

World Youth Day Cross and Icon
Tuesday 6th May 2008

- Your Grace, Bishop Bernard O’Grady;
- Fr Peter Hoang, Monash University Catholic Chaplain;
- Students and staff of Monash University; and
- Visitors to our University.

As Vice-Chancellor, it is my pleasure to welcome the World Youth Day Cross and Icon to Monash University. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to the visitors to Monash, and in particular, the volunteers involved in the pilgrimage as the Cross makes its way to the 12th World Youth Day, which will be held in Sydney in July.

Even though Monash University is a secular organisation, we celebrate and promote diversity and encourage people to practice their beliefs. As Australia’s largest university, with campuses in Australia, Malaysia and South Africa, and a learning centre in Italy, the multi-national Monash community comprises more than 54,000 students from more than 130 countries.

As Monash University celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, we continue to have a strong commitment to integrity and fairness in all that we do, which fits well with the World Youth Day purpose of “hope and peace” when the late Pope John Paul II entrusted the Cross to the Youth of the world.

I understand it has been a symbol against racial injustices, religious barriers, civil unrest and acts of terrorism during its journey since 1984. I have read that the Cross was “smuggled behind the Iron Curtain into Eastern Europe” when Christians were being persecuted under the former Communist regimes, and has also traveled to Ground Zero in New York after the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers.

To the young people here today, although you are taking part in a celebratory journey, you are also participating in a journey of responsibility. As residents and citizens of a country so rich in many ways, you have a responsibility to promote that message of hope to support others less fortunate in the lead up to World Youth Day and afterwards.

Sir John Monash, the man whom this university was named after, once said, ***“Adopt as your fundamental creed that you will equip yourself for life, not solely for your own benefit but for the benefit of the whole community”.***

What did Monash mean by that? First he was exhorting his listeners to make the most of their potential by acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes that would allow them to thrive in life. It is really important to emphasise that equipping yourself for life means much more than acquiring knowledge which will be useful in obtaining a job and earning a lot of money. It means benefiting from a broad education so that you can participate fully in life – appreciate music, literature and art, understand, enjoy and respect the diversity of cultures, religions and beliefs, contribute to political and social debate and participate in sport and other physical activities.

But the most important part of this quotation comes at the end. Monash recognised that it is normal and proper that you should benefit from living your life to the full. What he is exhorting his listeners to do is to contribute also to the community.

One of the great aspects of my job is to work with so many young people. While some people have said to me that this generation is selfish, demanding and interested in immediate gratification, my experience of young people today is just the reverse - there is a level of commitment to helping others and serving the community that would have delighted Monash. There are so many examples of altruistic behaviour at Monash University that I could not list them all, but suffice it to say that Monash students founded the Oaktree Foundation, a philanthropic and community development organization composed and run entirely by young people with over 10,000 members and operating in Africa and many countries in Asia and the Pacific. Other students take part in groups including Medicins Sans Frontiers, Engineers Without Borders, voluntary community organizations of many types, charitable activities run by student associations, environmental groups and many activities that contribute to the local or international community.

I hope that from your experience today as we welcome the Cross and Icon to Monash, and in the months ahead as many of you travel to Sydney for World Youth Day in July, you will look on this not just as a journey of celebration, but as a journey of responsibility to others as well.

After you have fulfilled your duty to yourself by making the most of your abilities and caring for your family, make sure that you contribute to the wider community as well. You may do this by choosing a profession that gives you scope to serve others. There are opportunities in most fields of endeavour for you to do something a bit extra. Or you may have the opportunity to take part in voluntary community service activities. Speak out against racism and discrimination. Argue for peaceful resolution of conflict. Support the less well off in our community.

If you do this, you are also fulfilling the wishes of the late Pope John Paul II, who entrusted the youth of the world with this symbol of peace and hope.

My best wishes to you as you participate in the journey of the World Youth Day Cross and Icon.

Thank you.