



Diocesan e-News

WOMEN'S COLLOQUIUM

Over eighty women from twenty-one dioceses participated in the Council for Australian Catholic Women's successful Colloquium on September 17 and 18 at Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney. The theme, Women as Witnesses to the Joy of the Gospel, was developed in three phases with talks on Women and Family, Women and Church, Women and Society. Amanda Smith and Audrey Brown attended the colloquium from the Diocese of Ballarat.

"Colloquium means sacred conversation!" This is how Mrs Lyn Horner, chair of the Council for Australian Catholic Women introduced the two day conference "Women as Witnesses to the Joy of the Gospel". The eighty participants took this invitation seriously, listening intently to the speakers and opening their hearts to the voice of God and to their companions from across Australia.



The Opening Address by Selina Hasham, Director Communications for the Archdiocese of Sydney, took up the scriptural basis of the theme and examined how each of the Gospels presents women and their responses to the Resurrection event. This provided an entry point to naming the context we are each in and how we are called to be witnesses to the gospel right where we are. Selena bravely explored the impact of the clergy sexual abuse crisis on Catholics and the heartbreaking impact that this has on Catholics. Thanking Church goers for their faithfulness she urged her listeners to stick with the Church, to know that if they were to leave, a hole would be created that no one else could fill. Reminding the audience that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection precisely because they were the last witnesses to the crucifixion, she asked the women who were witnesses to suffering to be prepared to joyfully receive resurrection.

Professor Maria Harries, addressing Women in the Family, began with a punch stating "I'm not here not be provocative. We are not witnesses if we don't act. We are not here to preserve the Church as it was, we are here to build the Church." Maria drew on her life experience of being born on a leper colony in Uganda, working in the field of social work, parenting a family and serving on the Truth Justice and Healing Council. Deeply aware that women are the most impoverished and the most subject to abuse, she said "We don't have to be clergy or religious to lead, and to lead with the authority of Jesus." The pathway to renewal requires that we "nourish the feminine in our Church and we can only do that if we have nourished the feminine image of God in our lives."



Dr Michele Connelly energetically explored three passages from the Gospel of Mark: A woman healed of haemorrhage (Mk 5:24b-34), Two men seeking power (Mk 10:35-45), Three women who said nothing because they were afraid (Mk 16:1-8). She left her listeners pondering the shocking conclusion of the Gospel of Mark where women left the tomb of the resurrected Jesus saying "nothing to anyone, because they were afraid" (Mk 16:8). Rather she urged the group to bravely "tell the whole truth" (Mk 5:33) of their experience as Australian Catholics and to exercise servant leadership as recommend by Jesus (Mk 10:44)

In her dinner speech, Natalie L’Huillier examined places of hope and possible obstacles before commenting directly on issues related to women’s participation in the family/Church/society. She echoed a line from the Opening Prayer, she called on all to “Transform our lives, Transform our church, Transform our communities” in practical ways at the parish, diocesan and community level.



Another highlight of the dinner was the outstanding and uplifting choral performance of two choirs from Loreto Kiribilli supported by their teachers Larakia Jones and Josie Ryan.

On Sunday morning, starting with a popular song from 1957, "Thank heaven for little girls..." Dr Megan Brock investigated society’s view of women through the work of French thinker, Foucault. She raised questions about language, ideas and values. Using a variety of current stories that expressed opinions about women, she said “Continually question who benefits within the discourse and who is oppressed. Resistance offers new knowledge and gives power to emerging discourses”.

The Colloquium concluded with an enthusiasm about the plans for a National Synod and a passion to promote women’s voices in future decision making in the Church. Within the closing liturgy, women committed to prayerfully and practically support each other in their joyful witnessing to the Gospel.

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