

On August 17, Damascus College Ballarat held its annual faith development day for all staff members. The facilitator for the day was renowned Jesuit Fr Richard Leonard. He has degrees in arts and education, as well as a Master's degree in theology. Fr Richard did graduate studies at the London Film School and has a PhD from the University of Melbourne. He directs the Australian Catholic Office for Film & Broadcasting, is an Honorary Fellow of the Australian Catholic University and author of many books.

Fr Richard was returning for a third visit to the Damascus College, this time addressing the challenging topic, "What are we doing on earth for Christ's sake?" This workshop looked at the pivotal question of mission and identity for a Catholic School: how can we unashamedly promote religious belief, Christian faith and an active membership of the Catholic Church in a world that increasingly says we are nuts to believe anything other than that which we can see and hear and test, that all religious collectives are deluded and the Catholic Church is particularly open to criticism.

Starting with a profile of religious affiliation in Australia, Fr Richard challenged the popular wisdom that religion is not a significant player in the lives of Australians. He challenged the some of the commentary that tends to denigrate all religious thinking as ill-conceived and the charge that religion is the cause of all war. Turning to stories of ordinary people who became extraordinary examples of saintly lives, Fr Richard showed that belief in Jesus and working with compassion for peace and justice remains a might powerful way to live an authentic life that makes a difference.

Fr Richard returns to Ballarat later in the year for sessions at Mercy Performing Arts Centre at Our Lady Help of Christians School Wendouree in October.

*Tony Haintz – Assistant Principal*



*Fr Richard pictured with Matt Byrne, Principal of Damascus College Ballarat*