

**Courage Ministry**  
**Article 71 October 2012**  
**Brendan Scarce**  
**International Director of Courage – Pastoral Visit-**  
**September 2012**

**Introduction**

In the past two weeks we have experienced the blessings of a pastoral visit to Australia by the International Director of Courage, Father Paul Check of the Bridgeport Diocese, Connecticut, USA. I was encouraged by what I heard, experienced and saw at the fourth Oceania Courage conference in Sydney and the public open forum held in Brisbane a couple of days later.

**Fellowship (Koinonia) in Sydney**

I consider my work in the Courage ministry as a vocational call. And I was delighted to see a number of men whom I had not seen for some years participating earnestly and sincerely at the conference in Sydney. As I caught up with them I heard their account of their own struggle to remain faithful to the evangelical call of chastity. I was able to inform one man, who had come out of the gay lifestyle many years before, how he helped me in my early days of ministry. The wisdom he had acquired from the scene and his knowhow enabled me to minister more effectively to those who approached Courage for help.

Another man informed me how he has lead a life of fidelity to the Church's teaching and how his local Courage group was so supportive and important for him. What impressed me were their habits of perseverance and the constancy of prayer, fellowship and spiritual direction. You might call it the Pauline biblical way of seeking Christ and being faithful to the teaching norms and guidance of the Church.

Other instances showed me again the absolute necessity of fellowship and good holy companions for our life's journeys wherever and whoever we are.

I will present in my own words and according to my perceptions and interpretations a snapshot of three of the presentations given at the Conference. They are quite varied, but encourage and challenge us to learn by reflecting on our habits and life patterns.

**Father Paul Check's exhortation**

Father Paul's topic was "Be Faithful, My Son" He drew from the second book of Maccabees Chapter 7 and the sacrifice of the seven brothers and their mother's encouragement to them. This action of the brothers indicates that the desire to do right is deeply embedded in the heart of us all. What hurt her sons did not necessarily harm them, nor her. Father Paul was making the point that suffering is never wasted – see Colossians 1:24. The Maccabees preserved their fidelity even though they died.

In this year of Grace, Father Paul suggests we take on four aspirations: petition, gratitude, sorrow, and joy (love).

1). We ought to petition Our Father in prayer – for God wishes us to ask – see Jesus' exhortation; Ask and you shall receive, Mt 7:6.

- 2). Have gratitude for all the blessings and for the fact that God gave himself up for us, Jn.3:16
- 3). Have sorrow for sin. We see in psalm 51 the cry of the heart “Have mercy on me O God in your kindness and in your compassion wipe out my offences.” Father Paul also stated that attending confession monthly is a good idea.
- 4). Keep the joy of Jesus in your heart. Jesus lived an intensely happy life. See Jesus’ comments about the joy of what had been revealed to him, (Luke 10:21). “At that time Jesus full of joy through the Holy Spirit...” It is the joy of Christ that wins people to Him. Father Paul has an acronym - **J**esus, **O**thers, **Y**ou = **Joy**. It is for us to consider that sometimes the surrender of our wills, may be another word for love and surrendering our hearts to God.

### **The Pilgrimage of Responsibility**

Anna Krohn is a doctoral candidate in the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family in Melbourne. Her paper displayed her insights and research from literature..

She highlighted the fact that being sexually responsible is a pilgrimage in life. And such a pilgrimage contradicts the liberal notion of sexual tourism. I thought the distinction she made between pilgrimage and tourism was a telling insight.

(In our current Australian colloquy/dialogue/monologue)sexual responsibility is equated now with safe sex –my emphasis).

Anna asked why do so many young people want to go to military places of pilgrimage, eg Kokoda, Gallipoli, Flanders, etc. Why is pilgrimage now so popular? To wit the film of Martin Sheen – “The Way”.

Anna considers that for many the actual journey is the celebration. The journey has become a search for self. This is not the Christian way. Chaucer in “Canterbury Tales” depicts what pilgrimage is about – it is about ultimate choice. The pilgrims that Chaucer describes know that pilgrimage is not about him or her: – it is the way of entering into the Paschal mystery – which will make him and her more like Christ.

For many it was a penance, given by the priest. The penitential destination might have been Jerusalem, Canterbury or Santiago. It was a wake-up call to be morally alert.

The Church adopted this experience in World Youth Day pilgrimages with the hope of Youth being awakened to the deep spiritual possibilities and purpose of life. This has been evidenced by so many young people in the past twenty five years. Anna sees this form of pilgrimage as evangelical and pedagogical. It is formative and a life teacher. It enables those on pilgrimage to be even more responsible as they contemplate the experiences, rituals, communion and fellowship of their journey. Hopefully the pilgrims on returning to normal life patterns are more responsible in their choices and actions.

(Quite a number of pilgrims returning from being involved in World Youth Days commit to a deeper religious and or vocational life).

Anna reckons Blessed John Paul II illustrated the responsibility of pilgrimage by his pastoral visitations and tenacity despite his disabilities. His encyclical “Veritatis Splendor” spelt out for all the fruits of his life.

## **The Virtue of Hope**

Father Greg Morgan is an Assistant priest of Liverpool in the Sydney Archdiocese.

He challenged us to ponder the mystery of the Cross. We begin with the cross for we cannot begin with hope unless we acknowledge our sin. If we do not acknowledge our sinfulness we are anti-hope, because we are anti-truth. The Cross in some mysterious way leads us to the kiss of integrity and the kiss of sincerity. The Cross in other words keeps us honest. We all have to be truthful to have hope. Let us show our wounds to Jesus, and in so doing transform the wounds into the scars of holiness. By being vulnerable and honest we can find the theological virtue of hope and live it meaningfully. We ultimately have to move toward the transcendent.

It is a truism that no one can hope like a Christian nor can anyone despair like a Christian.

Father Morgan gave some examples to illustrate his message. He has met Catholics who say they have no sin – such people can hardly aspire to a higher life if they believe that.

On another occasion a young man on the train came and spoke to Father because he saw him smiling. Father asked him how he was doing and the young man said that he hated his life. Father asked “When did you last have hope?” He replied “I can’t remember!” Father believes that many of our neighbours are in this situation.

I ask are we people of hope? Are we transmitters of hope? Do I live as if I have the theological virtue of hope, not just a sense of worldly hope? (Things will turn out ok!)

Let us live Christ from the inside. Father Morgan exhorted us to never make resolutions, but make petitions. Prayer is the proclamation of hope and if we can, we should try to engage in mental prayer, one of the building blocks for our life in Christ.

## **Pastoral Insights**

After the Sydney Conference, Father Paul visited Canberra where he was able to confer with a group of priests about the ministry of Courage/Encourage. Some good affiliations were made and contact with possible future Encourage mentors.

From Canberra, Father visited Brisbane and during his time in Brisbane, he met Archbishop Coleridge, who was extremely positive and affirming about the ministry. The Archbishop had known Courage from the Sydney World Youth Days of 2008, when he gave a well received lecture on the life of Saint Paul.

Father conducted an open forum on the work of Courage and was able to field questions about the nature and charism of Courage. While he was in Brisbane, Father was interviewed by the Catholic Leader and was available for personal interviews.

Hilary and I were blessed by his visit to our home where we were able to seek his wisdom on the forthcoming start of Encourage. We were able to provide stories of our involvement with the Courage ministry in Brisbane and what might be the future relationship with the wider network of Courage groups in Australia.

### **A more definite structure for Courage in Australia**

The development of Courage in Australia will be enhanced by the announcement that Father Peter Joseph of Sydney, who is the Director of the Sydney Courage group, was appointed the National Coordinator of Courage in Australia. I welcomed this appointment for it means that the Australian groups now have a source of authority and direction for National Courage events. There is a lot of good will between the groups so I expect that there will be a more cohesive thrust about how we might confront and deal with certain events and issues that need to be quickly addressed. Many people in the Catholic Church do not know of the existence of Courage. However the effort of Father Paul in his special sessions with a good number of priests and seminarians in various dioceses will bear fruit in due season. My hopes and expectations for the future were significantly elevated by the wisdom, decisions and dialogue that occurred with Father Paul Check.

In the Paulian epistles we read often of Saint Paul encouraging his co-workers. I feel that was the impact of Father Paul Check on his co-workers in the Australian chapters of Courage. If we as Courage workers, members and supporters live by the following exhortation of Saint Paul our work will be fruitful and healing for all who approach our ministry.

“ Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom ...Colossians 3 ;12- 16

Courage is a ministry of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane

For contact purposes the addresses are :

Brisbane Courage Post Office Box 151, Geebung Qld 4034

Telephone (07) 3865 2464 –Brendan Scarce & 041 118 0264 Michael Curtin

Email: [Brisbanecourage@bigpond.com](mailto:Brisbanecourage@bigpond.com)