

SYNOD REPORT 2013- MLC School Burwood

TELL: MLC School has been a Uniting Church School that through history has promoted a whole person approach to education. Spirituality and the search for meaning in the lives of students is of utmost importance and priority to the School Council and Principal, in their affirmation of Chaplaincy and visible Church presence at the school.

MLC School's worship program draws on Paragraph 14 of the Basis of Union, where it states in reference to Gifts and Ministries, "*...of renewed participation of all the people of God in the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, the building up of the fellowship in mutual love, in commitment to Christ's mission, and in service of the world for which he died.*"

The Uniting Church Lectionary shapes the devotional assemblies and Chapel services for students from Pre-k to Year 12, which are centred within a community time, held in the Chapel and other venues to highlight the worship and witness of the School community. The Chaplains liaise with the Principal, Staff and Students to build on themes relevant to the life and culture of the students and age-appropriate liturgies are built upon. The weekly devotional assembly takes the likeness of a Sunday Liturgy, and all aspects of life in the community whether it be responses to National disasters or Women's' Rights and increased awareness of Social Justice Issues are highlighted. Significant liturgical events such as Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Easter, Pentecost and Advent are marked by students and families gathering. Sunday services are structured around a House system, bringing the House family together, and students take leadership in creating the liturgy for these services. On Wednesday morning, service assemblies are held to promote Service Learning projects and students participate in the making of items, which are then sent to particular School supported partnership projects. During Wednesday Service Assemblies, students visit and spend time with residents at Ainsley Nursing home, across the street from MLC School, and create items for e.g. blankets and table mats to present to the residents.

There is an emphasis on mindfulness and wellbeing that is taught and practiced throughout the pastoral and academic program. Students are invited to explore and express their religious and cultural beliefs. Thriving fellowship groups meet at lunchtime for prayer, bible study and contemporary worship and there is an annual fellowship camp. Students are mentored as they take on leadership of whole school liturgies as well as voluntary fellowship groups. Many students make significant faith commitments as a result of their participation in the School liturgies and fellowship groups and see their worship and discipleship at School as central to their faith expression. This continues beyond graduation for many Old Girls who return to the School regularly and continue to see it as their faith community. In addition to formal Chapel services, small groups of students and staff meet throughout the work for prayer and to share Communion. School camps and retreats provide students an opportunity to explore faith and develop spiritual practices.

TEACH: The Religion Program from Pre-K to Year 12 incorporates an academically rigorous approach for students to study the Scriptures, Church History, Liturgical Tradition, Ethics, Philosophy of Religion and World Religions. During the Year 3 during their course of study, explore World Religions and visit various places of Worship, including a Hindu Temple, Baha'i Temple, Greek Orthodox Church, and a Mosque. The

most recent trend towards 'Godly Play' in our Pre-K and K-2 years, has offered a great opportunity for MLC School to be involved in an approach towards R.E, which has been endorsed by the Uniting Church. The Godly Play program is the core of the lower junior years study of Religion, and as more staff are trained, it is being rolled out to be used across all of the Junior Years. The Chaplains are directly involved with the Head of HSIE in evaluating the R. E Curriculum throughout the School and therefore becoming visible participants in the Religious Education program of the School, and giving voice to the theological expressions of the Uniting Church.

TEND:

MLC School has ongoing partnerships supporting schools and communities in Nepal, Fiji and East Timor. In 2012 Year 10 students spent time working with these partners in Nepal and Fiji as part of their academic 'Enlightenment' program. The project in Fiji is a village in the highlands about 4 hours from Nadi. It is a traditional village with a chief and clans and belongs to the Methodist Church of Fiji. The village has no electricity and relies on farming which was recently wiped out by a devastating cyclone. The project MLC School has been involved in for the last two years is building a two-room school. The girls who visited last year, painted the school on the outside.

The Nepal project had three components: Kami's School, MSPN- The New Life Centre and KAT (Kathmandu Animal Treatment) Centre. The girls, who visited and spent time with these organisations, have also developed a long-term commitment to helping these charities through an ongoing partnership.

Pictures of the girls participating in these projects are attached.

MLC School is a School in partnership with the Round Square Worldwide association of schools, and has students actively embracing their programs.

To name a few of these:

- Starehe Girls High School (Round Square has paid for the education of 2 young girls in Kenya until they graduate in year 12)
- Prince Alexander fund (This is the Round Square fund we pay into and money goes towards bricks/cement/ piping/ clean water etc. for building houses and schools in a range of projects around the world)
- Kiva loans (money sent to women around the world to help them set up businesses and to support themselves, this is ongoing)

Every year the SRC leaders in partnership with Round Square organise Rainbow week which is a celebration of the diversity within our school and across the world. Money is raised, as is awareness, for charities the students want to support that year and what is in line with the School's mission.

TRANSFORM: MLC School's Mission statement is faithful to the Uniting Church tradition as stated in the Basis of Union Paragraph 3, *"The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself."*

The MLC School Mission statement states, “Founded in 1886, MLC School is an Australian Independent Girls School of the Uniting Church. MLC School’s mission is to educate young women to be fearless thinkers with moral courage and compassion to be agents of change in their own lives and the lives of others.”

The Pastoral Care program through membership in a House community, works to further particular Social Justice projects, focussing on the need for advocacy and awareness rather than simple fundraising without commitment to the same. The more recent drive to focus on Indigenous issues where education is concerned has been welcomed by staff and students alike. A program is in place to promote scholarships for students from an Indigenous background, and a culture of reconciliation and understanding amongst the MLC School Community. Inter-Faith dialogue is fostered through regular interaction with Affinity Intercultural Foundation, and participation in workshops and conferences.

Students work towards social justice through advocacy. A ground breaking student group, *Collective Voice*, promotes positive self image, analyses media representations of women and children, and advocates for respect and equal treatment of the genders. Their letter writing campaigns against the sexualisation of girls for marketing purposes has resulted in increased awareness of significant issues for our students. In 2012 there was significant support amongst staff and students for *Wear It Purple Day* which shows respect and support for sexual and gender diversity.

The implementation of the IBO’s Middle Years Program in 2014 will formalise Social Justice in Years 6-10 as a compulsory component of the academic program for all students embracing education as a vehicle to a better world. The School’s strategic design, *New Horizons*, prioritises “Serving Humanity,” in a Partnership dimension. The School’s response to environmental responsibilities within its grounds, physical plant and buildings and energy conservation is through some of these examples:

- Installation of a 14.2k W Solar energy system in the Senior School campus.
- Solar Hot Water Heating in the Junior School campus.
- The School is currently investigating the potential of additional solar investment.
- Junior School has a vegetable garden that the students and teachers tend.
- In the Junior School Rainwater is harvested into underground holding tanks. The capacity of these tanks is 80,000L.
- The water is filtered, and then used as grey water for flushing toilets along with irrigation of grounds and gardens. The system uses mains water to top up system as required.
- Main Campus: Rainwater is harvested in two key locations to irrigate grounds and gardens. The capacity of each tank is 5000L.
- General Waste separation & Introduction of Recycling.
- A proposed upgrade is in place to deliver sustainable long term financial benefits, improved lighting, and provide an energy efficiency upgrade resulting in substantial environmental, social, and economic benefits.

Fundraising for charity is combined with awareness raising and advocacy work. Uniting Church based organisations such as Burnside, the Exodus Foundation and UnitingCare are supported financially and in voluntary hours of work. Other organisations such as Loaves and Fishes, Starlight Foundation, World Vision, The Cancer Council, Beyond Blue, The Hamlin Fistula Foundation, CanTeen are amongst those that are supported by

the House Pastoral System. Students take an active role in fundraising, advocacy and volunteer work.

TRACTION: The Sacrament of Holy Communion is celebrated at the end of term, and a whole School approach is embraced, where the partaking of the Sacrament is optional, and time once again is used for the building up of the School community. The Chaplains with permission from Sydney Presbytery administer the Sacrament of Baptism at our Sunday Family Services for old girls and staff, in consultation and collaboration with their local Uniting Church congregations. A service of Dedication is offered as an alternative to Baptism as well.

The School community is also served through Chaplaincy at Funeral and Wedding services for Staff, Students and Old girls. School Ministry is unique in that it brings the Church to the Community, continuously striving to keep the dialogue going, and therefore continuing the work of Christ in ushering the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Students painting in Fiji





Students in Nepal at the New Life Centre with HIV Positive children.