Seeds of Justice
2014
Annual Report
I solemnly pledge...
to continue to work for justice in the footsteps of Catherine McAuley
and to support the works of the Sisters of Mercy.

I will remain...
committed, steadfast and connected to others in heartfelt compassion.

I will endeavour...
to serve others and stand up for the needs of the poor and marginalised in our society.

By proudly wearing this badge I will keep the spirit, energy and heart of this conference alive in my own school community and the world.

Yes I know I can Make a Difference.
“Prayer is a plant the seed of which is sown in the heart of every Christian, but its growth entirely depends on the care we take to nourish it.”

(Catherine McAuley)

In one of her many letters, Catherine McAuley once commented: “How rapidly the days, weeks, and months are passing. Another month ended, that seemed but a few days begun.” Certainly, this seems to have been the case in 2014. It is a gentle pleasure then to look back over the events of the year, and to share in Catherine’s recognition that, if our time together at each Seeds of Justice event throughout the year has been spent in the service of God, then truly “they were blessed days for us”.

As we do each year, in the blessed time that we have spent together at Seeds events, we have pursued the following three foundational project aims:

- to offer formation and development in the Mercy charism to students and staff from Mercy Education;
- 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.

It is of course through the dedication and hard work of the wonderful people that make up our Committees that we work to achieve these goals; and so it is a joyful pleasure to acknowledge and thank each member of the three committees for their efforts throughout 2014.

**Melbourne Committee 2014:**
- Marlo Drake (Sacred Heart College, Geelong) – resigned December 2014
- Michael Haywood (Mount Lilydale Mercy College)
- Bernadette Inman (Our Lady of Mercy College)
- Mairead Kennedy (Mercy College, Coburg)
- Eugene Lynch (Mercy Education Limited)
- Natasha Leaumont (Mount Lilydale Mercy College) – resigned May 2014
- Sr Anila Isaac rsm (Academy of Mary Immaculate)
- Sam Weir (Sacred Heart College, Kyneton) - Chairperson

**Regional Victoria Committee 2014:**
- Jo-Anne Saunders (Mercy College, Camperdown) - Chairperson with support from teachers from Mercy schools.
Western Australian Committee 2014:
- Rosa Speranza (Mercedes College, Perth)
- Helen Chaffer (Santa Maria College, Attadale)

We are blessed too, each and every year, to have the generous administrative support of the team in the Mercy Education office, and I take the opportunity to also extend a warm thank you to Pam de Kort and Effie Coulson for all that they do behind the scenes.

In 2014, the Melbourne Committee facilitated two student events and one staff program, while the Regional Committee hosted its third annual program. An overview of each of the programs held in 2014 is provided below.

### Seeds of Justice Programs

**Melbourne Student Event 1: 22nd – 23rd May 2014**
**Theme:** “Where We Meet Justice”
**Venue:** Holy Cross Centre, Templestowe

Our opening event for 2014 invited participants to confront the issues of social injustice that we are met with in our everyday lives.

The event began with an opening address from Mark Clarke, Executive Officer of the Melbourne Archdiocese’s Office for Justice and Peace. Mark’s presentation was intentionally provocative, as he challenged all present to maintain a vigilant awareness of the conditions that lead to injustice; and to be vocal and active in our response to these.

Following a break for lunch, participants had the opportunity to debrief the material that they had encountered during Mark’s presentation; and to share the new insights that they had gained.

As is now the established tradition of the May event, the evening session offered participants an opportunity to visit and engage with one of a range of social organisations across Melbourne. In 2014, students were offered the following options for their community placements:
- McAuley House
- Mercy Place, East Melbourne
- Mercy Place, Parkville
- Baily House, North Melbourne
- Olympic Village Exodus Community, West Heidelberg
- St Vincent de Paul Soup Van, Collingwood
The keynote session of the second day of the event was spent in conversation with a panel of guests, including: a past resident of McAuley House; members of Young Mercy Links; and Bernadette Inman, Coordinator of YML. The discussion was engaging and eye-opening for all, with each panel member sharing generously of their own experiences encountering and responding to vulnerability in our communities.

The panel conversation also provided a platform for participants to begin their own discussions once they had moved in to school-group workshops. In this closing session, time was provided for each school-group to explore the actions that they would take once they had returned to their own school communities.

Comments from the event:

- *This was a really rewarding experience because I stepped out of my comfort zone and learnt a lot.*
- *I discovered the importance of social justice in the past two days and importance of doing something and speaking up.*
- *I loved the amazing speakers who opened our eyes; and going out to placement and actually seeing where we can help and the help that is being provided.*
- *I loved the program and the friendly and absolutely inspiring atmosphere. Everyone was so encouraging and really invigorated me to do what I can no matter how big or small.*
- *The program was really valuable. The talk by Mark Clarke really spurred me to action and helped me to get the most out of my community placement experience.*
- *The program was good in the sense that it showed us the different perspectives and allows us to be connected with real people that have experienced this first hand, as opposed to stuff we read about in class, but rarely get to experience.*
- *Great, enthusiastic guest speakers. Fun, safe environment. Great, like-minded students.*
- *This program was enjoyable and opened my eyes to what justice means in our world.*
- *The program was excellent and I think that it really inspired people.*
- *I extremely enjoyed the experience and would gladly come again. I thought the placements really opened my eyes.*
- *It was a great opportunity to meet like-minded people.*

**Western Australia Student Event: 2014**
**Theme:** “Homelessness”
**Venue:** St John of God Retreat Centre, Safety Bay

Our Seeds of Justice journey began nearly 7 months ago; when we were only 10 girls unaffected by homelessness but keen to make a difference in the wider community. When we began our journey, our mission was focussed on homelessness in Western Australia and to build a better understanding of what 'home' meant to us. We were faced with facts that we were unaware of, and an issue that many Australians were oblivious to. Every night across Australia, more than 100,000 people are homeless, of these 14,000 sleep rough. Each has a different journey into homelessness, and they are
not who you may think. Close to half the homeless are female, many with young children and nearly half of all homeless are under the age of 25.

Together, we decided that these people were people like us. Although we may be of differing backgrounds and circumstances, we have the same aspirations, hopes and needs. We are human beings and so are those living in harsh conditions affected by violence, mental illness, debt, family breakdown; the list goes on. Just as many people journey into homelessness in different ways, we journeyed into a society that was mislead by the misconceptions on homelessness to try and make a difference, and answer the question "How can we assist in ending homelessness?"

The statistics were confronting and the amount of lives of those on the streets that had been affected gave us the determination we needed to work persistently towards our mission. In order to acquire a more in depth understanding, we went to a retreat facility in Safety Bay where we spent 2 days learning about homelessness through a Mercy lens, getting to know students from the other Mercy schools and developing ways in which we could help the homeless in our own communities. The two day program began with an introductory session leading into morning tea where we got to know many lovely people. We then discussed what home meant to us, and did an activity where we wrote down 5 things that we could not live without and shared them with the other groups. This gave us an interesting insight into what different people considered to be 'home.' That night we were treated to a delicious dinner and after another short bonding session went to bed.

The next morning was packed full of activities, beginning with a talk from Tracy Pollett, a lady of New Zealand origin who gave us a compassionate insight into the lives of the less fortunate, her own life and her own meaning of 'home.' We then continued to voice our own opinions on the topic of homelessness and listened to the opinions of those who had experienced homelessness, or been involved in the issue of homelessness in some way. After a lot of discussion we eventually explored the theme through art with our resident artist Lisa Speranza, who assisted in creating lino prints to decorate pieces of material from clothing from op shops further exploring our idea of 'home.'

We also reflected prayerfully on the topic by walking the labyrinth in the garden and completing a sand mandala labyrinth. This helped us to find peace and harmony within ourselves, reflecting on all that we had learnt. At the conclusion of the program we sat in our school group and discussed ways that we could all help raise awareness in our school communities. We ended our program in a brief liturgy in the chapel where we received a framed piece of our work along with a pack of flower seeds to spread our mission for justice and pledged to continue this work together. The experience was great fun as well as a great opportunity to learn more about a particular social justice issue and develop as people of Mercy.
However, the journey did not end there as we brainstormed ways to raise awareness on the issue of homelessness. Those of us from Mercedes College decided to make a movie in which a few of the Seeds of Justice girls dressed as homeless people while the others filmed, attempting to capture people's reactions to the homeless. The preparation of the movie required us to wake up early on a Monday morning to film, and many hours after that to edit. However the end result was definitely worth it. The film was a pleasant surprise and we were very proud of our efforts. Although there are still huge issues surrounding the homeless, we believe that this video will help raise awareness about the issue. The students and teachers at Mercedes were kind and compassionate to the actors and in turn made the film a great success.

Recently students from the 2014 Seeds of Justice Program gathered at Santa Maria College to share our progress in various schools in raising awareness about homelessness. We shared the accomplishments of each of the schools and we were extremely impressed with the results. Santa Maria College had managed to raise a large amount of funds to help Tracy find a new home and donated the rest of the money to St. Vincent de Paul. Aranmore had organised a jacket collection where they asked their peers to donate their old jumpers and coats which they then to donated to St Vincent de Paul for their work with the homeless. To conclude the evening we were treated to a delicious dinner and then presented with our Seeds of Justice badges to remind us of our ongoing commitment to justice.

The Seeds of Justice program has been an amazing experience that we were all very privileged to be a part of. We had a great time getting to know all the girls and boys from Santa Maria, Mercy and Aranmore Colleges. We look forward to continuing this good work next year and encourage the younger students to embrace this opportunity and work towards raising awareness and being involved in action for the benefit of not only the school community but the global community.

Stefanie Boyle & Kate Martin (Mercedes College)

Staff Formation Day: 4th August 2014
Theme: “Fostering Mercy Beyond the School Gates”
Venue: Mercy Congregation Centre, Alphington

While each of our Staff Formation events seeks to achieve the three founding goals of the Seeds of Justice project, each year we also pursue further aims, specific to the selected theme. In 2014 these further aims were:

- to provide an enriched awareness of the Mercy charism, and of the social outreach work conducted by members of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy Australia and Papua New Guinea;
- to confront the issue of human trafficking and to explore how we in Mercy Education may best respond to this grave injustice; and
- to promote the work of Young Mercy Links and to provide participants with information on how to build connections between YML and their schools.

Following our opening prayer, the day began with an insightful and deeply engaging address from Sr Angela Reed RSM. Sr Angela spoke with participants about her research into the social evil of human trafficking, drawing on stories of her time spent in the Philippines. Many participants spoke of feeling empowered by the intellectual framework that Sr Angela provided, and deeply moved by the living example of compassion and Mercy that she offered in her presence.

Sr Angela’s session was later complimented by a workshop hosted by Sr Carole MacDonald rsm, in which Sr Carole provided participants with an overview of the works conducted by ACRATH. This was very much a ‘hands-on’ session, as participants took the opportunity to explore the ACRATH
website and discuss the many ways that ACRATH’s wonderful resources might be used in our classrooms and in our wider school communities.
During the day, participants also had the opportunity to interact with a panel of speakers from Young Mercy Links. This session provided many participants with the impetus to further develop the relationship between their school community and YML, which is continuing to grow as a significant service ministry for school leavers and young adults in the Mercy community.

Comments from the event:

- Sr Angela & Sr Carole both understood where teachers are “at” and what was useful for us to help with reaching our students.
- The program was wonderful as always!! Very practical and yet intellectually rigorous. Always great to share ideas and resources.
- The program was informative, practical, inspiring, well planned and we had access to great resources. It was a wonderful introduction to the Mercy Charism and its ongoing influence in society – one voice makes a difference. Love the music and prayer – inspiring.
- It was a fantastic Day – very informative, well structured.
- The day provided a good mix of theoretical input and practical advice for use in our schools, and for linking with Mercy & Justice post school.
- This program is fantastic in identifying our responsibility as educators, to improve awareness on social injustices and not only provide us, but also our students, with means of action. Very practical.
- It was great! Very engaging and informative. It exceeded my needs and expectations.

Regional Seeds of Justice Event Report 2014

After a successful planning meeting held at Mercy Regional College in April, students from many different Mercy Schools attended the third annual Seeds of Justice Regional Event on August 21/22. Students attended from the following schools:

- Notre Dame College Shepparton
- St Aloysius College, North Melbourne
- Catholic Regional College Sydenham
- Sacred Heart College Geelong
- Emmanuel College Warrnambool
- Mercy Regional College Camperdown
- Damascus College Ballarat

Forty-two students and ten staff from these schools shared the wisdom of guest speakers Sr Karon Donellan RSM and Shane Howard (formerly of the band Goanna).

The Regional Retreat is situated at Anglesea. It’s proximity to the beach and compact layout, make it a perfect destination for students to gather and share their love of Social Justice and their commitment to being people of Mercy.

Shane Howard shared his life experiences and his journey into a deeper understanding of indigenous culture in Australia. He challenged students to be aware of the economics, the politics and the justice behind their clothing purchases. He promoted questioning, curiosity, study and awareness of the issues affecting our own country and our global communities.

Sr Karon shared a great deal on the day with the students and staff, becoming part of the fabric of the event. She shared stories of Mercy women in isolated outback areas of Australia embracing the indigenous community. Sr Karon then went on to encourage the students to embrace the fact that they
are Mercy people, no matter where their journey may take them. She highlighted the concept of hospitality and education as synonymous with a life in Mercy and challenged the students to empower others in their schools to become more aware of the manner in which Mercy people treat one another and the strangers in our lives. Sr Karon proposed that students look into their own communities to recognise the qualities of Mercy at work and the aspects that might be improved.

Of particular interest were the creative responses to the keynote speakers presented by mixed groups of the students. They included rap songs, poetry, drama and interview style responses. Each of these creative responses indicated that the students really took on board the message of the Keynote speakers and considered how they might express what they had learned in a fun and creative way.

One of the most inspiring facets of the Regional Event is the input of each school group and staff. All the staff were encouraged to be involved in some way and take on responsibility for leading a session or warm up activity. As a regional team we believe this is a great strength of the event and brings about great collegiality. From the prayers and reflections to the team activities and hypothetical arguments it was a great event.

I would like to thank all staff involved in planning and implementing the Regional Event and the Melbourne Seeds of Justice Committee for their continued support.

Mrs Jo-Anne Saunders - on behalf of the Regional Seeds of Justice Event Team

Melbourne Student Event 2: 23rd – 24th October 2014
Theme: “Mercy Responding to Women and Poverty in Our World”
Venue: Holy Cross Centre, Templestowe

For a number of years now, the themes for our October events have been taken from the issues that have been highlighted as areas of specific concern by the Sisters of Mercy and in 2014 we turned our attention to examine the issue of ‘Women and Poverty’.

The event began with an interactive workshop hosted by Mairead Kennedy. Participants took on the challenge of seeking out information about the disproportionate impact of poverty on women across our shared globe; before taking time to discuss their findings and their responses to them.

Empowered by the knowledge gained in their opening workshop, participants then moved into conversation with Sr Julie Anne Ryan rsm. Sr Julie Anne was more than generous in sharing the story of her time living and working in Papua New Guinea, and her interactive presentation left a palpable and lasting impact on all participants.

Later in the day, participants had the chance to deepen their knowledge of the Mercy story in PNG, as they took part in a workshop focused on the story of Mercy Secondary School Yarapos, PNG. While she was unable to attend on the day, Sr Agnes Murphy rsm, past Principal, had spent significant time and energy preparing presentation materials for our participants, and these were ably delivered by Eugene Lynch on Sr Agnes’ behalf.

Presenter, Sr Julie Anne Ryan rsm with students from Sacred Heart College Kyneton
The connections that participants made between the content they had encountered in each session was on full display later in the evening, when the direction of the event was handed over to the students. Working together in small groups, participants presented a range of creative, energetic and joyful responses to the material presented during the day. All adult participants present were struck by the joyous hope with which our student participants channeled their responses to the social evil of poverty into song, drama, dance, music and prayer.

On the second day of the program, Marlo Drake led a conversation about the ongoing relationship that has developed between the Sacred Heart College Geelong community and the Mercy projects underway in Timor Leste. During this session, staff and students from other schools were also invited to take advantage of the ‘Open Mic’ to share their own stories of connections with our nearest neighbours in Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea.

Comments from the event:

- It was very inspiring and interesting to find out what is happening in PNG and East Timor and how we could make a difference.
- I found the program extremely informative and moving. It provided me with the information I needed to promote social justice to my school community. I have made friends through this conference and I have been inspired to be the change.
- This program was extremely worthwhile. I learnt about much that I was originally unaware of. The presentations were a great way to learn.
- I learnt a lot from this experience, especially about making a difference and empowering the community.
- This program was very heart touching and inspirational. I will certainly be coming and participating in the upcoming Seeds of Justice programs.
- The program was very good and gave an insight into the life of women in our neighbouring countries.
- I now have a bigger understanding of what Mercy Schools can do. I have also received a lot of information about how I can help even more.
I loved attending this for my last chance. Seeds is always amazing because I have a strong passion for social justice.

I would definitely encourage lots to sign up because it is a worthwhile experience. I learnt so much and have developed relationships with so many people.

The program was very good and informative. It’s really given me that little push of motivation I needed to get started and get involved.

Dates for 2015

The dates for each event are as follows:

- May Student Event: 21st – 22nd May (Holy Cross Centre)
- Staff Formation Day: 3rd August (Mercy Congregation Centre)
- Regional Student Event: 20th – 21st August (Araluen Lutheran Camp, Anglesea)
- WA Student Event: 19th & 20th August (St John of God Retreat Centre, Safety Bay)
- October Student Event: 22nd – 23rd October (Holy Cross Centre)

Closing Comments:

While it is a joyful task to have shared with you some of the highlights from the year, reflecting on each of our 2014 events is also of course a necessary step towards our planning for the year to come - and the 2015 calendar promises to be just as eventful as the one we have just concluded. As we celebrate what we have achieved, and begin looking forward to next year, we would do well to take to heart the Christian call to service of which Catherine McAuley reminds us: “It is not sufficient that Jesus Christ be formed in us – he must be recognised in our conduct.”

Across the course of 2014, it has been both humbling and energising to work alongside fellow Committee members that give so freely of their time, creativity and passion for justice. It is a deep pleasure to have the opportunity to thank all members of the Committee for their wonderful work in 2014; and to acknowledge the ongoing support of those schools that have allowed time for members to attend meetings and events.

We especially thank our on-going sponsors in Mercy Education, ISMAPNG and Grant Thornton. We extend sincere appreciation to our new sponsors for 2014 in Catholic Church Insurances (CCI) and Catholic Development Fund Perth.

As the year draws to a close, we fondly farewell two members of our Committee, Natasha Leaumont and Marlo Drake. Both Natasha and Marlo are thanked for their many contributions during their time as a Committee member, and we wish each of them well for 2015 and beyond.

Peace,

Sam Weir
Chair
On behalf of the Seeds of Justice Committee
December 2014
Seeds of Justice
A/C 124170
Date: 19/12/2014

General Ledger Balance: $9,156.56

Donations/Expenses

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