

## **Inspiring Alumni Evening, Emmanuel College, Warrnambool. November 5<sup>th</sup> 2011.**

Thank you for this great evening and for all those who have worked so hard to provide it for us to enjoy.

It is with gratitude and humility that I accept this honor this evening - that of being named an inspiring alumna of Emmanuel College Warrnambool in the area of Service.

I share this honor with my Sisters in Mercy who have not only been inspiring alumni in their own ways but on whose shoulders I stand to be able to receive this recognition.

Sr Cecilia Gleeson, Sr Marie Mansbridge, Sr Sheila Gleeson, Sr Patty McKinnon and the generations of Sisters of Mercy who have been students of this College or who have taught me, and the thousands of Emmanuel College and St Ann's students since 1872, when M Philomene Maguire and her Sisters first arrived in Warrnambool from Dublin, Ireland

Just a few weeks ago I stood in the first House of Mercy, built by Catherine McAuley some 184 years ago in Baggot Street Dublin, and I reflected there on the incredible outcome of one woman's commitment to making a difference in a world in which education was the major means of empowerment of the poor in Ireland at that time.

Her approach to education was so successful that her schools, which began in that House of Mercy on Baggot Street for those women and girls who were otherwise destitute, were opened all across the world. Today hundreds of schools and colleges across the world bear the name or carry the founding tradition of Mercy, thousands of faculty and staff and hundreds of thousands of students from primary to secondary to higher education are connected in Mercy through the originating dream, the vision, the skill and the hard work of one woman – Catherine McAuley.

I walk in her footsteps today in the work I have been privileged to do and the people across the world I have been enriched to meet, from the slums of Nairobi to the shanty towns of Soweto - to the dusty outskirts of poverty stricken Lima - to the fearful pathways of Cambodia where the landmine infested ground challenges your trust in walking on the earth beneath you - to the Great Sandy Desert communities of this country with the community's cries for basic needs to be met in health, education and housing... to the urban poverty and struggle of the unemployed and to despairing youth, particularly young Aboriginal people, in this very state of Victoria.

In all these places we have been able to invite people to tell their stories, and through video and the use of the most sophisticated web platforms created by Fraynetwork Multimedia, we were able to allow those many people to find voice, - to make a small difference by building a more just and compassionate and mercy-filled world.

Together with others in Mercy I've walked as a teacher and story teller to help people cross bridges of mind and heart to places of better understanding of the other... and hence to a more just and compassionate stance. With other Mercy people I have tried to be a greater servant of compassion and justice in our world. And we continue on that journey we are still being moved to action by the experiences of the suffering and needs of the people across our world.

I have seen the plea in the eyes of many little ones around the world who often just needed water, food, medical care or shelter, gifts we take for granted as our everyday right. From these basic human needs people then desire and request education, as they know the empowerment of broader knowledge and the ensuing capacity for greater choice.

The tradition of Mercy education covers so many people and communities across the world. To see one broken piece of chalk as the only shared writing tool in a rough hewn school shelter, to see school going on under a tree in a sparse refugee camp, to see a corrugated iron shed school in the baking heat of the poorest slums. And yet to see Mercy educators also working in magnificent facilities for learning and training is also part of this tradition. I have seen these new facilities being constructed in the finest of educational institutions across the developed economies of the world.

All this is part of the educational tradition you belong to and are connected with across the world. You may one day be in a position to influence and support the empowerment of those communities of people who are still crying out for the education you have received here and which we often take for granted...

You who have attended this College and those who work in it share Catherine McAuley's Mercy vision to connect the rich with the poor. This is a very similar spirit to that which has been inherited from the other great Founder of this College tradition, namely, Edmund Rice, the first Christian Brother.

I also want to acknowledge tonight the other great strand of alumni that I am come from - that of my Howard family. My dear Mother, Teresa who, as Teresa Madden, attended this great school, formerly St Ann's, many years ago and subsequently assisted many Principals with the Administration of the College, and also my Father, Leo, who was an inspiring alumnus of this College, the former CBC.

My sister Marcia is a member of staff here today at Emmanuel College, and for me is also an inspiring alumna. As too are my six brothers, including Brendan and Steve and my sister-in-law Mary, who are all here tonight! Their children - as past and/or present students and my other nephews and nieces both past and present - have much to aspire to!

I wish you all a successful conclusion to a hard year's work and I pray that you will be blessed and inspired on the roads ahead of you to keep on giving and thinking of the other - to be at the service of those in greatest need, either through your deliberate education of yourself about their reality or through your direct commitment to a work of service, or through your deep reflection and action to make a difference in our world.

There is one great energy for good in our world which we can choose to draw on. It is a well spring of love and we know from our Christian tradition that God IS love.

We also know that ...'It is in giving that we receive'... (St Francis of Assisi)

And that ... 'Happiness cannot be pursued, but it will ensue when we commit ourselves to another or to a cause' (Viktor Frankl)

Let us nourish and pass on the spirit of all we have learned in this great school - now Emmanuel College – in a spirit of generosity, compassion, thoughtfulness, hard work, great hope and deep faith, that the world can be a better place, that the Gospel inspiration of Jesus is there before us to give us direction and to sustain us in our uncertain times of self doubt.

We are grateful for having been a part of this college in the tradition of the Catholic Church community - and we continue to walk the path of mercy, justice, compassion and generosity of service in our world.

Adele Howard rsm