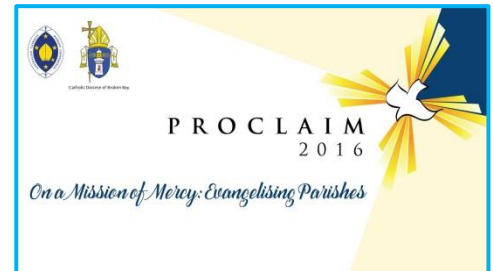


PROCLAIM 2016 was a conference on parish evangelisation organised and hosted by the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. Held over three days, September 1-3, PROCLAIM 2016 invited participants to discuss, exchange and learn fresh ways in which parishes can become evangelising communities of the twenty-first century, filled with missionary disciples that announce the profound joy and tender mercy of the Gospel.



Building on conferences in 2012 and 2014, PROCLAIM 2016's theme was "On a Mission of Mercy: Evangelising Parishes". Taking place in this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, and on the eve of the canonisation of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta, PROCLAIM 2016 embraced the challenges from Pope Francis for the joyful and pastoral conversion of our parishes, so that our practices, resources, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world (*Evangelii Gaudium* 27).

The Ballarat Diocesan Foundation provided sponsorship for people to attend this Conference. Applications were received, which addressed the selection criteria and the following people were awarded the sponsorship:

Noeline Hogan and Bernadette O'Donnell, Birchip Parish  
Joan Bourke and Michael Ryan, Gordon Parish  
Ann-Maree Convery, Cororooke Parish  
Carolyn Stanhope and Kymhan Watson, Hamilton Parish  
Mary Dagleish and Robert Niehus, Horsham Parish

### *Attendees to the Conference offer the following reflections:*

#### **Gordon Parish**

Michael Ryan and I were very fortunate to represent the Gordon Parish at the Proclaim 2016 Conference, "On a Mission of Mercy: Evangelising Parishes." The Keynote speakers were Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, Dr Susan Timoney, also from the Archdiocese of Washington, Mr Daniel Ang, Diocese of Broken Bay and Bishop Hudson from Westminster. They all spoke about the role of a Parish, with many references to Pope Francis and Pope John XXIII. Three of these references that really made an impact to me were:

- Parish is the Village Fountain (Pope John XXIII)
- Oasis of Mercy (Pope Francis)
- Local Neighbourhoods of Grace (Bishop Peter Comensoli, Bishop of Broken Bay)



There was also an emphasis on Parishes being in Maintenance Mode - they need to move onto more of an outreach role. We both attended five very informative and thought provoking workshops and have returned to our Parish with ideas and a new energy to pass on. We thank the Diocese for supporting us to participate in this amazing experience and we would recommend anyone who may have the opportunity to attend a Proclaim Conference in the future to do so.

We also attended three inspiring liturgies, the first celebrated by Bishop Comensoli which was beautiful. The conference was also a great opportunity to meet and network with other parish workers from the Ballarat Diocese. We left the conference feeling tired but energized in what our Parish is doing and what direction we are heading towards, but we could do more.

*Joan Bourke - Moderator, Gordon Parish*

## Birchip Parish

Although Proclaim 2014 was a huge learning curve for me I got so much more from the 2016 event. In 2014 the presenters were inspiring but to get answers they wanted you to buy their book (which I did just last week!). This year Cardinal Wuerl (Washington Diocese) and Dr Susan Timoney were more forthcoming with ideas:

- The Parish is not an outdated institution because it has the flexibility that allows evangelisation;
- What do Catholics bring to our society....what would the world be like without us reinforcing the traditions of our church. Thou shalt not kill, love one another and other traditions;
- Cardinal Wuerl described a "Cultural Tsunami" taking over our world. Divorce, diminished recognition of our faith;
- The parish should be an inviting community, go out, listen, encounter. Use courage, be bold. It's our turn to bring the good news to others;
- "I don't have to go to church to have faith". As Catholics we come together to share sacraments, get nourished as a Parish Community, give each other comfort and support;
- The Catholic school community is not necessarily a part of the church community;
- Dr Susan Timoney questions whether we have too many churchy words. They can be overwhelming and perplexing to lay people;
- Social media should be encouraged. A Parish Facebook page is a way of hooking people up;
- Your belief is often looked upon with a certain respect by onlookers;
- You can accomplish anything if it doesn't matter who gets the credit.

### **Communication**

What are we attempting to do, what is the goal?

### **Consultation**

Listen; Feedback; Hearing back.

### **Collaboration**

Work together in a coherent manner

Cardinal Wuerl told the story of a huge media campaign called, "The light is on for you." They advertised on buses, radio, etc., that Reconciliation would be held in the church every Wednesday evening during Lent - the light will be on for you. By the end of Lent they could barely keep up with all the faithful coming to confession. Yet these people weren't Mass goers. It all starts with the invitation!



- Dr Susan Timoney says parishes should be inviting and welcoming through worship, education, service.
- Is there something that draws people back to our Parish, not just weddings, baptisms, sacraments?
- Jesus was always on the move. He didn't wait for people to come to him. He was always evangelising.
- When you leave the conference and someone asks you what you did on the weekend, don't just say you went to some church thing. Don't be anonymous!

- We are the evangelisers in our homes and neighbourhoods. The Priest can't always be there.
- Does your local supermarket reflect the same people in the pews?
- What signs of welcome would I see if I came to your Parish? What is on your pin up board? Is it welcoming?
- Unlock the doors. Locked churches are not welcoming!

- Do the Mass times suit? There is a moving focus to Sunday evening Masses.
- Dr Daniel Ang says we need a *vision and a strategy* otherwise we are just 'adding on' to an already busy Parish.
- The heart of evangelism is one person telling another person how Jesus has changed their life.
- Marguerite Martin says Sacraments are not academic exercises. Everyone is allowed to do their Sacraments regardless of intellectual ability.
- At Baptism there are no conditions attached to how parents will exercise their responsibility to educate their child in faith.
- How do we keep them coming to Mass after the sacraments?
- What is your Parish good and bad at?

Proclaim 2016 was all about being inclusive and welcoming. We do the inviting, the Holy Spirit does the calling. Music has an important role in the Mass, it needs to be engaging. Our outreach is focused on Parish Ministry. Don't just speak the words, live the words. How do we invite the people back to the church? Conversation? Make no apologies, desire to share it!

Plans for the future of the Birchip Parish are already underway.

*Noeline Hogan*

### **Cororooke Parish**

My immense gratitude to the Ballarat Diocese for the opportunity to be a delegate at Proclaim 2016. One of the workshops I attended was delivered by Michael Magnan and I think we all came away full of enthusiasm, with *Our Hearts Set On Fire!*

I would like to pass on to the Pastoral Ministry Office and to Bishop Paul that in the acknowledgements, just before the commissioning and sending forth of the delegates as re-energised ministers of evangelisation, the Bishop of Broken Bay, Most Rev Peter Comensoli, thanked the delegates from both Ballarat and Maitland-Newcastle Dioceses, commending us on our willingness to participate in Proclaim 2016 in a time when our commitment to the Catholic faith may be questioned. I was extremely moved by Bishop Peter's personal heartfelt message of empathy and of solidarity. Together in faith.



*Ann-Maree Convery - Parish Leadership Team*