

## General Conference Report, Wednesday, July 18, 2012

NOTE: For easier emailing, low resolution photos are included in this report. Go to [www.generalate.smugmug.com](http://www.generalate.smugmug.com) for more photos.

### The impact of schools and parishes on youth

Judith King was the first presenter for Wednesday. An adult educator, psychotherapist, teacher/trainer, group facilitator and organizational consultant, her clients include individuals, student groups and leadership teams of religious congregations (at chapters and province assemblies, as well as with major superiors and councils). Much of her work focuses developing a better understanding of the factors that influence the holistic development of individuals as members of organizations and systems.

She opened the session with an interactive morning prayer and then began her presentation on the impact of schools on the education of youth.

"Education must involve the whole person," she said. "I believe in a transdisciplinary process where themes, not subjects, are the starting points." She continued by saying that the themes need to be age-tuned, creative, and "most of all, fun."

What is sought in the educational experience is not simply a memorization of facts and figures but a transformative process that makes students aware of the community and the world. It is a way to help people learn the skills needed to simply "deal with life," she said.

It is a shift from passively receiving knowledge to helping students take greater responsibility for self-directed learning. Following the themes presented in yesterday's talk by Prof. Fausto Colombo, knowledge is much more democratized than ever before.

What is a holistic response? It begins by acknowledging that one learns through experience. Ms. King gave the example of conference participants. What they take away from the General Conference is not just knowledge gained from the presentations. It begins with their ENTIRE experience of the conference, including how they feel. Are they sleeping well or not, exercising or not, interacting well with others? All of these experiences are a part of not only how participants experience the conference but what they take away from it.

"The body does not simply carry around the head," said Ms. King. It is an integral part of who a person is.

Educators must consider the many facets of knowledge, including somatic knowing, or how one comes to gain knowledge through one's physical experiences. There is also emotional knowing, intellectual knowing, contextual knowing, knowing through creativity and story-telling, spiritual knowing and the knowing that comes from the freedom of play and recreation.

All of these dimensions of knowing are integrated into the web of who each of us is. And that web is interconnected with many relationships that have their own unique dimensions.

"We are each an active part of an unfolding universe," said Ms. King.

By helping young people with more than academics, by helping them to sort out emotions and interpersonal concerns, they will not just be more receptive to academic knowledge, but be prepared to deal with the many challenges of life that go beyond academics.

Ms. King noted the importance of learning in context. All knowledge is known in context with relationships and physical situations being a part of that context.



Participants wish Kathleen Donohue a happy birthday

She emphasized the need for creativity and story-telling. “To be human is to be creative.”

Where does the Christianity, and more importantly, the Dehonian charism, fit into the discussion? Ms. King noted that while religious practice has declined greatly in recent years, there has been no significant drop in those who say that God is important to them.

“There is a hunger for God that that traditional affiliations are not satisfying,” she said. At the Salamanca meetings, and now here at the General Conference, Dehonians expressed a desire to share their spirituality. People are receptive to spirituality, but Dehonians have to discover ways in which to share it that go beyond the traditional methods of education.

At the end of her presentation, Ms. King challenged meeting participants to develop the profile of a Dehonian educator.

They broke into linguistic groups to define the profiles and then reported in plenary. Taking Ms. King’s words to heart, several of the groups used plenty of “play” and humor in developing their presentations. Reports ran the gamut from the traditional to the humorous.

“But in all the presentations I was struck by the theme of the heart in each response,” she said.

### **Conference joined by the bishop of Speyer**

Bishop Karl-Heinz Wiesemann, bishop of the Diocese of Speyer (in which Neustadt is located), joined the conference for its midday Eucharist.

Originally from Westfalia, in the northwestern section of Germany, Bishop Wiesemann was appointed auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Paderborn, his home diocese, in 2002. In 2007 he became bishop of Speyer.

With the German Bishops Conference, Bishop Wiesemann is chairman of the Youth Commission and a member of the Ecumenical Commission. Since 2008 he has been deputy chairman of the Council of Christian Churches in Germany.

The bishop was kind enough to rearrange holiday travel plans to join Dehonians at their conference.

### **Moving from schools to parishes**

Fr. Anthony-Francis Vincent, SDS, director of the Institute of Practical Theology at the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome, discussed the impact of parishes on youth today. Originally from India, Fr. Anthony has done extensive research on inculturation and catechesis as it relates to Catholic schools, the focus of his doctoral thesis. Fr. Anthony also serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Empirical Theology.



The bishop of Speyer joined the conference on Wednesday



Judith King presented the morning session

He began by speaking of the interdisciplinary approach of theology and education, the need to evangelize by educating but also to educate by evangelizing.

Fr. Anthony spoke of the phenomenon of young people who are “believers” but who do not belong to a formal church. He echoed what Ms. King noted: religious practice has steadily declined, but there has been no significant drop in the number of people who believe that God is im-

portant in their lives.

At a time when the parish is just one option among many for young people, what role can it have? What impact can it have?

Fr. Anthony noted the growing popularity of sects, small religious groups that often meet the needs of people by going out to them. "How can parishes be more fluid," said Fr. Anthony. "We need to find more ways of going to the people where they are."

### **Photos**

[Click here](#) to view photos from today or paste the following in your web browser:

[http://generalate.smugmug.com/Other/General-Conference-July-18/24243480\\_M4nRL5#!i=1973084587&k=ZWqzz3M](http://generalate.smugmug.com/Other/General-Conference-July-18/24243480_M4nRL5#!i=1973084587&k=ZWqzz3M)

All photo albums are available at: [www.generalate.smugmug.com](http://www.generalate.smugmug.com)

And, of course, the reports, links to photos and other documentation, can all be found at [www.dehon.it](http://www.dehon.it).