

Words of Welcome for Handover Liturgy and Ritual

Perth, January 21, 2010

Breda O'Reilly RSM (Outgoing Congregation Leader, Perth)

Having welcomed all present, Breda went on to say.

This is a very important time not only for our own congregation but for the whole of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea.

For the past five years our council has been involved, among other things, in leading this congregation through the reconfiguring journey. As an Institute we have come a long way on this journey with five major consultations, a mountain of reading each year...; writings from Mercy theologians all around the world; visits from the Institute Leadership Team and international speakers who have experienced reconfiguring in their own congregations.

We have had Institute Gatherings; 'Gatherings at the Waters', congregation gatherings and small community gatherings. Of course we had that huge questionnaire in which we all participated and finally we had the results of the questionnaire which was an eye-opener for many sisters.

As part of our reconfiguring journey we have been blessed by the support, love and co-operation that we have experienced from the West Perth Congregation. Moving our archives and our office to Northbridge was a huge step for all of us (Perth and West Perth) and a huge inspiration to all the Mercy leaders around Australia and Papua New Guinea. I thank sincerely Beverley Stott (Congregation Leader, West Perth) and her Congregation for making us so welcome and giving us the opportunity to work so closely with them. Even though we've only been two years at Northbridge, I feel like I've been there forever.

The next part of the reconfiguring journey is (for some congregations) the indicative vote that each congregation will do to indicate its readiness to vote formally to join the one canonical congregation in the future. We were the first congregation to take part in this indicative vote. Unfortunately we did not get the required percentage to take it forward to our Chapter in 2009.

Every congregation, except Ballarat and Adelaide who have already got the majority vote required to approach Rome to be part of the new canonical entity, will be required to have an extraordinary chapter to make this decision. Hopefully we in Perth will get the required result at our second indicative vote in June this year, which will lead us to our extraordinary chapter in July when we will have the opportunity to vote to approach Rome to become part of this new identity.

Of course we will be extremely interested in the Institute Chapter which will take place in September of this year. We are much more aware of being part of the Institute and the big picture for us is that we will be one in the near future.

My personal guess would be that within two years we will be all part of the one canonical congregation, or at least those of us who are willing to go that way.

Leadership is about service and about living out our charism as passed on to us by Catherine McAuley especially through her legacy as she said, 'My Legacy to the Institute is Union and Charity.' May our new leader and council continue to foster union and charity within the congregation and with all those we meet in our daily living, including our lay colleagues.

In these times we are a mirror of what is happening in our society; we are in the process of ageing and diminishment. There is no doubt about it that many of our sisters still live out the Mercy charism in their ageing years by their love, compassion, respect and service to those around them. It's been impressive, inspiring and encouraging to watch and to meet with these

sisters. Our indication of ageing and diminishment is obvious by the fact that on Monday we will bury Sister Joy Ryan who is the twentieth sister to die in our congregation over the past five years. May she Rest in Peace.

Our colleagues are well and truly immersed in the Mercy charism. They will go on doing the Works of Mercy with or without us, but of course they will do it much more effectively with our support and encouragement.

May the Holy Spirit and the spirit of Catherine guide us always, but especially in the coming months of challenge and change. May we collaborate with the Institute Leadership Team, the Institute Plenary Council and the Reconfiguring Co-ordination Committee.

During this Mass may we also remember the people of Haiti who are in deep shock again as they experience their second aftershock and tremor. We remember the asylum seekers in Christmas Island. We remember the poor in East Timor. And while we thank God for what we have, the most important thing for us now is that we are here for love, compassion and service for one another and for people in need throughout the world.