

NSW State Conference – April 2007

Keynote Speaker – Judith Nichols, Senior VP MU Australia

Talk 2

Nurturing a New Vision – Who Cares.

When Mary Sumner conceived the idea of The Mother's Union she did not have in mind a social club for the elderly but an organisation that would grapple with the profound social changes that an increasingly urbanized and industrialized Britain was facing at that time. We are in a similar position. Though the issues are somewhat different, the challenge remains the same.

The changing role of women.

In *The Week End Australian* May 6, 2006 there was a feature article "Who's Afraid of the Closing Gender Gap" by Alison Wolf which stated that for the first time women in developed countries can enter any occupation or career they please. But the advantages from the revolution in job availability have taken place at the top. (By 2012 the majority of doctors will be women).

This has brought enormous benefits. But it has also had some less positive consequences.

1. The Death of sisterhood i.e. where women shared life experiences to a far greater degree than men. Educated, high profile women now, in contrast to their less educated sisters, tend to choose careers around which they fit their families – not a family life punctuated by jobs.
2. The erosion of female altruism – the service ethos that has been profoundly important to modern industrial society, particularly in the education of the young and the care of the elderly and the sick.
3. The impact of employment change on childbearing where educated women face disincentives to bear children.
4. The huge effect on voluntary organisations where the revolution in female opportunity has also led, amongst other things to the decline in church involvement and the glorification of self-actualization. The period from the mid- 19th century to 20th Century saw the pick of the country's most able, energetic and focussed workers giving up enormous amounts of their time for free.
5. Similarly teaching and nursing attracted the country's most academically gifted women. They shared an openly expressed idealism that their jobs mattered especially for the future of other women.

The change in values.

1. The pioneering female professionals used a language whose vocabulary was imbued with Christian values even if somewhat moralising. These women lived in a world where "doing good" was intrinsically linked with religious faith and instruction. There is a huge moral chasm now between the past voice of female pioneers and female advertising slogans such as, *Because I am worth it.*"
2. Professionals increasingly run voluntary organisations nowadays such as in our own case Mary Sumner House. Once upon a time it was in these organisations that women met across the dividing lines of wealth, position and education. Now a lot of middle class educated women are working. Home based, educated women under the age of 60 are now missing from charitable organisations.

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3. Educational papers of the 40's and 50's still contained the language of morality and idealism. Today they are concerned with the economic benefits of schooling and the development of occupational skills.
4. The authors of the article ask does equality of salary and occupational representation say anything about equality of worth? Maybe what these assumptions about economic and professional equity reflect is our present preoccupation with global capitalism that absorbs the energies of men and women in the interests of consumerism and discounts the cost to the family.
5. Burrgraf, a social scientist, argues that the tension between the modern work place and family well-being is real and unresolvable so long as societies place no financial value on the activities that take place within the home. Families still remain central to the care of the old and sick as well as the raising of the next generation yet our economy and society steer even more educated women away from both bearing and raising children.

Discussion

1. *We have held our numbers remarkably well despite the pessimistic scenario about voluntary organisations. Why do you think this is so? But what about the future?*
2. *Do you think MU should be concerned about addressing the issues raised in this paper? Why? How?*
3. *What is interesting is that young women **aren't** all out at work. Many About 40% in Australia) have taken off part of their child rearing years from their careers and turn their giftedness to child raising. How can we contact those young women? What are they interested in? What changes are we to make to the way we do things in MU? To what extent are we willing to serve them.*
4. *Or perhaps you may feel that we should just continue the way we are ministering to an increasingly elderly population. What is your opinion on this?*
5. *What would be a way of recapturing the values that have motivated the great movements for good in the past?*
6. *What motivates you to do what is right? Something to think about:*

For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:9-10