

VINE AND BRANCHES YEARNING TO BELONG

The Catholic Diocese of Ballarat was well represented at the recent *Vine and Branches* National Pastoral Leaders and Planners Conference in Melbourne, held September 4-7. In attendance were from Hamilton Parish, Fr Paddy Mugavin and parish staff members Noreen McLeish and John Hockey, together with Sr Veronica Lawson who led a workshop and Sr Pam Barlow from the Mercy Sisters, as well as Thomas Thekkumury from the Diocesan Pastoral Council, and Amanda Smith, Diocesan Pastoral Services Consultant. There was much discussion amongst the two hundred participants from all around Australia who heard excellent presentations and participated in workshops.



Thomas Thekkumury, John Hockey, Amanda Smith, Noreen McLeish, Fr Kevin Lenehan

Music and poetry, songs and silence were woven through the conference led by Dr Maeve Louise Heaney, musician, composer and theologian from Australian Catholic University. Dr Heaney joined Dr Richard Gaillardetz from Boston College, social researcher Hugh Mackay, broadcaster Geraldine Doogue and Archbishop Mark Coleridge as keynote speakers.

Richard Gaillardetz gave two sessions, speaking on 'Wrestling with the Church in Times of Scandal: Why belonging to the Church still matters' and 'Pope Francis and the Church of tomorrow'. One feature of the conference was the fully engaged and passionate but also carefully argued presentations, and Dr Gaillardetz was a great example of a compelling speaker who made you want to know more about the Church and faith.

Geraldine Doogue spoke on 'Living through the *Holy Saturday* of our Australian Church experience'. She spoke of "the complex virtue of humility." She also elaborated on the idea of doing acts of "high symbolic value."

Hugh Mackay gave a very informative and concise summary of the contemporary faith situation in Australia. He also spoke about young people growing up "in the most dislocated period of our history", of the high rates of depression amongst young people in this country, and of how they are taught to expect happiness yet are more criticized, more "rubbished" than any previous generation.

Maeve Heaney led beautiful opening and closing liturgies, morning prayer each day and music and reflection after each keynote speaker. Throughout the conference, she drew together themes and ideas from those attending into a song of gentle immersion that we all sang.

The workshop presentations ranged across the themes of belonging, planning and engagement. Sr Veronica Lawson's workshop was on the scripture text of the conference title, exploring scripture through ecological eyes. Dr Clare Johnson who directs the new Centre for Liturgy at ACU led an informative workshop on ritual, liturgical celebration and the Eucharist in schools and parishes. Dr Kevin Lenehan's workshop shared insights into *Catholic Identity in a Disenchanted World* and in the workshop led by Kelly Paget, from Catholic Youth Broken Bay, participants used their phones or tablets to contribute ideas to build an on-screen visual analysis of the key ingredients and also the challenges of school-parish collaboration - a great discussion and a very useful online tool to encourage and record participation.



Archbishop Coleridge presented on the final day about the process for the 2020 Plenary Conference: "everything is on the table." The final words were liturgical, words of prayer, of looking into ourselves. "Love interrupts and it hurts if you let yourself move with the truth as it cuts in and opens your mind Dancing through our lives ... But to live is to grow in the newness you hold in your hands ... Will you stand for a future unknown?" (ML Heaney).

It is hoped that videos of the keynote addresses will be available online soon – links will be on the Ballarat diocese website. Richard Gaillardetz has published some very informative books.

Amanda Smith – Pastoral Services Consultant

Pictured above: Dr Richard Gaillardetz, Archbishop Mark Coleridge and Dr Maeve Heaney, keynote speakers