

PROCLAIM 2014

The theme for the 2014 Proclaim Conference was "Living the Joy of the Gospel in Parishes" and was based upon Pope Francis' encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*. The Diocesan Foundation offered sponsorship which enabled forty-six people from the Ballarat Diocese to attend from the parishes of Ballarat, Birchip, Colac, Cororooke, Gordon, Hamilton, Horsham, Maryborough, Ouyen, Port Fairy, Redan, Sebastopol, Stawell, Warrnambool, Warrnambool East, Warrnambool West and Wendouree. Also in attendance were Bishop Paul, Frs Justin Driscoll, Ed Moloney, James Kerr, Peter Hudson, Andrew Hayes and John Corrigan

We were so very fortunate to have keynote speakers Fr Michael White and Tom Corcoran from the Church of the Nativity Parish, Timonium, North Baltimore USA present on "Make Church Matter" and "Moving people from Consumers to Contributors." Fr Michael and Tom entertained and informed us with their story of how they have re-built their parish. Over the course of ten years they have made many plans, implemented changes, made many mistakes and have celebrated much success. Together they have published the books *Rebuilt: Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost, Making Church Matter*.



Fr Michael White and Tom Corcoran
photo first published at <http://mediablog.catholic.org.au/?p=3181>

Over the three day conference the words "Gospel, Music, Ministries, Message" were repeated frequently as being so important in a successful parish. We were challenged to see how these words fit in our own parishes:

- Are we a welcoming parish community?
- Are we inviting people to join us at Mass?
- Are we providing a worthwhile Mass experience that people will want to join us again?
- Are we inviting people to join our ministries? And when people join ministry teams, are we willing to welcome and support them?
- Are we making our parish a place people want to be a part of?
- Are we reaching out to those people in our parish who are not in the pews?



We were reminded that we do not "own" any positions in our Church, but that we are fulfilling a ministry and should be inviting others to join us so that our Churches continue to operate well into the future.

There were twenty-eight workshops to attend during the Conference, including presentations by Fr Justin and Amanda Smith, Diocesan Pastoral Services Consultant. The workshops covered: Parish Life and Growth; Leadership and Vision; New Media; Kerygma;

Marriage and Family; Directed Outreach; Liturgy; Youth; and Prayer. People could choose to attend four workshops that were of interest to them.

Mass was celebrated every day at Our Lady of Dolours Parish Church in Chatswood. This beautiful Church provided a lovely setting for us to reflect and pray together as a whole group. Bishop Paul Bird celebrated Mass for the conference on Saturday morning and his homily can be read below:



Congratulations must be extended to the organising Committee of this Conference. We have been provided with inspiration, enthusiasm and strategies to return to our parishes to begin proclaiming the gospel and sharing what we learnt from this wonderful Conference.

Fr Michael White has written a blog about his trip to Sydney: <http://nativitypastor.tv/?p=1784>

Julie Boyd – Pastoral Ministry Office

Comments from attendees include:

The Proclaim Conference in Sydney was a wonderful, inspiring three days. Hopefully we can all take some of these good ideas back to our parishes and start implementing them with the help of our parish priests.

June Raeburn – St Patrick's Parish Stawell

I was proud to be a part of the Ballarat team attending Proclaim and also grateful to Bishop Paul, to Amanda Smith and all those involved in the organisation of getting us up there.

I wasn't sure what to expect but I was mildly cautious given the number of conferences I have attended in my professional life that have had no 'take home for Monday morning message'. At Proclaim, however, through many opportunities to listen and speak to other disciples, I was reconfirmed that we can only achieve the spreading of the greatest news on the planet through humble, patient and loving dialogue. God is alive in His Church!

The description of the Church as a 'movement' hit home for me. In a movement there is...movement! The 'mover' can be recognised by their love for Christ and a sincere vision to share that great call to become disciples of Jesus Christ, to become another visible presence of God in the world.

At the parish level, we were called throughout the conference to change into a person for others. We are called to Reach out and not Preach out! The 'Life to the Full' is pure gift from God and we do not own this gift. It is our responsibility to pass the Fullness of this gift to everyone both in the Church and those not here yet.

Shawn McLindon – St Patrick's Cathedral Parish Ballarat

Faith can be many things to many people; empowering, spiritual, loving, divine. If you ever needed any evidence, we experienced all this and more at the national Proclaim Conference held in Sydney recently.

Five hundred plus people attended the conference, forty-six from the Ballarat Diocese which is an amazing accomplishment and a feather in Bishop Paul's cap.

'Proclaim' was an amazing gathering of likeminded people. Most Catholics I know tend to keep their faith close to their heart. No breast beating in my part of the world! But 'Proclaim' was a place we could be honest about our faith, where we could be open with each other because we all had one goal: to reach those who are not active in the life of the church. Those people who have faith but have given up on the Mass. Our lives are busy. We work all week, we play sport, we go out socially and now we can do our groceries on a Sunday or browse the Malls. Why would we try to squeeze in Mass when we are this busy already?

We learnt a lot about our faith and our role in the Parish. We went in with ideas some got thrown out along the way, some ideas we were able to develop and other ideas were introduced that were completely new to us. But most importantly of all, we all came home with a plan.

When we arrived back in Melbourne, we bumped into an old friend who didn't know we had just attended the Proclaim conference. But immediately the conversation turned to her guilt about not making time to attend Mass. The guilt may not have stemmed from the fear of burning for all eternity but a guilt that stems from letting herself and her personal faith down. An evangelization moment if ever there was one!

We look forward to meeting again with our new friends within the diocese and reaffirming the motivation we were fortunate to receive from those around us at the Conference.

Noeline Hogan and Bernadette O'Donnell - St Mary's Parish Birchip

*Last week we shared the privilege of participating in the three day Proclaim 2014 "Living the Joy of the Gospel in the Parishes" event in Sydney. This conference was hosted by the Australian Catholic Bishops Commission for Evangelisation and provided the opportunity to explore avenues for building parishes and sharing the Good News. The Conference brought together well over five hundred participants from across Australia and beyond – and was inspired by Fr Michael White and Tom Corcoran, Authors of the book *Rebuilt: Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost, Making Church Matter*. These two men have worked together to rebuild their parish in North Baltimore (USA). While North Baltimore is a long way from our Parish of Gordon, so much of their story resonated with the challenges that we face, as we consider what is important in the spiritual nourishment and development of our parish community. We are left reflecting on what can we do to shape a more welcoming and spiritually nourishing parish that more and more people want to actively participate in. Our challenge is 'to make church matter' to the vast majority of people who nominate as Catholic on their census form but remain absent from our celebrations of Mass. The great news is that we are not alone!*

In follow-up to the Conference we will be meeting with Fr Ed Moloney, our Supervising Priest, to reflect on key messages and consider opportunities for the future of our community and we look forward to keeping you informed as this story unfolds.

Sue Daly, Lin Bowers and Joan Bourke – St Patrick's Parish Gordon

Bishop Paul Bird's Homily at the Proclaim Conference

Our Lady of Dolours Parish Church in Chatswood – August 23 2014

During the ordination of a deacon, the bishop places the book of the gospels in the hands of the new deacon and says: "Receive the gospel of Christ, whose herald you now are. Believe what you read, preach what you believe, and practise what you preach."

This is good advice for deacons. When deacons give homilies, their homilies will have much more impact if they themselves practise what they preach. It's also good advice for each one of us as far as spreading the gospel is concerned. When we speak about following Christ, our words will be much more effective if they are backed up by the way we live.

In the gospel that we heard a few moments ago, Jesus referred to people who had a responsibility to guide others by their preaching but he pointed out that some of these people did not put their own teaching into practice. They did not practise what they preached. So Jesus said to his listeners that they might find helpful guidance in what these preachers said but that they should be wary of what these preachers did. "Listen to what they say but do not be guided by what they do."

There is a problem if our actions do not match our words. St Charles Borromeo said that our life and conduct should be sermons in themselves. He was speaking particularly to those who were preachers and teachers but his words have a message for us all. He said: "Is your duty preaching and teaching? Make sure in the first place that your life and conduct are sermons in themselves. Do not give people cause to purse their lips and shake their heads during your sermons, since they have heard you before, preaching one thing, then seen you doing the exact opposite."

If we say one thing and do another, our actions will undermine our words. On the other hand, if what we say is what we do ourselves, then our words and our lives will work together to give a clear message.

In 1975, Pope Paul VI published a document called "Evangelii nuntiandi", "Announcing the good news". He highlighted the importance of bearing witness to the message of Christ in our lives as well as in our words. In fact, he said that people would only take notice of the message if it was supported by the way we live. This is what he wrote:

"The first means of evangelisation is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbour with limitless zeal. People today listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelise the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus – the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of holiness." (Evangelii Nuntiandi, par 41)

Last Saturday, Pope Francis beatified 124 Korean martyrs. He spoke of the great witness they had given to Christ. They lived for Christ. They were even prepared to die for Christ. Pope Francis said that these martyrs challenge us to consider our own faith. This is what Pope Francis said: "The martyrs call out to us to put Christ first and to see all else in this world in relation to him and his eternal kingdom. They challenge us to think about what, if anything, we ourselves would be willing to die for."

During these days of the Proclaim conference, we have a wonderful opportunity to hear about how we can share the good news of Christ. May the Lord grant us the grace to witness to the gospel, not only by our words but also by our lives. May we truly practise what we preach.

Paul Bird CSSR