

## “COMMUNICATING HOPE AND TRUST”

The Australian Catholic Communications Congress, organised every three years by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) was held recently at the Rydges Hotel in Brisbane. The theme of the Congress this year was “Communicating Hope and Trust”, inspired by Pope Francis’s message for World Communications Day 2017. It acknowledges that both hope and trust are in short supply today, including – or especially – when it comes to media and communications. The Congress examined how those working in the Catholic Church can do their best to restore some hope and trust in the world. For the first time, the Australian Catholic Communications Congress was held in partnership with the Australasian Catholic Press Association Conference, which attracts leading journalists, editors and communications experts from across Australia and New Zealand.

The Congress was opened by Archbishop Peter Comensoli, Bishops’ Delegate for Media and he spoke on the theme of communicating hope and truth and that those in Catholic media are communicators. We are communicators of faith, which involves both listening and action.

‘The Power of Story -- Storytelling in Catholic and Indigenous Culture’ was the topic that Theresa Ardler, Indigenous Educator, Gweagal Aboriginal woman spoke on as first keynote speaker. Theresa intertwined both the indigenous and Catholic stories of creation and reminded us to keep telling our stories and to share these with the next generation.



A keynote address by Greg Erlandson, a former Vatican journalist and current Editor-in-Chief of the US-based Catholic News Service was straight to the point in highlighting the bewilderment of the sexual abuse crisis in America. Greg sees Pope Francis as “a beacon of hope. He is challenging the Church in a prophetic way, challenging clericalism, challenging self-centredness, challenging consumerism.” Greg urged all communicators to continue to share the good news of the church, “And that much hope can be found in stories at the Church’s grassroots.”



The program was full with many presentations, expert panels with Q&A and participant workshops which included Anita Quigley, Archdiocese of Sydney Director of Communications and News Media and former Executive Editor of NewsLocal, Australia's largest community newspaper group speaking on “Good news is local news”, Roby Curtis, Director of Blind Eye Ministries, Brisbane-based outreach supporting the most vulnerable, held a session on “Telling our story: Outreach to the Poor and Marginalised” Monica Doumit, Communications Manager, Coalition for Marriage and Michael Cooney, National Director, The Australian

Republic Movement, author of The Gillard Project, talked about “Campaigning for change or not” as well as many others speaking on interesting topics.

Former ABC presenter, author and commentator Madonna King delivered a keynote address, "Hope, Trust and the Kitchen Table". Madonna was captivating in delivering her address, talking about her two recent books “Fathers and Daughters” and “Being 14”. Madonna interviewed over five-hundred girls and many fathers, as well as leading psychologists, school principals, CEOs, police, guidance counsellors and neuroscientists, to get answers that mothers, fathers and daughters need to know about father/daughter relationships, exploring a father's role in his daughter's life from a daughter's perspective as well as the father's. In “Being 14”, Madonna examined the key challenges that face 14 year old girls and their parents, interviewing two hundred girls across Australia. One aspect that came up over and over again, was the girls hope that their parents will listen to them.

The Congress Mass was held at St Mary's Parish Church, South Brisbane, celebrated by Archbishop Peter Comensoli and Archbishop Mark Coleridge and con-celebrants. Following Mass was the Congress dinner, held at The Rydges. We were thoroughly entertained by Matthew Hayden in an interview style address with Archbishop Mark. Stories from Matthew's life and faith provided great enjoyment to all present.

The final day of the congress included a panel discussion with Greg Erlandson and Professor Jacqui Ewart, Griffith University on “How can the Church communicate hope and trust in Australian society today?” and a presentation on the Plenary Council 2020 with facilitator Lana Turvey-Collins. Lana's presentation was very informative with an overview of listening and dialogue sessions that have been held around the country so far, including statistics and details on responses received. Lana advised that listening and dialogue sessions can be held anywhere, informally or formally, at any place where people are gathered - the time is now to share your story.



The Congress always provides a great opportunity to renew acquaintances and make new connections with others in the communications area of their dioceses, and this year's message of communicating hope and trust is one that needs to be at the top of our list.

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