

MEDIA RELEASE

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For immediate release

We must listen to the vulnerable and marginalised, conference told

The focus turned on Day 2 of the 'Mission: one heart many voices' conference in Sydney towards the marginalised and vulnerable as Robyn Miller, Robert Fitzgerald and Ravina Waldren led a stirring morning.

Dr Miller, the CEO of Mackillop Family Services, began the day's proceedings with a keynote address at the ever-popular conference breakfast, encouraging unity, particularly in leadership for mission.

'We live in a time of extraordinary events and it's one where we need to hold our nerve as a Church,' she said. 'In leadership, it is often a painful and lonely journey. The first thing is to form community, and form a connectedness with others.'

Dr Miller set the tone for a day which would focus on listening to and caring for our marginalised and vulnerable.

'We have seen an 82 percent increase in children coming into care in the last decade and Aboriginal children are ten times over-represented,' she said. 'It's happened on our watch. We have to think differently about how we set the policy and how we advocate for the government to fund.'

Later, Dr Miller joined Murri Ministry Coordinator Mrs Ravina Waldren and Productivity Commissioner Mr Robert Fitzgerald in a discussion facilitated by Director of the Edmund Rice Centre and President of the Refugee Council of Australia, Mr Phil Glendenning.

The session was titled 'Supporting and protecting vulnerable and marginalised people', but the message was very clearly about listening.

Mrs Waldren spoke first, grounding the discussion in the historical treatment of Indigenous Australians. 'We all need healing, because history has divided us,' she said. 'As a result we are still hiding our true Australian identity.'

'How do we bring about the healing?' she questioned. 'It requires individual and social actions; charity.'

Mrs Waldren identified recognition, respect, restitution and recompense as necessary elements for reconciliation to be possible, challenging the audience to lead change in their own context. 'Visit significant sites, especially of trauma, and familiarise yourself with the history. Join locally based reconciliation groups.'

'It has to be a forward thought, not an afterthought.'

Mr Fitzgerald said recent events demanded change, particularly in our attention to the voices of vulnerable children. 'In the past, there wasn't enough care for what children were saying,' he said. 'Today they're speaking, and they're speaking loudly.'

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Sexual Abuse informed much of the discussion. With Dr Miller and Mr Fitzgerald having each been involved in the process, they and Mrs Waldren all pushed the importance of listening rather than imposing solutions. 'In our work recently [with MFS], we have found the importance of listening to very young children.'

As the only practicing Catholic to sit on the Royal Commission, Mr Fitzgerald shed light on what he saw as the implications of the findings. 'The public nature of the process means we are liable to be held more accountable than in the past,' he said.

'If we do not respond, and we have been given ways to respond, we will be judged far more harshly than we now judge those responsible for wrongdoings of the past.'

He also referred to another historically marginalised voice. 'It was agreed [during the Commission] that if women had had greater involvement in the decision-making around responses to institutional abuse, the response would have been different.'

Father Ted Nowak, the Secretary of the Society of the Propagation of the Faith also spoke at the breakfast, taking the opportunity to promote the upcoming Extraordinary Missionary Month, called by Pope Francis to coincide with the centenary of *Maximum Illud*, Pope Benedict XV's post-war encyclical on mission.

'To be effective evangelisers,' Fr Nowak said, 'we must develop a taste for the depths of human experience.'

'The Extraordinary Missionary Month is an opportunity to ponder the Church's mission and our engagement in that mission.'

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

High resolution photos and interviews are available. Contact Matthew Poynting for details.