



Author Pat Barrett, at back, at the Divine Mercy congress in Colombia with, from left, Anna-Marie Barrett, Jess Claire, Julie-Ann Buick and Julia Schmetzer.

Divine Mercy Congress strengthens faith

by PAT BARRETT

BOGOTA, Colombia — From August 15 to 19, I attended the Third World Apostolic Congress on Mercy (WACOM), held in Bogota, Colombia, with four young women from Christchurch diocese — Julie-Anne Buick, Jess Bond, Julia Schmetzer and my eldest daughter, Anna-Marie.

Our participation was as part of a group of 10 New Zealanders, five of us from Christchurch, and five from Auckland under the guidance of Fr Rory Morrissey from Herne Bay parish.

About 1000 delegates made up the audience, including 60 priests and religious, 10 bishops and four cardinals, including the president of WACOM, Cardinal Schonborn.

Claudia Koll, an Italian movie actress, gave a personal testimony on how she had devoted her life to the pursuit of money and success at the cost of having no husband, family, or indeed knowing the love of God. Her path took her, through the use of New Age practices of TCM and Reiki, deeper and deeper into the occult, presenting her with a chilling experience of evil when a voice told her she should hate all those with whom she worked and that she hadn't hated them enough. Although a fallen-away Catholic she responded: "I am made to love." And she knew she did not know how to love,

she continued. "That voice revealed, 'I am death, and I have come to kill you'."

At this, she revealed, "I prayed the Our Father and I grabbed a cross I had at home, and I screamed, 'God, help me'. And when I screamed with all my strength, God liberated me."

She gives honour to Jesus Christ, she said.

Many parishes and dioceses in this country allow, or at least tacitly acknowledge, the promotion of New Age occultic practices among the faithful in the form of workshops, retreats, and self-awareness programmes. These retreats are at variance with Catholic teaching, which they attempt to confuse and destroy.

We were also given the opportunity to visit poorer areas of Bogota to see firsthand programmes carried out by Catholic institutions among the underprivileged of the city, where there are many orphans as a result of drug-related violence and repression by military regimes. It was a sobering reminder of how fortunate we are to live in a mostly peaceful New Zealand.

The orphans performed a traditional dance for some of the groups and we had the chance to speak with them and share a little in prayer.

Cardinal Ruben Salazar, the Archbishop of Bogota, spoke movingly on the effects of narco-terrorism, state repression, kidnappings and violence



Orphans at Brothers of St Francis of the Holy Spirit Orphanage in Bogota, Colombia.

that have shredded the fabric of Colombian society for generations and produced thousands of victims and perpetrators.

"Where was the mercy of God, for the mother who was given the mutilated body of her retarded son?" he asked. "Where was the mercy of God for those incinerated by a cylinder bomb in a church?"

"Where? On the Cross!"
"Mercy is a cost, an act of pain sometimes. Take the pain and use it to forgive others and to love. Let us pray for them."

The close of his talk was greeted with a five-minute standing ovation.

Following his talk some victims of the violence spoke, one of whom was Pastora, who has suffered at the hands of narco-terrorists who first claimed the life of her father, who was killed in front of her eyes when she was five. Later when she married and had her own family, her husband was kidnapped (he has never been returned to her), then her 20-year-old daughter, the mother of two children, was kidnapped and while she went out to look for him her son was taken. He was killed and later thrown on the road.

Some days later she found another man lying on the road, who was injured. She took him home, gave him her son's clothes, put him in her son's

bedroom and cared for him.

When he awoke, he became distressed and wanted to know where he was and who was the man in the pictures on the wall and who are you? Because we killed him a few days ago.

She responded, "That is my son, you are wearing his clothes and lying in his bed, and I, am his mother". At that moment someone in the family wanted to kill him, but she would not allow it, she said. She continued to care for her son's murderer and to pray for him and even to grieve for him as her own son when he later died of a drug overdose.

Do we have this power of mercy? Can we transcend such evil? Yes! But only with the grace of God and only if we actively seek it with trust.

Cardinal Francisco Errazuriz, Archbishop Emeritus of Santiago, Chile, and legate of the Holy Father, reminded the audience that St John Paul II had put mercy at the centre of apostolic life, and had said that, "only divine mercy can put a limit to evil. Only in God's mercy would man find peace and happiness. We have to resort, once again, to God with all our strength. "We will never be missionaries of mercy if we are not children of mercy."

More information: <http://thedinemercy.org/news/story.php?NID=5970>

Pat Barrett is the national coordinator for NZACOM.



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