Reflections on Hope:  
Australian Catholic University and Community Engagement

Hope is one of the great recurring themes in human existence, and is also at the heart of the Christian lifestyle.

Hope is a positive orientation to the future, and it invites us to strive to move beyond where we are to a better, brighter future.

People experience the beginnings of hope when they recognize possibilities for something better – which in turn involves transformation. Australian theologian Anthony Kelly characterizes hope in a number of ways: as a movement forward from defeat, danger or despair to something more positive; and entry to a fuller dimension of life (1). One can hear resonances of Jesus here, “I have come that you may have life and have it to the full.” (John 10:10)

Having recognized the potential for positive change, a person begins to live in hope when he or she seeks out ways in which these possibilities might be realized. A common image for human experience is the journey of life. Using this image, we can say that hope entails an ability and a willingness to envision a path towards a better future, a path that takes us beyond today.

Ideally, an individual (or a community) living in hope will discover pathways that lead to desired outcomes that can be sustained over time rather than dead ends.

Relationships with others are integral for this journey. By its very nature hope calls people to collaboration rather than isolation, to partnership rather than competition.

This work of hope is aided by, and in turn builds upon, a number of foundational life stances. Some of these are:

- an openness to trust, even in the face of overwhelming ambiguity
- belief in a kind and generous universe;
- expectation of change and a willingness to seek it (what we commonly call motivation); and
- grace, synchronicity and a capacity to see goodness in life and in the world.

Hope gives birth to action for transformation – transformation of individuals, local communities, and national and international organizations and structures. In this sense, nurturing hope must be part of the mission of any organisation seeking human advancement.

Hope rests upon a number of foundational beliefs in the Christian world-view. Primary among these is that we have a creative and creating God. This God invites human beings to be co-creators in history and in the world. Such creative activity is both personal and communal, and is directed towards writing a life-giving history for all humanity.

In the image of the Trinity, Christians recognize relationality as one of the key characteristics of God. As Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God models a community of love and action that beckons us to leave
behind individualism and isolation, and to move into a space more open to relationship and collaboration with others. Here the work of hope can be most effectively undertaken.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from death is one of the principal beliefs of Christians. The resurrection affirms that God’s call is a call to transformation and new life. It is the event in which hope is put at the heart of human existence, for in it God’s commitment to human life in all its fullness is shown forth definitively in history.

In his foundational ‘mission statements’ Jesus affirmed that God desires fullness of life for all human beings (see John 10:10). This was the vision that shaped Jesus’ mission:

“... to bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (Luke 16:18-19)

It was the work of hope, calling individuals, institutions and cultures to transformation.

The Church shares in and continues this same mission in the world today. ACU, which is deeply immersed in the life of the Church, places the work of hope at centre stage in the University’s mission-based community engagement, which calls for transformative action in three priority areas;

- Beyond Disadvantage
- Beyond Borders
- Beyond Differences.


This paper was prepared by Anthony Steel, Institute for Advancing Community Engagement. A version of it appeared in the ejournal Terra Spiritus volume 3, issue 4, 2007.

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