

*Proclaim 2018 was a national conference which engaged parishes and faith communities in a conversation focusing on five key areas: Leadership, Culture Change, Young People, Belonging and Evangelisation. The Ballarat Diocesan Foundation provided sponsorship for a number of people from the Diocese to attend this Conference. Diocesan e-News is featuring stories from participants.*

It was a privilege to be able to attend Proclaim 2018 Conference which was both inspiring and thought provoking, a dichotomy of upbeat, cheerful celebration of evangelism along with multiply stated criticism of the church hierarchy's response to historical sexual abuse. Cardinal John Dew's keynote address "Leadership in Times of Change" took the theme "make your home in me" interpreting home as "encounter", which taken with Ron Huntly's keynote address "Culture Change" when he speaks of discipleship needing a transformational encounter, is a language that gives both an image and a vision.



Cardinal Dew also spoke about going out and mission, and listed several reasons that may stop us fulfilling mission including not understanding evangelism, embarrassment, lack of opportunities, fear of rejection and even our own doubts. Ron Huntly, who is on the Leadership Team of Divine renovation, spoke of the culture of parish communities. The Books, "Divine Renovation", "Divine Renovation Apprentice" and "Divine Renovation Guidebook" are very readable experiences and guides to developing good leadership in parish communities, including recognising good leadership behaviours as well as toxic behaviours. This is a complementary addition to the "Rebuilt" books that were written by Fr Tom White who was a keynote speaker at Proclaim 2014, and will be very helpful for building our own parishes.

Coming from a Diocese which has been gravely affected by clerical sexual abuse, which has made me personally feel humbled but somewhat hopeful, where the ribbons on the fence surrounding St Patrick's Cathedral have two diametrically opposed responses, one of acceptance and the other of wishing them to be removed, the conference gave me an opportunity to hear of "secondary victims" of sexual abuse whose professional and personal lives had been impacted because of their support of a priest who had later been convicted, and to recognise the divisions in the church community to the same sex marriage debate where having a 'yes' vote had meant the loss of a friend.

The message of the Conference is one of the gift of 'encounter' and has given the tools to go forward in mission.

*Sandra Dillon*

*Make your home in me...John 15:4*

The Proclaim conference was a wonderful opportunity for pastoral leaders across the country to kick start the preparations for the Plenary Council 2020. The conference provided an excellent opportunity for leaders across the country to come together in prayer and listen to what the Spirit was telling the Church.

The highlight of the conference was the call to Evangelisation. The Church must heed the voice of Pope Francis to go to the peripheries to reach out to those who are marginalised, wounded, hurting and in need of God's forgiving merciful love. The conference also pointed to the importance of a culture change in leadership in our parishes that is vital for evangelisation. We need to change our toxic culture of being chronically cranky Christians and become a healthy Christian culture where there is true freedom to welcome, correct and encourage each other and to acknowledge that it is okay to make mistakes. Our Leadership teams need to be places where people feel safe, welcomed and not judged on their ability because God looks at the heart and not on external or outward appearance. Our theme should be "First fall in love with Jesus" and after that comes the mission.

Church should be a place where people experience the love of Christ and know that we are in the life transformation business. The change should start with a conversion to Christ, which is followed by the conversion to his Church. Then comes the conversion to his mission. Great leadership comes with a great vision. Great leaders empower those under their care and help others flourish and unleash their gifts. A great leader brings out the best in people who work within his team.

We are called to be a Church with a vision. Our focus should be to bring the culture of change and make our Diocese a home where every person can experience a sense of belonging. Our mission is to evangelise and lead the people of God to a deeper experience of God's great love that is freely gifted to every child of God.

*Thomas Thekkumury*



*From left (back): Thomas Thukkumury, Jess Salazar, Jamin Howman, Ann-Maree Convery, Sandra Dillon, (front) Sue Crowe, Amanda Smith, Marie Shaddock.*