

House of Hospitality's 20 years celebration



Occasional address by Sr Virginia Bourke who was Congregational Leader at the beginning of the House of Hospitality.

A phrase like “celebrating 20 years” trips off the tongue easily. Some looking on at this House of Hospitality over 20 years might catch themselves thinking, “Goodness, hasn’t that time’s gone quickly!” But for those involved in the House, not only Carmel and Beverly who have lived here, but the many members of the Faith Community over the years, this has been a ‘day in, day out’ experience. Let’s pause to reflect on that amount of time: In the environs of a school, the House has persisted across 80 school terms! There have been 20 birthdays, 20 summers, 20 winters, 20 Easters, and 20 Christmases in this place! A long time in the lives of all concerned!

For Carmel it’s been the full 20 years and for Beverly, 15 of them. It is particularly remarkable that this was not something they chose to do as an aside to the rest of their lives. Rather, it’s been the context from within which everything else in their own lives has been lived. Yet it did not hold them back from many another endeavour. For Carmel, to name but a few things, working towards her law degree and now practicing law, supportive visits to Timor Leste, work amongst the most needy of the city in association with the Vincent de Paul and other legal services. And then there’s been lots and lots and lots of squash! It was from here Beverly went each day to her ministry amongst the Catholic teachers of this Diocese. Here she, Carmel and the rest of the Faith Community dealt with the shock of the illness that eventually led Beverly to need to leave here. Here Faith Community members supported others’ lives as they faced all that was involved in their own families: the joys and challenges that come across the years, the growing-up of children and grandchildren.

To widen our perspective on what we are celebrating today, we might do well to consider that we live in a country that is paranoid about the need to protect its borders. Undoubtedly this is a complex question that can’t be answered simplistically. Yet, few would doubt that much of our approach to this question stems from fear, and much of our response is about keeping the cause of our fears at ‘arms’ distance’, or even ‘locked away’ so we do not have to face or deal with it.



Similarly, fear and the need to keep what we fear at a distance has a bearing on how we deal with crime in our society. The Bishops’ statement on Prisons circularised today raises this type of concern. noting that our crime statistics are actually declining whilst the numbers of those being incarcerated is escalating. When we operate mainly from fear and the tendency to lock away what threatens our safety, we miss, say the Bishops, the chance to promote social safety by supporting a whole way of life which deals with others in ways that promote human dignity and wholeness, in the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus.

This problem too is complex and I am not really suggesting simplistic answers. What I am saying, however, is that we have very good cause to cheer the positive thing that has been done here in this House over those long 20 years. It is counter-cultural in the openness of its hearts and doors to people who are experiencing tough times. Here those human beings have encountered trust, encouragement, compassion, support and challenge. It has been a place where people have been welcomed, given space and time out, a chance to gather their lives after trauma, a chance to try new skills and start again to pull things together for themselves. This place has not been about giving out handouts or promoting dependencies. It has been an environment in which people's independent 'standing on their own feet' has been supported as well as expected. For these reasons our world, our Australian society and our Church needs places just like the House of Hospitality to keep the possibility of positive alternatives to fear before our consciousness.



In 1986, Elie Weisel, a Jewish thinker and justice activist marked by the personal tragedy of the Holocaust, declared that in his view "indifference" is the key cause of evil in the world. I believe what we are celebrating here today about the people whose lives have made this House possible is the very opposite of the "indifference" Weisel deplors.

*"Indifference, to me, is the epitome of evil.
The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference....
The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference.
and the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference.*

Because of indifference, one dies before one actually dies.

*To be in the window and watch people being sent to concentration camps
or being attacked in the street, and do nothing,
that's being dead."*

[Elie Weisel, US News and World Report, Oct 27th, 1986]

So, let's give 3 cheers for all who have supported life in this House and will continue its work in Broadmeadow!

Srs Ruth, Maureen, Colleen, Anita, Anne, Patricia, Carol and Jenny share some memories of the House.



Bishop Bill enjoyed meeting Carmel and Sara from Timor Leste – our 'student'.



Dorothy discusses some fine points of bicycles with Terry a past resident of the House.