

Mission Programs – A Global Fellowship

Nick Toovey

Mr Julian Van Tienen and I had the honour and privilege of representing Flinders Christian Community College at the inaugural Mission Fellowship Global Network Conference in Hong Kong last week. Of the thirty delegates, we were the only Christian school in Victoria to be represented. Other delegates came from NSW, Queensland, South Africa, Romania, New Zealand, Canada, Indonesia, Korea and Hong Kong.

The ambitious purpose of this first ever conference was to provide “a forum for Christian educators from around the world to meet and share their vision and experience about Mission programs”. The conference provided a “fellowship for Christian schools to support and encourage each other in Mission work”. It was the first conference of this kind ever in the world. It is hoped that this is “the beginning of a Christian schools’ movement for global mission”.

Popular New Hope International President Bob Frisken defined mission as ‘being sent by Jesus to do something’. “If we are not involved in mission, we are not Christian. We are spiritually ‘constipated’ if we are not involved in mission.” In the Christian context, mission means being sent by Jesus to obey his commission from Matthew 28: 18 – 20.

“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”

We were inspired by the many stories we heard about what other schools are doing in their Mission programs. Pacific Academy, Vancouver, Canada sends Mission teams to Uganda, South Africa, and Korea, China as well as the local area. Their Director of Mission Outreach Society, Ray Sutton spoke at the Conference about his school’s programs, especially in Kibaale, Uganda where their program had delivered ‘gifts of education, skills, health principles, community care and partnership’ since 1995.

Ray spoke passionately about what God is doing in people’s lives inspiring them to fulfil his purposes. He encouraged us to involve everyone at the school including office staff and maintenance, ground staff and parents, if possible. He suggested that “all Christian schools should 1) impart the saving knowledge of Christ 2) have a Christian world view 3) teach the skills to live a Christian life and 4) provide the opportunity to practise their Christian world view and serve!! He invited us to stand back from the canvas and look at what God is doing with the whole painting. “We are just one painter in the corner.” The whole school community needs to buy into Mission schooling if it’s going to be sustainable. He believes that “school is life” rather than “school is a preparation for life.”

South African delegate Fred Hoffman told remarkable stories of their mission based activities. The Kings Court Christian School, South Africa, have begun a 'School in a Bag' program which brings community welfare, parent support and student's leadership to orphans, vulnerable students, street children and children victims (of AIDS and war). The outcomes of this mission program include a reduction in preventable diseases, decrease in the number of unschooled children and an increased level of literacy and numeracy.

Indonesia's Sekolah Pelita Harapan Principal Brian Cox spoke passionately about the series of schools he is managing to establish in Karawaci, Java, Indonesia. Translated as 'Hope and Light Grammar School', they responded to the Asian Tsunami through involvement in 'Operation Blessing'. Thousands of 'Survival Boxes' were packed containing basic necessities. These were distributed to many towns and cities throughout the province of Aceh, especially the fishing town of Meulaboh.

Brian explained how one student who went to Meulaboh had been led to believe that "I am here to serve and find joy in that. God has a purpose for me in my life. He has given me many different privileges; they aren't for my selfish use, but to be shared with others." Those of us at this Mission Fellowship hope that each person on Mission trips comes to a similar realisation.

Romania delegate Ms Priscilla Pop spoke powerfully about the slow but steady growth of Christian education in her tragic country. Afflicted by communist and dictatorial governments, Christian education grows in an atmosphere of fear, intolerance and persecution, even to this day. We prayed for her and her courageous efforts.

Respectfully regarded as the father' of Mission in Christian Schools in Australia, Dr Ted Boyce from Pacific Hills, Sydney believes that God allows us to go on Mission in order to administer his grace. (Philippians Ch 2). "God has called us to this place at this time to fulfil his purposes." Mission is not for our students only, but for our teaching staff, office staff, ground staff and parents. He was at pains to explain that local 'neighbourhood' mission activities are just as God-like as overseas work. He describes a school as a community of God's people in mission. (I like that!)

Dr Boyce described how students of his school, Pacific Hills, look after people on the margins of the local community (in a program called 'Fusion'), travel to Indonesia to provide help to intellectually handicapped people, travel to other Christian school communities in Australia, travel to the Ukraine to work with students and parents in their Christian education, go to China on music mission trips, worked with AIDS orphans in Thailand, and join with former students in the streets of Nairobi, Kenya. He concluded that all these mission activities honour God by sacrificial service.

Dr Boyce's biblical basis for mission was further explained in 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 10: *we are called to use whatever gifts we have received to serve others. There is no higher call than this to administer God's grace and worship him through service.* Dr Boyce encouraged us to serve with the strength that God provides. He believes that God called us together in Hong Kong to let God speak to each of us through his word and by his spirit.

We also visited several schools in Hong Kong and in China where the students were so gracious and hospitable. Not all staff and students were Christian and there was concern expressed that Christian schools were becoming increasingly secularised in Hong Kong. In China it is still dangerous to openly practise Christianity. We heard some very moving testimonies from several people who were conducting their own Home Church and Home School based on Christian values, at their own risk.

Our week in Hong Kong has given us great encouragement to build on what we have begun in our mission program locally as well as in Thailand, PNG and maybe the Solomon Islands soon. There is so much potential and opportunity for mission activity in many parts of the world. It is something we believe in passionately. We feel our whole school community can be a part of this exciting and challenging calling and by so doing fulfil God's sacred purpose in our lives.

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