Committee Member, Sam Weir and Eugene Lynch.
EVENT 2: Thursday 27 & Friday 28 August

“Walking Together”

One of the decisions made by the Committee at the end of 2010 was to use the October events as an opportunity to explore the four focus areas of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy Australia. Accordingly, 2011’s second student event invited participants to explore issues of Indigenous concerns, under the theme ‘Walking Together’.

Deferring the usual introduction to Seeds of Justice until later in the program, the event began instead with a fire ceremony and an acknowledgement of country led by Ms Vicki Clark, Coordinator of Aboriginal Catholic Ministry. Vicki invited students to voice their own memories of stories shared around a campfire, and then asked all participants to - one by one - warm their hands by the fire and pass ‘the flame’ on to one another.

Vicki then spent the following three sessions with the group, during which time she offered insights into the past and present state of Aboriginal issues in both Victoria and Australia as a whole, and shared generously the wisdom gained from her own life journey. Vicki also brought with her a range of goods from ACM, which students and staff were free to purchase during the afternoon break.

Vicki encouraged interactivity throughout all three sessions, particularly so in session two. During this workshop, staff and students were separated onto three ‘buses’ (‘Justice’, ‘Equality’ and ‘Hope’) and asked to consider some of the experiences of the Stolen Generation. The immersion that followed was both challenging and emotive, and gave participants a framework through which to deepen their empathy and understanding. Many students expressed their shock at some of the attitudes, behaviours and events that are found in our country’s not-too-distant past, and were firm in their resolve to work for a truly reconciled future.

During the break after dinner, the Committee met with staff members to discuss ways to debrief Vicki’s sessions with their students, and methods for building on the days experiences.

The evening session was run by Scott Darlow, an Aboriginal musician and performer. With his only props a chair, a guitar and a didjeridu, Scott shared his own stories, wisdom and faith, in an interactive session that was liberally sprinkled with music, songs and humour. The response from both students and staff was unanimously enthusiastic, and Scott’s central message tapped into the ideas and issues that Vicki had raised during the day. His parting words were to ‘remember to think FLUTE’ (Forgiveness, Love, Understanding, Tolerance, Empathy) when approaching issues of justice. The evening came to a close with time for prayer and reflection, and a chance to think back over what had been a busy, though energising, day.

Day 2 began with some warm up activities, and an overview of the overarching aims of the Seeds of Justice project. Sr Nicole Rotaru rsm then led the group in morning prayer, drawing on the issues explored the day before, and on Scott’s FLUTE acronym.
In the first session of the day, staff and students from Sacred Heart College Kyneton, Mount Lilydale Mercy College and Sacred Heart College Geelong spoke in turn about the Aboriginal-immersion experiences that their school communities take part in. Sacred Heart Geelong also spoke about their experience with the FIRE Carrier program (Friends Igniting Reconciliation through Education), which Vicki had also recommended the previous day. Time was then allocated for individual school groups to discuss how they would build on their experiences when returning to their communities. The whole group then regathered to share their plans, and each participant was presented with a Journey Stone, purchased from Aboriginal Catholic Ministry.

The event drew to a close with the commissioning of the Seeds of Justice badges, ‘the Pledge’ taken by all participants, and a closing prayer. The last formal program item was a vote of thanks to the catering and administrative staff at the Holy Cross Centre for their hospitality.

Students and staff left the event energised and resolved to tackle issues of Aboriginal concern, and to celebrate a shared path towards a just and hope-filled future.
Participant’s Comments

- I loved listening to people’s personal experiences and stories and gaining a lot more awareness about Aboriginal and Torres Strait history and issues.
- It was much more interesting than I initially expected. It really opened my eyes and inspired me to help make a difference.
- It really opened my eyes and mind to what’s happened and happening around me. It was very inspirational and it is just amazing how much you can learn and experience in less than two days.
- Definitely provided valuable input and insight into Aboriginal reconciliation. Highlighted the importance of “fixing our own backyard”
- It was more than I expected, I absolutely loved it. Can’t even describe the place and how much stuff I achieved from it. I gained a lot and the experience I got will help me get ideas and gave me confidence in my leader position in 2012 as Year 12 Mission Captain.
- The program was much more engaging and informative than I expected. I am highly motivated to bring back what I learnt and encourage everyone at my school to be involved and make a difference.
- I liked the prayer sessions – I care that at Seeds I feel I can openly express my faith as a big part of my social justice mission.
- It was a truly unforgettable experience this gathering of young like-minded people, on the bus to Justice, Equality and Hope, all striving to make the world a better place for all.
- Very effective and changes a lot of people’s point of view about different people in a positive way. It is a valuable experience with so much to get out of it.
Comments and Discussion Points

As the year draws to a close, there are a number of comments the Committee can make:

Sponsorship and support

- We are again grateful for the ongoing support of MSEI and the Melbourne Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy. Their financial sponsorship allows us to plan for high quality programs throughout the year. It is worth noting that much of the Committee’s yearly budget is spent on donations to community placement locations and on gifts to speakers and guests; and so effectively the monies provided by MSEI and the Melbourne Congregation are disseminated across a range of worthy services and individuals.
- We also appreciate the support of the Principals of Mercy sponsored, co-sponsored and affiliated schools, and thank them for the investment that they make in allocating funds for students and staff to attend events, and allowing time release for staff.

Dates for 2012

- A suggestion often found on the feedback forms following student events is that we consider expanding the program over three days/two nights. The Committee has discussed this idea on a number of occasions, with the view consistently being that one of the strengths of the student events is their contained and concentrated nature. As such, the Seeds of Justice project will follow a similar program of events in 2012.

The dates for each event are as follows:

- Student Event 1: Thursday 24th – Friday 25th May *(Holy Cross Centre)*
- Staff Formation Day: Monday 6th August *(Mercy Congregation Centre)*
- Student Event 2: Thursday 25th – Friday 26th October *(Holy Cross Centre)*

Membership

- The Committee has seen some changes to its membership throughout 2011. We began the year welcoming Marlo Drake, Natasha Pisotek, Bernadette Hogan and Jacki Paterson; and farewelled Jacki mid-year as she left to travel overseas. As the project moves into its second decade, the Committee will need to continue to address the issue of membership and succession planning.
- Throughout 2011, all members have given generously of their time, energy, creativity and passion, and the Committee recognises and appreciates the support of those schools that have allowed time for members to attend meetings and events.

Finances and account

- While the position of Chairperson has moved from Mount Lilydale Mercy College to Our Lady of Mercy College, the decision was made early in the year to keep the Committee’s account at Mount Lilydale. It is expected that, over time, the position of Chairperson will continue to move between schools. In light of this it seemed sensible to keep the account in one place, as this will help to ensure ease of access and the ongoing integrity of the account, regardless of other changes to the Committee’s membership.
- As a result of this decision, Mike Haywood has taken on the role of Treasurer, and both he and Natasha Pisotek are to be thanked for their work in maintaining the account. The decision also means that the Committee will be reliant on members from Mount Lilydale being available to fill this role in the future.
Regionalisation
- While the Holy Cross Centre remains an excellent venue for student events, the growing popularity of these programs has meant that the facilities for overnight accommodation are often stretched to capacity. Partly in response to this, the Committee has begun to discuss the idea that the project considers future regionalisation (for example, forming a new Committee to plan and run separate events in the south of the state). Where this were to occur, a regional Committee could begin by making use of the wealth of programs run by the project in the past ten years. The Committee will continue to explore this idea into 2012.

Community placement contacts
- The Committee now has an established relationship with a number of outreach services, and will continue to work with them when planning for the first student event of 2012. Members of the Committee will also continue to seek out other outreach services that may suit the framework of our program.
- Feedback from students and staff, as well as from the placement locations themselves, continues to be positive, and suggest that the placements offer a rewarding and enriching experience for all involved. A common comment on the end-of-event feedback forms is a request for placement opportunities during the second student event as well. It is the feeling of the Committee that the second event should remain speaker/workshop focused, so as to allow for deeper levels of thinking and insight.
- In 2010, Annalee McKew developed a resource kit for staff to use when debriefing with students following a placement experience and the Committee will likely revisit and reuse this kit when planning future events.

Sisters of Mercy
- The 2011 events were enriched by the involvement and presence of Sisters of Mercy. Sr Cathy Solano, Sr Kaye Evans, Sr Marie Doolan and Sr Nicole Rotaru are each to be thanked for the generosity with which they shared their insights, wisdom and faith. They are also to be acknowledged for the example that they offer to the participants of a life steeped in the Mercy charism. The Committee looks forward to the continued presence of Sisters of Mercy at each of the 2012 events.

Congregation Day
- On July 30th the Committee were invited along with six students (two from Mount Lilydale Mercy College, two from Sacred Heart College, Geelong and two from Our Lady of Mercy College) to attend the Sisters of Mercy Congregation Day, held at the Rydges Bell City Ballroom. The students addressed the congregation as a panel, and spoke candidly of their experiences attending Seeds of Justice events. The event was an enriching exchange for both parties, particularly during the question and answer session, in which the conversation between audience and speakers developed around a shared sense of hope for a world of justice and mercy.
**Closing Comments:**

The image of the seed may seem at first a simple metaphor – however it is rich with meaning and implication. And at their core, this year’s Seeds of Justice events have, like their namesake, offered opportunities for growth: growth in knowledge, growth in understanding, and growth in faith.

The feedback from all three events has been overwhelmingly positive, and it has been both a pleasure and a privilege to have worked with such wonderful groups of students and staff throughout the year. The ‘seeds’ of justice are truly alive, and are being nourished in our Mercy schools and communities. As we move towards fresh challenges in 2012, it is heartening to think that upwards of 1000 students have experienced a Seeds of Justice event in the past decade.

The Committee looks forward with anticipation to another series of challenging and thought provoking events in 2012. We will continue to seek programs, speakers and placements that both inspire hope for, and generate action towards, a world of mercy and of justice.

As a final note, the pleasure falls to me to thank Jacki Patterson for her input as a Committee member in the first half of the year. Jacki brought with her not only boundless energy and enthusiasm, but also a mind quick to consider an issue from all sides, and a comprehensive awareness of the many justice issues that face the world in the 21st century. The example set by Jacki’s creativity and her readiness to embrace communication technologies to promote justice initiatives is one that the Committee will continue to draw upon. We wish Jacki well for her travels and for the new adventures she will encounter.

Peace,

Sam Weir
On behalf of the Seeds of Justice Steering Committee
December 2011
Financial Report for Year Ending 30th November 2011

Starting Bank Balance  $  795.15  
As at 1 January 2011

Cash Receipts
  Sisters of Mercy – Melbourne Congregation  $2,000.00  
  Mercy Secondary Education Inc  $2,000.00  
Total Receipts  $4,000.00  

TOTAL:  $4,795.15

Less Cash Payments:

Event One:
  Donations to Street Placements
    Fr. Bob Maguire  $150.00  
    Exodus Community  $150.00  
    McAuley Comm Services Women  $150.00  
    Mercy Place East Melbourne  $300.00  
    Sr Kaye Evans  $150.00  
    Baily House Residence Trust  $150.00  
    Sr Marie Doolan  $300.00  
    Mercy Secondary Educ—Reimb  $150.00  
    Transport to placements  $540.17  
Total Payments for Event One  $2,040.17

Staff Formation Day:
  Ms M Anania  -  $150.00  
  Ms E Rossimel  -  $150.00  
  Ms C Rossimel  -  $150.00  
Total Payments for Staff Formation Day:  $ 450.00

Event Two:
  Guest Speakers (cheques/donations)
    Scott Darlow  -  $400.00  
    ACM  -  $650.00  
    Flower arrangements  $ 92.73  
Total Payments for Event Two  $1,142.73

TOTAL EXPENDITURE FOR 2011  $3,632.90

CURRENT BANK BALANCE  $1,162.25

Account held at Mount Lilydale Mercy College
Account Number 124170