

An energy and equality that only mission can bring

My overwhelming feeling at the end of our conference was one of hope and a new beginning. It is like the new beginning many talk of with the election of Pope Francis. We too might begin again.

I felt we were Church, but a humbler, more human and inclusive Church. We had our share of Bishops and priests but the conference was not at all clerical. Instead there was an energy and equality that only mission can bring. We are collaborating in something much larger than ourselves, God's life and mission in the world.

In recent decades the Church has spent considerable effort on developing its identity but identity alone is often seen in opposition to others and can divide. There is a much more vibrant sense of identity that comes from mission and service and I believe we had more than a glimpse of that during our three days together.

As the title of the conference suggests we wanted to hear *many voices* because we all have the one mission and need the support and encouragement of each other. I thought the conference was ideal in that regard. There were all kinds of different voices and people felt free to speak in a way that has not been common in recent years.

I was fascinated that such a diverse group of people could share so easily. I admired the mature and tested hope of some of the religious women who have remained faithful to mission and the poor through many years. And at a time when their congregations were growing smaller and older, work for justice had become a neglected and unpopular ministry, Vatican II seemed to be being watered down and as women they were being marginalised. [By the way, I was told that one older religious revealed to registration that she had been saving up for the conference but could only afford two days which she had enjoyed. Unfortunately she only revealed that when it was too late.] I was also fortunate to be asked to convene the workshop, *Young People and Mission* and was impressed by the commitment, hope and sense of justice shown by Elise, Dominique and Annie from Young Christian Students. I thought it all boded well for an Australian Church inspired by mission and finding unity and encouragement in diversity.

The other goal of the conference was to give us a vision that would affirm, encourage and inspire us in our vocation of building the Reign of God. All the keynotes and workshops were good but I believe Steve Bevans' first talk was critical. His presentation, his vibrant images and his enthusiasm gave us a vision of a Triune God who was constantly loving, healing and reconciling the world and inviting all of us to be partners in recreating the world. The Trinity has a liberating plan for the cosmos and we can be part of it. It is a vision to affirm and inspire and one broad enough to include us all. Steve gave our three days great impetus.

The conference was more successful than we on the planning committee had envisaged. More than 370 people came. Besides the key notes, we had 39 different workshops covering a truly Catholic list of ministries, including aboriginal ministry, migrants and refugees, justice and ecology, the scriptures, leadership and prayer and so forth. The challenge now is to maintain the vision and the forum. We hope the website www.mohmv.com.au will be such a forum and we invite you to send in your stories, insights, plans, successes and even failures. We need each other to deepen our faith and hope and our efforts to partner God in recreating the cosmos.

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