

Lasallian Global **Women's Symposium 2017**



SYMPOSIUM REPORT

Auckland, New Zealand | 16-19 July 2017



Introduction

16-19th July, 2017, Auckland, New Zealand.

After more than a year of planning and preparation, the Lasallian Global Women's Symposium took place. The 114 delegates gathered from Australia, New Zealand, PNG, Pakistan, Vietnam, USA, UK, Singapore, Sri Lanka, South Africa, the Philippines, Malaysia, Italy and Hong Kong. There was a wide-ranging representation of age, culture, gender and workplace role, offering a richness of diversity.

Not only women attended. Four Brothers were there for the duration: Br Robert Schieler, Br Ricky Laguda, Br David Hawke and Br Ed Phelan; Mr Merv McCormack, Executive Director of the Lasallian Mission Council ANZPPNG was also a delegate. Present for part of the Symposium were Br Gustavo Ramirez Barba, Br Rafa Matas, Br Patrick Lynch and Br Peter Gilfedder. The men's respectful listening and participation was critical not only to the dialogue that took place, but to the vibrant network of relationships that were formed.

One of the highlights leading up to the Symposium was the sponsorship of close to 20% of the delegates who attended. The 'Sponsor a Sister' fundraising program (with donors from 22 Lasallian workplaces from around the globe) ensured that 'our sisters' from developing countries could be part of the conversation. This program was not just about money, but about forming close relationships before the Symposium even began, as sponsors and their delegates exchanged messages and got to know one another.

Within the three days of the Symposium a community formed, centred around a deep commitment to the authentic living out of Lasallian mission in our lives and in our workplaces. A sense of belonging and cohesion grew, which transcended any particular country, workplace or project.



"In this time of vitality and new life, let us not bind ourselves to a language and a mentality that limits our horizons.

Let us put aside old and tired conversations and rejoice in what is springing up. Let us listen to these seekers who are expressing new paths for living the Lasallian charism."

Br Bob Schieler

We reflected on the words above from Br Bob in the weeks leading up to and during the Symposium. Significant outcomes were achieved in response to this challenge to find new paths for living our charism.



General Councillor Brother Gustavo
with Trish Carroll

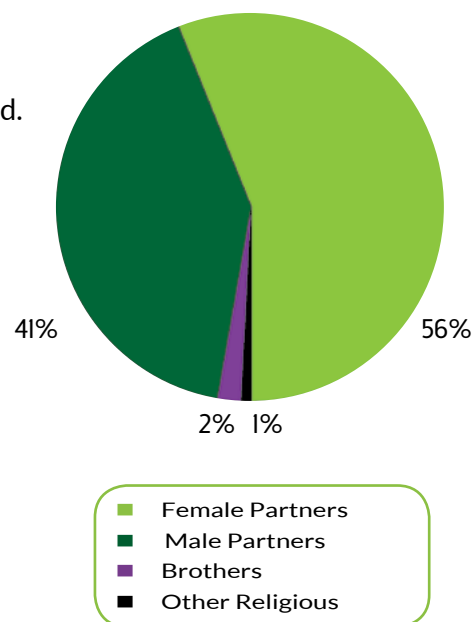
Women as change makers

Chapter One: Before

In 2012, the first Women's Symposium was held in Thailand, followed by similar gatherings in different countries around the world. The purpose of these meetings was to build on the ideas raised in Circular 461 about the vital contribution of Lasallian women, and to explore the distinct role and identity of women in the mission.

The 2017 Symposium was only possible because of the District and Mission Council of ANZPPNG, which was generous and wholehearted. The women on the Steering Committee were given agency and authority to plan and implement the Symposium, within a culture of trust and empowerment. The Symposium was planned, led and run by women, giving the entire process authenticity.

Today, women currently make up approximately 56% of Lasallian Partners globally. Indeed, the role that women play is MISSION CRITICAL. Yet women are mostly under-represented at every level of decision making and leadership across the Lasallian family.



It is clear that women have a pivotal role to play in ensuring the global Lasallian mission is vibrant and sustainable over coming decades. How are we ensuring that we get the best out of our people, women and men, for the continued vitality of our mission? How do we ensure that women have an equal voice in our association of Lasallians? How well are we engaging our Lasallian women and building capacity for the future?

In response to these questions, the theme for the Symposium was decided: **WOMEN AS CHANGE MAKERS**. The words of Circular 470 provide an invitation to discern ways of *bold and creative* new leadership. That new leadership must fully recognise and involve women.

In the months of consultation leading up to the Symposium, several clear themes emerged as most important for Lasallian women.

These led to the determination of the **Symposium Aims**.

Building community began months before delegates met in Auckland. Through a series of email letters, social media, Facebook, phone and Skype many conversations (international and local) took place and relationships began to be forged. When delegates arrived, many of us felt that we 'knew' one another from these ongoing communications.

Symposium organisers aimed for 100 delegates, and we achieved this number - and more. We recognise that New Zealand was a long way to travel to, and that may have been a deterring factor; we also recognise that not everyone is in the same place with regards to the role and identity of Lasallian women. In fact, our research showed us that women are still amongst the poorest and most disenfranchised in today's world. Our intent is that the delegates from the global Symposium 2017 can lead the way in showing leadership and influencing Institute responses in view of society and the Church of the 21st century.

Symposium Aims:

1. *To recognise the distinct role and identity of women in the mission, especially as catalysts of change.*
2. *To raise awareness that women are critical to enabling the achievement of mission goals and are essential to the future sustainability of the mission.*
3. *To empower Lasallian women to have a confident collective voice.*
4. *To develop ongoing relationships that support association between women, and provide opportunities for mutual growth and support.*
5. *To promote the Lasallian vocation as a desirable and accessible option for young women and girls.*

The powhiri ritual

Chapter Two: During SUNDAY

The Symposium began with a powhiri, a formal ritual where our indigenous Maori hosts welcomed us to their land. The powhiri is conducted in Maori language by members of the local community.

As we gathered in the foyer of the Crowne Plaza, we heard the strong clear voice of a young woman calling us to enter the meeting space. The powhiri ritual included singing, speeches, a haka and hongi (the traditional touching of noses and sharing breath). It was a powerful and moving cultural ceremony.

During dinner, Br Bob Schieler gave the first of three keynote addresses. *"It is your challenge and responsibility to describe the specific contribution of women to our common mission and to envision new and invigorating modes of participation. Your task is to help me and the rest of the Lasallian Family appreciate the 'women's perspective'."*



"I have come primarily to attentively listen to your shared wisdom and experience. My desire during these days with you is to listen, reflect and learn. I hope to leave this symposium inspired, motivated and challenged by your questions and insights."

I am here!

Br Bob confirmed that, statistically, the greatest number of those involved in the Lasallian mission are women. He asked us to consider the distinctive styles of service, relationships and leadership that women might bring to enrich today's organisations. *"How do you envision women as transformational Lasallian leaders? Can you suggest concrete ways to incorporate more women into mission-related governmental structures at the local, District and Institute levels of transformational leadership?"*

The evening concluded with a reflection and 'roll call', in which each woman in attendance was called by name and answered **"I am here!"** in their own native language. This statement **I AM HERE** signified a commitment to be fully present and engaged during the Symposium. For the delegates, there was an invitation to be willing to share our experiences of being women (and men who work with women) in the Lasallian mission; to listen and learn about the Lasallian story and each other's stories; to share the highs and lows of our mission work; to contribute to personal and group reflection; and - most importantly - to relate what we experienced, discussed and thought about of today's Lasallian mission.



Br Bob's Opening Address

[View in full here...](#)



The ongoing story

MONDAY

The theme of Day Two was 'The Ongoing Story'. Trish Carroll and Tina Bonacci presented the second keynote address on **Change Makers; Women of our Lasallian Story**.

The presentation began with a reflection about change.

Trish and Tina then shared the stories of four women, whose lives intersected with the Lasallian story, who created significant change in very different ways. These four women were Mary of Nazareth; Madeleine Lamy; Louise Hours and Dorothy Day.

Like these women, the women (and men) in the Symposium room were also called to be agents of change. Regardless of our role or status, we each have a voice that can speak for justice.

This takes courage. It takes courage to speak, but also courage to listen and allow ourselves to be transformed by what we hear.

Reflection about change

All change, even very large and powerful change, begins when a few people start talking with one another about something they care about. Change starts with an attitude of humility and a willingness to learn.
(M.Wheatley)

*Change is about **LISTENING** in such a way that you are transformed by the encounter-and then taking (risking) action.*

Determination, energy, and courage appear spontaneously when we care deeply about something. We take risks that are unimaginable in any other context...BUT Change always involves a dark night when everything falls apart. ...until a (new way) emerges.
(M.Wheatley)



The four stories show us that change begins with humility and listening; it is born from conviction about what is right; it is about having the courage and strength to risk action; it is about having the conversations we need to have and being changed as a result; it is about acting and speaking in accordance with the things we truly believe.

In the later part of the morning, we were paired randomly, invited to find a quiet spot and to journey together two-by-two on an Emmaus Walk.

We took the time to reflect on our personal Lasallian stories – to share with one another and awaken new understandings in ourselves while coming to know a new Lasallian sister.

The conversations continued in the afternoon with a group process exploring four key themes of the Symposium.

1. *What are the current realities and experiences of Lasallian women?*
2. *How do we create opportunities to give voice to Lasallian women?*
3. *How do we foster global relationships?*
4. *Imagine the Institute in 20 years' time – what will the Lasallian women's vocation look like?*

These were difficult questions to grapple with, and prompted some creative and lively debate. In each of our sessions, we recorded thoughts and suggestions. The entire group then had the opportunity to prioritise their four top concerns or statements.

The top areas of concern that emerged from the discussion were closely aligned to the original aims of the Symposium, and designed to inform the Symposium recommendations. There was a high degree of consensus amongst the group, and priority areas were clear-cut.

Top identified priorities

- *Structural changes to better support and represent women at all levels*
CONSULTATION & DECISION MAKING
- *More active leadership participation in the Institute LOCAL, REGIONAL AND DISTRICT LEVELS*
- *Creation and participation in global networking and communications, formation & mentoring*
- *Be proactive in promoting women's Lasallian vocations*





Poi making

The evening ended with the cultural activity of 'poi making'.

In Maori culture, the wahine (female) dancers perform the Maori POI, a dance performed with balls attached to flax strings, swung rhythmically. The POI dance was originally used by the Maori women for keeping their hands flexible for weaving and by the men for strength and coordination required during battle.

"Throughout the day we shared an energy and a closeness so we no longer felt like manuhiri (visitors) but whanau (an extended family)."

PJ Thompson, delegate from the USA

Lasallian women: the present

TUESDAY

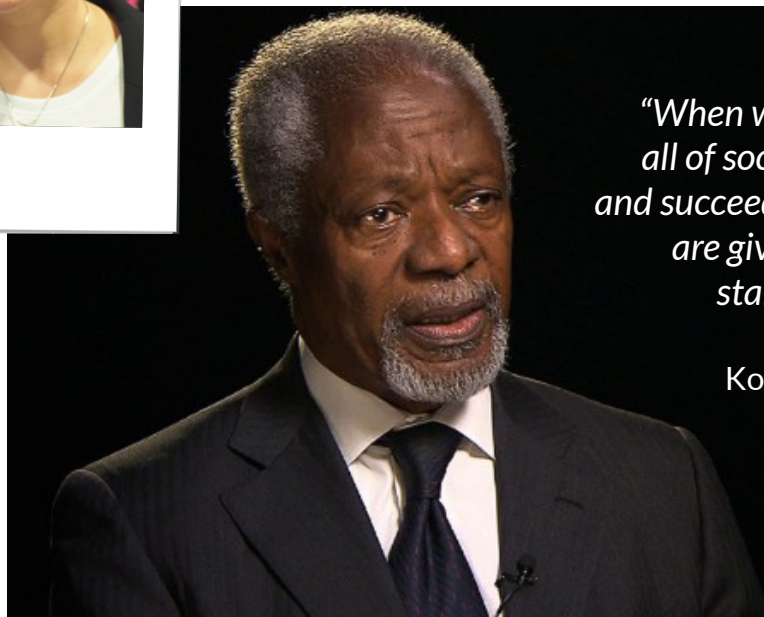
The theme for Day Three was 'Lasallian Women: The Present'. The focus of the day's conversations was the place and identity of women today in the world and in the Lasallian mission.

We discussed how we might be a collective voice for Lasallian women and what that might look like for our future.

Tracy Adams and Amanda Proulx began the third keynote presentation by giving a snapshot of the status of women in today's world. Women are the world's poorest and most oppressed citizens, and this is a reality to which our mission must respond.



- *Women do 66% of the world's work, yet earn 10% of its income (this does not include unpaid work such as child care, elder care and housework).*
- *35% of the world's women have experienced physical/sexual abuse.*
- *Two thirds of the world's illiterate are women.*
- *Two thirds of the world's most poor are women.*
- *A woman dies every 90 seconds through childbirth or pregnancy complications.*
- *Each year, 15 million under-aged girls are forcibly married.*
- *Each year, thousands of girls are murdered in 'honor killings'.*



*"When women thrive,
all of society benefits,
and succeeding generations
are given a better
start in life"*

Kofi Annan

Tracy and Amanda then looked at the role of women in our Lasallian mission, giving statistics that show that women, the majority of mission partners, are greatly under-represented in decision making and leadership roles. **Highlighting it is no longer a risk that there will not be enough Brothers to guide the way, it is a reality.**

To respond to this reality, women must step up and take responsibility for the mission with Faith, Service, Community and Courage: FSCC. Just because we can't be Brothers doesn't mean we can't be leaders. We must create pathways for young women in the mission. Our future depends on it.

We must commit to take on greater co-responsibility for the mission "with all the affection of our heart".

Key points

Education of women is **THE** key solution to addressing these issues of inequality:

- *A child born to a mother who can read is 50% more likely to survive past the age of five, to be immunized, and to attend school.*
- *Wages, agricultural income, and productivity –all critical for reducing poverty, are higher where women who are involved in agriculture receive a better education.*
- *Each additional year of schooling beyond primary - a woman receives offers, greater payoffs for improved opportunities, options and outcomes.*



There was a powerful “**YES**” in the room from the delegates in response to this call to action. *Yes, we must be bold. Yes, we must be creative. Yes, we must take up the challenge of co-responsibility. Yes, we must reshape leadership frameworks.*

We were also reminded that many of our world’s women (including Lasallians) are amongst those who statistically are voiceless, and that we also have a mandate to ensure that our sisters who were not in the room are heard.

The words of Malala Yousafzi, women’s rights and education activist, resonated with us all.

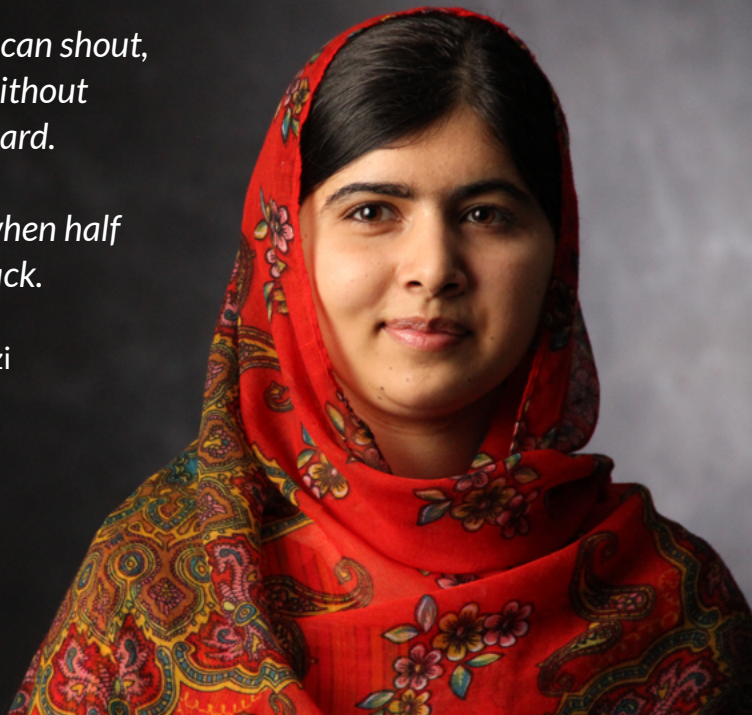
Women in the Mission

- *We must be bold*
- *We must be creative*
- *We must accept the challenge of co-responsibility*
- *We must reshape leadership frameworks*
- *We must have an obligation to action*

*I raise my voice not so I can shout,
but so that those without
a voice can be heard.*

*We cannot succeed when half
of us are held back.*

Malala Yousafzi



There was a strong and unanimous conviction amongst the delegates that, in order for the mission to continue strongly into the future, there must be:

- a. *A re-shaping of leadership frameworks in our Lasallian organisation to guarantee equality of decision making and leadership roles for women at every level, including Institute level.*
- b. *A formal body (advisory group/council/committee) to ensure that the voice of women is represented and heard at every level, including Institute level needs to be created.*
- c. *A formal program to mentor and support young women Lasallians needs to be developed.*

After deciding on these priorities, the next question was how these initiatives might be achieved in reality. In round table conversations, the remainder of the morning was spent workshopping practical solutions around the following stimulus:

Stimulus

A collective Lasallian women's voice

If there were to be some sort of group (e.g. reference group, Council, advisory group) to provide a voice for Lasallian women:

- *What would it look like?*
- *What would it need to do?*
- *How could we achieve it?*

In the afternoon, there was a break for a cultural visit to Auckland Museum.

When we returned in the late afternoon, there was an 'open mic' session, to gather feedback on how our delegates were responding to the program so far.

Many women took the microphone during this session, to express their gratitude for being together; their hope for the future; their feelings of strength in having a collective voice; their responses to the sessions and reflections; their ideas and opinions. In the words of one delegate, ***"You have expressed what all of us women have been feeling but we have been too afraid to say it."*** There was a strong call for change and action.

"We don't want this to just be a talk fest. We want something to happen as a result." There was a feeling of optimism and energy.



The presence of the General Councillors and Br David amongst us during these conversations was greatly appreciated by the women. These Brothers listened to some potentially challenging conversations with openness, respect and affirmation. There was no sense of 'us' and 'them', but instead a sense of community united by a *'single heart and mind'* motivated to make the mission as best as it can be for the young people we serve.

The day concluded with a cultural performance during dinner. We were first treated to an all-female barbershop quartet, The Sweet Adelines.

The second half of the evening was a performance of traditional Pacifica dancing and singing. Members of the audience were invited to join in the fun!



Lasallian women: the future

Wednesday

The theme for Day Four was 'Lasallian Women: The Future'.

The main purpose of this last day was to leave the Symposium with a series of resolutions to put to the Brother Superior and the General Council. After a review of what we had discussed up to that point, we listed the recommendations that had been proposed by delegates the previous day. Each table group was invited to reflect on this list and then add to or update input so that we could formulate specific resolutions.

Six resolutions were developed, accepted and endorsed.

The program concluded with evaluations, vote of thanks, the presentation of certificates and a concluding ritual. During the closing ritual, each woman was presented with a hand painted river rock, either a New Zealand Maori '*taonga*' or an Australian Wurunjeri dreaming stone.





Symposium resolutions

One

- 1.1 That a truly Representative International Lasallian Women's 'Council' (ILWC) is established with a mission Statement and clear roles developed ASAP.
- 1.2 That there is the appointment of Person/s as a short-term bridge to effectively get started in a timely way.

Two

- 2.1 That the International Women's Council engages with regional groups that currently work within existing structures (not reinventing the wheel).
- 2.2 That the ILWC draws on the knowledge and wisdom within our existing Institute 'documents' to promote an authentically shared mission within today's context.

Three

- 3.1 That there is Institute policy development to ensure inclusivity, a collective Lasallian voice and gender parity in leadership roles at all levels.
- 3.2 That policies are collaborative and inclusive in tone and intent and take into account cultural sensitivities.

Four

- 4.1 That the ILWC undertakes effective communications, both virtual and traditional, to inform, engage, and include ALL Lasallians.
- 4.2 That there is a database/directory for ongoing global connections between Lasallian women.
- 4.3 That there is a personal commitment by all delegates to share this experience, and the knowledge and outcomes, with their local Lasallian Community (men and women) on return.

Five

- 5.1 That a global and regional women's mentoring program is established via a variety of structures (technological and face to face) covering both short and long-term needs of participants.
- 5.2 That the voices of students/clients/young Lasallians are engaged in Mission planning, as well as in the promotion of Lasallian Vocation for the ILWC and the broader Institute.

Six

- 6.1 That the process of implementing these **recommendations needs to begin immediately.**

Next steps and feedback

Chapter Three: Where to...

The next step is to pass on the Symposium report and recommendations to Br Bob and the General Council for their consideration and action. There was a strong wish for 'things to happen' as a result of the Symposium and for this to happen without delay.

The feedback from the Symposium was overwhelmingly positive. The only two 'negatives' were that the Symposium could have been longer and that it would have been great to engage other women from countries not represented.



The top ranking positive feedback comments were:

- *Well organised/professional/well run; stayed on task/ focused; well thought out; effective communication leading up to the event (especially 'personal touches')*
- *Transformative/renewing/energising/ motivating/uplifting/inspiring/moving/ spiritual experience; feeling an increased level of commitment to the mission*
- *Accomplishment of outcomes; strong hope in outcomes being realised; clear sense of purpose/not just a 'talkfest'*
- *Relevant/enriching content; pace and flow of sessions; powerful keynotes; courageous and open facilitators/ positive role models; engagement of many women in the process/ collaborative*
- *Sense of community/fellowship/ family with other women and Brothers*
- *Venue*
- *Cultural program/s*



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