

Introduction to the Education Conference

Mother General M. Mechtild Meckl CJ
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Welcome to Loyola, and welcome to the second Education Conference of Mary Ward's Institute. Some of you - those from Europe - were present at the first such Conference in Ascot, England in 1995. This time, as is fitting for a Conference with the theme '*Education for Justice and Peace*', we welcome representatives from all over the world, from our own branch of the Institute - the Congregatio Jesu - and also from the Loreto branch - the IBVM. Here in this room are representatives from every continent: from Asia - India, Nepal and Korea; from the Americas - Chile, Argentina, Brazil, the United States, Cuba and Canada; from Australia; from Africa - South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Mauritius; from Europe - England, Ireland, Germany, Italy, Spain, Austria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic - and from Jerusalem. We have never had such an international conference before, and I am just sorry that my presence in the Far East means that I cannot be with you in person. This is indeed a unique occasion.

Many of you are tired and have been travelling all day and it is late, so I want to keep my words to a minimum. You will be hearing much about Justice and Peace issues over the next week, and what you as Catholic educators in the tradition of Mary Ward can do to bring about a more just and peaceful world. I will not attempt to anticipate what others will say.

But I do want to say something briefly about Mary Ward and the subject of this Conference, after all, it is because of Mary Ward's vision that you are here today. In her own life Mary Ward suffered greatly from a lack of justice and peace. She lived during the years of persecution and wars of religion. She experienced injustice not only at the hands of her Protestant adversaries - who for a short time imprisoned her, but from the very Church authorities who ought to have welcomed an Ignatian Institute of religious women ready and willing to work for the Church through education and other means. She was imprisoned by Catholic authorities and her schools, along with her Institute, were suppressed.

How did Mary Ward respond to this injustice? Mary Ward had a *passion* for forgiving her enemies. Her 'Life' records that 'on June 26th 1625, praying before the Blessed Sacrament in the Church of St Eligio in Rome, she received from Our Lord so much light and knowledge regarding the forgiveness of enemies, that henceforth she cherished a tender affection for all who wronged her and was in the habit of calling them friends and lovers of her heavenly reward'. She knew through her closeness to God that only forgiveness can heal and rebuild troubled human relations from their foundations. Without forgiveness human justice will be fragile and imperfect, and without justice there can be no peace.

The whole world yearns for peace, and for a peace based on justice. Much is written and spoken on the subject. But as educators you know that today's young people are more likely to be inspired by 'models' than by words. If they can find in you a *passion* for justice, peace and forgiveness that is lived as Mary Ward lived it, and not just spoken about, there is some hope that the Kingdom of God will one day come on earth.

I wish you all a good Conference, an enjoyable Conference, and time and space to develop bonds with one another. My prayer for you this week is that you may be inspired to become ever more passionate about peace, justice and forgiveness.