

MEDIA RELEASE

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For immediate release

Spirit of inclusivity, diversity encouraged on Day 1 of mission conference

Diversity, inclusivity and joy were the standout themes, with a few surprises coming on the opening day of the Mission: one heart many voices conference in Sydney.

Dr Carol Zinn ssj and Bishop Paul Tighe delivered strong keynotes on the first morning of the fourth biennial conference, both of which urged the 400 participants gathered at the SMC Conference and Function Centre to take an open, welcoming and joyful approach to living the Gospel.

Dr Zinn spoke of leading mission, engaging the audience with an immersive presentation which included singing and audience participation. She spoke of the importance of trust.

'Leadership for mission is about trust,' she said. 'Without having that relationship of trust with God, it is almost impossible to lead mission.'

The first part of Dr Zinn's address focused on living the joy of the Gospel, the focus of Pope Francis' first apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and a key theme of the conference. Critical to doing so, she said, is choosing love over fear, inclusivity over exclusivity, and mercy over judgement.

'We have a choice of how we're going to be and how we're not going to be, and we have to know the difference,' she said.

Acknowledging that it is sometimes difficult to do mission in our home context and step out as Jesus did, Dr Zinn encouraged the audience to witness. 'We must witness to the Gospel if we are to be prophetic in our response,' she said. 'Practicing the Gospel requires a mutuality response; humility and curiosity are necessary to break down polarisation.'

Bishop Tighe, the Vatican's Secretary for the Pontifical Council on Culture, spoke of the challenges facing the Church in today's digital world. 'One of the things I've found is that there are great things happening at local levels, and that is the richness of our Church,' he said.

'Among the main challenges we face is the question, what does it mean to be Church in the geography and demography of the digital world?'

The answer comes in authenticity, witness and what we communicate, he said. 'When we communicate, we are communicating the person of Jesus. It is a person, not just a message.'

Ironically, the complexity of the digital age can still be effectively met with simplicity, as proven in an example that caught Monday's audience off-guard. 'The single greatest communication tool the Church has is still a smoke signal,' Bishop Tighe said.

'Thousands of TV cameras watch a chimney for days, sometimes weeks, during the election of a new pope.'

Dr Zinn and Bishop Tighe then engaged in a facilitated discussion with the audience, taking questions mostly on communicating the Gospel in such a rapidly evolving digital world.

Earlier, the conference opened with a moving acknowledgement of country by representatives from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) and a mesmerising



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performance from the Catholic Schools Performing Arts group, focused on inclusion and multiculturalism.

The conference continues through Wednesday with conversations and keynotes to come, featuring Mrs Ravina Waldren, Mr Robert Fitzgerald, Dr Robyn Miller and Archbishop Timothy Costelloe with Lana Turvey-Collins among others.

For more information on the conference, head to www.mohmv.com.au.

ENDS