

MU Australia State Conference at Grafton 2007

The theme for State President Isabel Farlow's NSW State Conference held in Grafton on 27th-29th April 2007 was "Nurturing the Vision". The members of MU Alstonville who attended were extremely proud to have our own President Isabel's conference happening at last, after all the hard work and preparations behind the scenes to see all the plans come to fruition.

The conference was held in the Servicemen's Club at South Grafton, which was a very good venue, with all the facilities that was needed to help everything run smoothly. The program was full, everyone keen to put the precious time to good use.

Friday evening started with fellowship as participants renewed friendships, the dinner was very lighthearted with entertainment from Christine Hurford and Margaret Dunn with everyone enthusiastic for the weekend ahead.

The keynote speaker was Judith Nichols, who challenged to see our vision as farsighted and not myopic. She encouraged us with stern comments and humorous insights and gave us food for thought. Judith also led workshops to follow up her talks. In small groups we pondered on strategies and difficulties and successes of our organization.

We listened and contributed as Rev Viv Hoskins, Rector of Lismore (and an ex broadcaster, media and political advisor) set the scene with his topic "From sheep to shepherd" looking at leadership. We studied Alexander the Great, Moses, David and Jesus Christ as examples of different leadership styles.

We heard about Action Programs supported by MU in the broader community, Vicki Hamilton gave a very moving account of her personal story and what lead her to establishing Heartfelt House; Jan Livingstone summarized how she initiated the PEP program into MU Australia; Barbara Whitted gave an interesting overview of Play place; Susan Dyer spoke about her involvement with the PEP program at a local level in Alstonville; Barbara Swain spoke from the heart of how she became involved with Richmond Clinic and her journey with mental health issues; lastly Beverley Hendley gave an outline of her association with GFS and her work in the Solomon Islands.

Sunday morning we attended a Eucharist Service at Christ Church Cathedral that certainly gave us a sense of why we were at the Conference and for us to celebrate our own faith.

Another most moving and encouraging speakers was Lenore Parker, a Koori woman of great depth and love who as an Elder explained just what that meant to both her community and ours. She has been asked by the Archbishop of Canterbury to represent the Indigenous Anglicans both here in Australia and in Hawaii and to sit on the World Council. Lenore shared and reminded us that our God is the God of both ancient times and now and that as an Elder of her people she takes every opportunity to speak of the dreamtime in that context. She is a voice of hope and challenged us to speak out about our own journey. Lenore is a widow, a mother and a MU member and is studying to be ordained. A delightful aside was that she has taken as her personal symbol the magpie - God's perfect creation in black and white!

Rev Canon Bruce McAteer, General Secretary of General Synod gave us his insight on "Effective Leadership - a challenge for the Church". He encouraged us to recognize when called to lead, to use our skills and gifts. We also took the opportunity to workshop his ideas in small groups. He also stunned us with his personal reflections on his recent visit to Israel and Palestine and the very real, unfair, day-to-day difficulties of the Palestinians (especially Christians) living under Israeli rule.

Rev Ann Solari runs a General Practice from the Cathedral Offices at Grafton (the only Cathedral in the world with a GP office). As a doctor Ann specializes in caring for those with difficulties with addictions, family health and with the needs of children and the aged. Her patients come from marginal communities and from those with mental health issues. At the Cathedral, Rev Ann is responsible for the Children's Ministry Program. After school care, playgroups and community contacts are ministered to through this work. It was great to see how God has moved this woman through her journey, using her skills not just in one sphere but many. An inspiration.

It was certainly a jam-packed weekend, but I am sure each and everyone came away feeling inspired personally and motivated to encourage members at branch level. Congratulations must be given to Isabel for such a worthwhile and fulfilling weekend with inspiration for us all.

It is a privilege to be part of this worldwide ministry sharing with 3.6 million members God's blessings and challenges!

Julia Adlington
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