



At the National Christian Youth Convention I realised that I am *old*! Seriously. I just don't get the music that young people listen to these days, what with the moshing and the swaying and the waving.

Despite my feelings of extreme age, NCYC was a meaningful week. The theme was "Converge" and people did, from all over Australia and the Asia-Pacific. What follows are a few of my personal highlights in no particular order; I suspect every participant would have a different list.



The overflow from MLC's main hall during worship; listening and watching the big screen

The focus in this Year of Mark was on the Gospel of Mark, with Robyn Whitaker speaking each day on the day's passage. Robyn has ministered in rural Victoria and as Chaplain at Methodist Ladies College, and is now doing a doctorate in New Testament studies at the University of Chicago. (She is also married to the Rev'd Peter French, who was chaplain at Trinity College when I was at Janet Clarke Hall.) Robyn had known since she was eighteen that she was called to ministry, but didn't initially find much support because she was 'too young'. (And one person she talked to said that she must have got the call wrong, because God doesn't call women!) I really enjoyed and identified with Robyn's stories of her own life as disciple and minister – I hope that the NCYC delegates did too.

There was an emphasis during the week on radical discipleship, on following Jesus as the "root" for Christian life. The point was made that following Jesus is not just about personal change, it is also about social change; it is not just about belief but about action. The call was made for delegate to get involved in the world, partly by *not* following the example of "Bubble Boy" – a character who spent much of the convention in his own life-size personal bubble! .

One of the best speakers on the subject of radical discipleship was Amie Dural, a church peace advocate and activist from the ecumenical movement in the Philippines. Amie reminded us that if we were following Christ and not caring about the poor then we were following the wrong Jesus. She had come to her calling as an activist when she saw people's homes being demolished; students unable to study because of poverty; and communities being harassed by the military. Amie thanked

the Uniting Church for our partnership with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and the advocacy work we have done on behalf of the UCCP pastors and members who have been murdered or imprisoned by the Philippines' military. It was wonderful to hear that what we have said and done in Australia has made a difference in the Philippines.

On Sunday night, as part of the evening worship Jay Robinson was ordained. Jay is part-time youth minister at High Street Uniting Church and part-time chaplain at Monash University. She was the first Uniting Church minister to be ordained at NCYC and it was an amazing and moving service. I studied with Jay, and it was wonderful to be at her ordination – with over a thousand other people!



Laying on of hands during Jay's ordination

As a chaplain I was lucky enough to be rostered to attend Al Macrae and Kylie Crabbe's Bible studies. They looked at Mark's Gospel from three different perspectives: the world *behind* the text (first century Palestine); the world *in* the text (how Mark's Gospel itself fits together); and the world *in front of* the text (how the passages inform how we live as Christians in our own contexts and how do our own contexts shape how we read the Bible). The delegates got the sort of fascinating, in-depth bible study that I was lucky enough to experience at Theological College, and they seemed to enjoy it.

I was one of dozens of chaplains, all wearing purple hats so that we could be identified by delegates, and so part of my enjoyment of NCYC was spending time with my colleagues and catching up with people that in some cases I hadn't seen for years. There were so many of us that duties could be easily shared -I only had to make *one* hospital trip with a girl who needed a shoulder x-ray.

Talking with some of the delegates I think for many of them the most exciting part of NCYC was being a member of such a large community of Christians. Christian young people can often feel marginalised in schools and universities; in many congregations there are only a handful of young people, if that. Being Christian can seem very lonely for someone aged between sixteen and twenty-five. NCYC overcomes that. The people I talked to were amazed at how many delegates there were, and that it was possible to talk to *anyone*; there were no cliques, no in-groups. I hope that they were able to take that sense of community home with them, and that it will help them to hold onto their faith when they feel isolated and alone.