



AMSSA CONFERENCE 2017 MELBOURNE

THURSDAY AUGUST 3 – SATURDAY AUGUST 5, 2017

“SUSTAINING THE SPIRIT OF MERCY”

Between 130 and 150 people over three days gathered at the Catholic Leadership Centre, East Melbourne for the AMSSA Biennial Conference 2017. There were representatives from over 40 Mercy schools in Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, from Mercy Education, Sr Annette Schneider rsm from ISMAPNG, Sr Loreto Conroy rsm from the Sisters of Mercy, North Sydney and Sr Ailsa Mackinnon rsm from Mercy Works as well as a large number of keynote and workshop presenters. The theme of the Conference was “Sustaining the Spirit of Mercy”.

The Conference opened with the Opening Prayer involving staff from Mercy schools across Australia and New Zealand and students from OLMC Heidelberg. Julie Ryan, President of AMSSA and Sr Loreto Conroy on behalf of the Australian and New Zealand Leaders welcomed the delegates. Julie introduced Patricia Bergin who had brokered the Conference on behalf of AMSSA and who would be the facilitator for the three days.



The first keynote speaker was Sr Elizabeth Dowling rsm who had been a teacher in secondary schools and adult education contexts and who is now lecturing in biblical studies at the ACU. Sr Elizabeth's address was titled “*Our Centre is God*” taking it from what Catherine McAuley wrote in her

retreat instructions: “Our centre is God, from whom all our actions should spring as from their source”. Sr Elizabeth spoke of Catherine's early upbringing and her life with the Callaghan family. As Mrs

Callaghan was a Quaker, Catherine was introduced to the Scriptures and unlike other Catholics of her time read and knew the Bible. This knowledge was reflected in the many letters Catherine wrote to her Sisters. The love of God was the source of all her actions. Sr Elizabeth concluded by saying that our schools needed to be centred in God and students need to have the opportunity to know the God of Mercy in the gospel stories.



The first day of the Conference concluded with an opportunity to socialise with each other, to make new connections and continue to build a network of Mercy centred people. It also provided us with the opportunity of viewing a range of artworks on display by Sr Margaret Broadbent rsm. One of her paintings was used for the front cover of the Conference Brochure.



The second day of the Conference began with **prayer in the courtyard** followed by a keynote address given by Prof Br David Hall fms, a Marist Brother and the Dean of the La Salle Academy for Faith Formation and Religious Education at the ACU. Br David was a Catholic school educator,

filling roles as teacher, Director of Mission and Principal. Br David's address was titled "**Navigating the Swamp**: a call to be more mystical and prophetic". He spoke of the turbulent times in which we live on so many fronts and particularly for the Catholic Church dealing with losing numbers and the Royal Commission and its aftermath. At the same time, while Pope Francis is popular, there is uncertainty about where the Church is heading. It will be young people who will call us to be renewed. Br David suggested that there is a need for prophets who will show us a new way, say no to their society and condemn habits and assumptions, complacency and waywardness. Their objective will be to reconcile people to God. Prophetic leadership is visionary, strategic, corporate and foundational.

On the afternoon of the second day, delegates were offered a range of experiences beyond the Conference venue: the Mercy Trail where

delegates visited some of the historical and contemporary Mercy sites in Melbourne; the National Gallery Wellspring Experience where delegates looked at a range of works of art from ancient civilisations to contemporary art; the Islamic Museum, the first of its kind in the Western world and the Jewish Museum: Courage of Care program which uses the stories of Holocaust survivors and the “Righteous Among the Nations” to promote respect for diversity, a spirit of mercy and a belief that ordinary people are capable of extraordinary acts.



The keynote speaker on the final day of the Conference was Dr Maeve Heaney vdmf, a consecrated member of the Verbum Dei Community and a lecturer in theology at the ACU. A musician and composer, she has led schools of evangelisation, retreats and spiritual exercises

and taught around the world. The title of her address was “**Centering our Lives**: Music as a form of presence and surrender to God in Christ”. Dr Heaney explored how music is a form of access and aid in experiencing God. She spoke of how music works and its importance for our faith and how it helps us to access Jesus. Music is very important as it explains the world to many young people. It is a dimension of the symbolic and allows a rediscovery of beauty. Dr Heaney through beautiful song and music was able to engage and challenge her audience.

The last session of the Conference was a panel session with four Sisters of Mercy facilitated by Patricia Bergin. The four Sisters were Sr Patricia Powellrsm, Sr Elizabeth Young rsm, Sr Margaret Broadbent rsm and Sr Michelle Goh rsm. What was most striking about the panel discussion was how different the backgrounds and experiences of each of the Sisters was.

Sr Michelle was born in Malaysian of Chinese background. She was baptised at the age of 12 and went on to study medicine and is now a practising dermatologist. Sr Margaret came from a more traditional Catholic family, entered the Convent and at a mature age went to Art School for 5 years. We were able to enjoy a number of her paintings which were displayed at the Conference.

Sr Patricia grew up in the country and went to university in Sydney. She was greatly influenced by Vatican 11. Sr Patricia is noted now for establishing the Rahamim Ecology Centre in Bathurst NSW. Sr Elizabeth grew up in a Uniting Church family in country South Australia and went to a Catholic school. She has degrees in Circus Arts and

Theology. Sr Elizabeth has worked in detention centres and in prison chaplaincy.

Our Conference concluded with the delegates gathering in the nearby church for Mass. The celebrant was Bishop Mark Edwards OMI. Thank you to the staff of St Aloysius College, Melbourne who organised the Mass and the students for their participation and the beautiful music.

Thank you to all who attended the 2017 AMSSA Conference from all Australian states, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. Thank you to our organising Committee: Julie Ryan, Marg Blythman, Patricia Bergin, Craig Holmes, Kitty Guerin and Michelle Cotter. Thank you to our keynote speakers and workshop presenters. Thank you, in particular, to Candice Wilson, Julie Ryan's PA who worked so efficiently and tirelessly over the past nine months. The great attendance and participation ensured the success of the Conference. We now look forward to coming together again in Sydney in 2019.

[Elizabeth Dowling Keynote](#)

[David Hall Keynote](#)

[Maeve Heaney Keynote](#)

[Saturday Morning Prayer](#)

[BACK TO TOP ↑](#)



AMSSA CONFERENCE DINNER

The delegates to the AMSSA Conference gathered for the Conference Dinner at Melbourne Town Hall which was built in 1870. It is a very grand building, a mix of bluestone and Tasmanian freestone, a classically designed building featuring a clock tower and fine masonry. It was a beautiful setting for a night where delegates could relax and enjoy good food and company. The guest speaker was an ex-student of Sacred Heart College, Geelong, Prue Smith.

Prue graduated from Sacred Heart College in 2004 and was College Captain in her final year. Prue spoke of her life after she left school which reflected her enormous determination and commitment to working for the good of others. She studied Law and Commerce and as a talented basketball player moved to Florida to play and study and Copenhagen. On her return home Prue spent some time in the Australian Army before completing an internship at the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal for Rwanda based in Tanzania.

Following a stint back home in Melbourne working in the corporate sector, Prue was determined to work again for the United Nations. She was successful and went to New York where she worked for two years at the United Nations Headquarters. Her work there was related to the Sierra Leone war.

In 2015, Prue returned to Australia to become Legal Counsel for World Vision Australia. She is now currently working in the legal team at PricewaterhouseCoopers in Melbourne.

Prue's story was one of determination and resilience which was very warmly received by those listening to her. She is indeed a most impressive young woman – a true Mercy woman.

[BACK TO TOP ↑](#)



BIENNIAL GENERAL MEETING 2017

The AMSSA Biennial General Meeting was held on Saturday, August 5. There were over 30 representatives from member schools in attendance. In addition, Sr Annette Schneider rsm, the Leaders' Representative, Eugene Lynch from Mercy Education Limited and Kitty Guerin, the Executive Officer attended.

There were two motions put to the meeting: that the AMSSA levy for 2018-2019 be unchanged from the current levy and that AMSSA release money from its reserves to fund a project with Fraynetwork to develop resources relating to Mercy ethos and tradition for use in Mercy schools. Both motions were passed unanimously.

Nicole Christensen from Monte Sant'Angelo Mercy College, North Sydney gave a Report on the Mercy Principals group which operates under AMSSA. Nicole spoke of the group being established and its progress to date. The Mercy Principals have agreed to meet at the annual conference and at a regional centre in the alternate year.

Paddy McEvoy was nominated as President of AMSSA for 2017 – 2019.

The meeting endorsed the following state/country representatives for the Executive:

Gilda Pussich, OLMC Burraneer	NSW
Paulina Skerman, St Patrick's College, Townsville	Queensland
Paddy McEvoy, St Aloysius' College Adelaide	South Australia
Kerrie Fraser, Mercedes College Perth	Western Australia

Brian Turner, Catholic College, Bendigo

Victoria/Tasmania

Deborah Brosnahan, VillaMariaCollegeChristchurch New Zealand

The AMSSA Constitution also allows for an additional member of the Executive who does not come from any specific state/country.

There were two nominations for the position: Catherine O'Kane – All Hallows School, Brisbane and Stephen Walsh – Our Lady of Mercy College, Parramatta. An election was held and Stephen Walsh was elected to the Executive for 2017 – 2019.

The 2019 AMSSA Conference will be held in Sydney and will be hosted by Monte Sant'Angelo Mercy College, North Sydney. The theme of the conference will have a global perspective.

[BACK TO TOP ↑](#)

AMSSA Staff Conference

August 8 – 10 2019

Monte Sant'Angelo Mercy College, North Sydney

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