

Dr. Karen Elliott shares her experience in India

Compiled by Maria Cramer-Kirkpatrick and Sister Karen Elliott

Dr. Karen Elliott, CPPS, Chairperson of the Religious Studies Department and Associate Professor of Religious Studies, Mercy College of Ohio, recently traveled to India to teach the content of a book she authored which was published by Anselm Academic in 2010: *Women in Ministry and the Writings of Paul*. While she went there to teach, she also learned a great deal.

“It was an absolutely phenomenal experience,” Dr. Elliott said. “I taught the Sisters of Charity of St. Anne in Mumbai, and I was amazed by the respect they have for education. Throughout India, there is a real reverence for learning and a tremendous dedication to academic pursuit. There, people who hold doctorate degrees have the status we give to sports stars in the United States. I had heard about this cultural reality from others but had never experienced it. It was so heartwarming to be part of it myself. The sisters I taught there expressed a genuine excitement and joy at the opportunity to learn. And they were eager to learn about the US. It is one thing to talk about diversity as a theory, but to see their enthusiasm for learning about our culture in the United States was just very humbling.



“I was so excited that they were able to connect with my teaching style. Each group did a presentation on the discussion questions at the end of my book’s six chapters, and when they gave their presentations, it brought me to tears – they understood the material on every level – intellectually, as women in the Church and from a faith perspective. For me, writing is a sacrifice – it requires solitude and time away from other commitments and enjoyments, but it was so worth it to see that my book could enhance the Sisters’ relationship with God, their understanding of Church ministry and of our faith.”

Dr. Elliott had a chance to experience two distinct areas in India – the city of Mumbai with a population of more than 12 million people and various places (the city of Cochin as well as the rainforest) in state of Kerala which is in the southernmost part of the country.

“In both places I was fascinated with comparing the experience of Church,” she said. “In Mumbai, so much was similar to the way we do things in the US. Everything, the prayers, the songs, and the preaching is in English. This was not the case in Kerala, yet as soon as we started praying, I felt at home. I attended an ordination, and afterwards, the Bishop asked if I spoke their language (*Malayalam*), and I admitted I did not. He said, ‘Oh, then you didn’t understand anything.’ I said, ‘I understood everything except the words.’ I was amazed that the ordination lasted four hours, and ordinary Sunday Mass lasts two hours. Everyone in attendance is very dressed up but sits on the floor, with plastic chairs reserved for the elderly. I couldn’t imagine anyone attending Mass in the US, dressed up and sitting on the floor and being happy about it. There was such enthusiasm and joy evident in the singing and the participation. It was an amazing faith experience.”

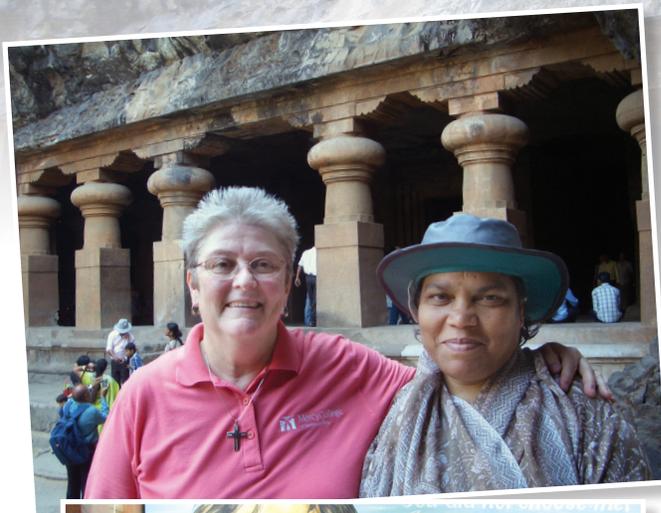
Another cultural element that impressed Dr. Elliott during her visit was the vibrant use of color in India – both in decorating and in the way people dress.

“I was amazed by the beauty of all the colors I saw every day,” she said. “Color was everywhere in the clothing, the flowers, in the chapel decorations created by the Sisters as well as in the local’s arts and crafts. The people of India are such a creative people, and so hardworking. The only people seeking donations were physically impaired. Everyone else was offering a service or an item for sale.”

Dr. Elliott will share more details of her experience in India in her presentation at Mercy College’s Spring Humanities Event from **noon to 1 p.m. Monday, March 26**. She said one of the greatest realizations she brought back from India which she plans to share with her students is that irrespective of geography, when it comes to spirituality, there is a connection that transcends distance and cultural differences. “As St. Paul wrote,” she said, “We are one body.”

MERCY COLLEGE'S SPRING HUMANITIES EVENT

Dr. Karen Elliott shares reflections on her experience in India



**Monday,
March 26**

**Noon to 1:15 p.m.
Room 3302**

Dr. Karen Elliott, C.P.P.S., recently traveled to India to teach. Her subject was *Women in Ministry and the Writings of Paul*, the title of her book published by Anselm Academic in 2010.

Dr. Karen Elliott, C.P.P.S., is Chairperson of the Religious Studies Department and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Mercy College of Ohio.

