

Gatherings for Outgoing and New Leaders and their Councils

By Teresa Flaherty RSM (Adelaide)

The Adelaide Sisters of Mercy recently gathered in thanksgiving for Meredith Evans RSM and the previous council (2004-2009) and to welcome Helen Owens RSM, the new leader and her council elected to take office from the beginning of 2010. This event was held at the Chapel of the Adelaide College of Divinity on January 30, and celebrated in the spirit of the chapter "Directions for now and the future".

Our December Chapter

Elections had been held at the four-day chapter (December 11-14). Archbishop Philip Wilson presided at the opening Eucharist, celebrated in the Cecilia Cunningham Chapel in the St Aloysius College grounds. Nerida Tinkler RSM, President of the Institute, was present for the chapter sessions.

The sisters elected to lead and support us in living out the chapter's direction are Helen Owens RSM (Leader), Janet Lowe RSM (Vicar), Lyn Beck RSM, Ilsa Neicinieks RSM and Margaret Adams RSM (Councillors). The outgoing leadership comprised Meredith Evans RSM (Leader), Rosemary Day RSM (Vicar), Janet Lowe RSM, Pat Feehan RSM and Tran Thi Nien RSM (Councillors). The sisters expressed their appreciation to them, particularly to Meredith and Rosemary, who have served in leadership for ten years.

The chapter was historic in the sense that it is likely to be the last one held in the name of the Sisters of Mercy of the Adelaide Congregation. The Sisters of Mercy throughout Australia and Papua New Guinea are in a process of negotiation about moving towards closer bonds of unity.

The outcome of this democratic process, which requires a large degree of consensus, will not become evident till the Institute Chapter to be held in September 2010. If conclusive, the petition will be put to Rome for the Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea to form one canonical entity. This orientation towards greater solidarity was in the minds and hearts of the Adelaide sisters in the decisions made during their chapter.

Directions for now and the future

In a spirit of prayer and communal discernment, the chapter delegates set about the task of determining future directions of mercy life and ministry, based on ministries in which the sisters were engaged and those emerging from contemporary needs. Although the number of sisters is much smaller these days, many are engaged in various ministries of education, health, pastoral work and social welfare, addressing local, national and international concerns. An essential dimension of the sisters' work today is active partnerships with lay people in the Church and society.

At the chapter, the sisters, responding to God's call and in a spirit of fostering partnerships, renewed their commitment to live in eco-just relationships with others in our Pacific region and the planet; promote justice and support for refugees and other displaced persons; continue the work of reconciliation with Aboriginal Australians; build peace through inter-faith dialogue and common action; address the evil of human trafficking, and support youth in their life and work for justice, especially through the Mercy Youth Justice initiatives throughout Australia.

Our Gathering Ritual of Thanksgiving and Welcome

After the holiday break, the sisters participated in this event with renewed energy and enthusiasm and the atmosphere (despite the heat) was charged with life, purpose, music and song, expressions of appreciation, a few tears and laughter. Within a context of prayer and in a spirit of celebration, the assembled community fittingly bestowed thanks on the outgoing leadership and welcomed the new.

We then moved on in a ceremony of commissioning one another through anointing in small groups with special oils prepared by Trang Thi Thu Trang (who had also prepared colourful bookmarks with the Chapter Directions for each sister).

The event concluded with lunch. Despite our general seniority, young and old managed to maintain our tradition of co-operation – the movement of chairs, catering and hostessing tasks, carrying gifts and equipment, and leaving everything as we found it, with feminine precision! The accompanying photos taken by Betty Schonfeldt RSM (and selected by Denise Coen RSM) will validate these joyful steps in our thanksgiving and welcoming dance!



Helen Owens, Ilsa Neicinieks, Margaret Adams, Lyn Beck, Janet Lowe.



Celebrating at the Chapter Dinner with our Wilcannia-Forbes sisters.



Meredith Evans RSM, Helen Owens RSM and Nerida Tinkler RSM