

BISHOP MICHAEL'S HOMILY
TWEC Graduation Ceremony
Therry Centre
11th April, 2010

Last year I had the privilege of meeting Miriam Rose Unger, an Aboriginal woman who is a very important elder among her people. She is a renowned artist, poet and writer. She lives at Daly River in the Northern Territory. She was awarded the Order of Australia years ago.

I had travelled with other members of the Council for Australian Catholic Women, who had flown to Darwin from where we split up and went in different directions to speak with aboriginal women about their situation in the local church and in society generally.

There were only 2 men in our group – myself and a priest from Tasmania. We felt a little self-conscious, not knowing if the Aboriginal women would speak-up in front of us. We wondered if there might have been some taboo on speaking in front of men or, if they might have considered it an intrusion if they wanted to touch on secret-women's-business!!

As it turned out they did speak freely in front of us, although they were a little shy about doing so.

Miriam Rose Unger was a delight to listen to. She has a calm presence and a wise, deliberative manner about her.

Among the many interesting insights she shared with us, she told us that it was the sacred task of the women in the tribe to **carry the fire** when her people went on walkabout.

On those cold, drizzly, damp days or on hot, steamy days or on windy days – carrying the fire was a real challenge.

The way in which the fire was carried from place to place was that the hot coals were placed in shell-cones and carefully wrapped with bark. The fire was checked along the way.

At journey's end the hot coals were fanned into life and a fire built. We can only imagine what a vitally important duty it was to carry the hot coals and preserve the fire.

Today in this Graduation Ceremony we recognize **the fire-carriers** in our midst. These are people, mostly women but a few men too I'm pleased to say, who have applied themselves to the Christian Formation and Ministry

Course for 3 years. They have carried the fire of learning, enquiry, questioning with energy, enthusiasm and commitment to complete a Course which has fanned hot coals into a new flame.

Not unlike the new flame of Easter where Jesus is proclaimed as risen, re-igniting the flagging faith of the disciples.

“As the Father sent me, so am I sending you” said Jesus on that first Sunday a week after he had risen (that is TODAY).

With **fire in their bellies** the disciples are to go out to spread the Good News of God’s great love shown in the risen Lord.

But before they can go out they need to be strengthened by their community. Notice how the disciples stuck together giving each other moral support, sharing the story of Jesus, crucified and risen, and attempting to overcome an understandable fear of the Jews.

From this community (COMMUNIO) they are to be **sent** out (MISSIO) to proclaim the Gospel. “As the Father sent me, so **am I sending** you”.

COMMUNIO and MISSIO – these are the 2 great foundations of the Church.

Just as an aside, I’m inclined to think that the current scandal of abuse in the Church is a sure sign that we’ve lost sight of the MISSIO part. Too much energy has been spent on COMMUNIO and not enough on MISSIO! That has been to our cost.

However, be that as it may, this afternoon’s ceremony pays tribute to a new batch of “fire-carriers”.

This gathered community and the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle sends you out to live and proclaim the Good News you have come to love with renewed vitality.

Keep your fire alight through prayer and reflection. Fan into a flame the cooling embers of people you meet. Don’t be rendered useless by **fear** (as were the Disciples for a while), but share the Good News with conviction and courage!

I congratulate you on behalf of the Diocese. Go well and God bless!