

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **For immediate release**

#### **'Mission: one heart many voices' Conference – Day 1 Wrap**

A stirring keynote address by Evelyn Parkin underscored an emotional first day of the 'Mission: one heart many voices' conference in Sydney.

The NATSICC Vice-Chair was joined by Father Frank Brennan and Ginn Fourie as guest speakers on the opening morning of a conference largely centred on themes of mission, reconciliation and mercy.

Set in the context of her own Indigenous spirituality and encounter with the Christian faith, Ms Parkin, a Quandamooka woman and fourth generation Catholic from Queensland's Stradbroke Island, spoke with deep emotion of the need for Australia and its First People to reconcile fully, both in the Church and in broader life.

'I believe that healing can be achieved by everyone through participation in prayer for the spirit to sweep our land and waters,' she said. 'Then can we truly discover our Australian faith identity.'

'Through dialogue and leadership we can share our Aboriginal theology so that all can know the Great South Land of the Holy Spirit.'

Ms Parkin had earlier opened the conference with former NATSICC chair Dr Elsie Heiss, who delivered the Welcome to Country.

The themes that will carry through the next two days of Australia's premier mission conference became resoundingly clear early on.

In a stage simulation, the incredible story of Ginn Fourie, Letlapa Mphalele and the post-apartheid South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was played out.

Ms Fourie and Mr Mphalele's encounter at the hearings, and their subsequent reconciliation are an extraordinarily moving example of what Father Brennan described as "forgiving the unforgivable".

At the conclusion of the simulation, Ms Fourie herself then appeared on stage and spoke personally of her relationship with Mr Mphalele, which has grown through their work with the Lyndi Fourie Foundation, promoting healing through reconciliation.

As Ms Fourie spoke, Mr Mphalele was attending a conference in Spain. The topic? Forgiveness, of course. 'He sent me a message just before I came here today and said, "the story will be empty without you," she said. 'I feel the same way without him here.'

Father Brennan, later reflected on Ms Fourie's story in his own keynote address, which also tied together concepts of reconciliation and progress. 'Forgiveness of the unforgivable has to come from the depths of the human heart,' he said. 'It doesn't happen often, but when it does it speaks of grace.'

Father Brennan told the gathering that mutuality and faith were essential components of forgiveness. 'Forgiveness is a shared occasion that is dependent on relationship,' he said. 'Our relationship with God forms the basis for our relationship with each other.'

The afternoon session saw the first of over forty workshops, masterclasses, facilitated conversations and experiences planned for the three days, each channelling the core themes and challenging attendees to consider the future Church they want to foster.

Day 2 of the conference begins with a breakfast keynote from Bishop of Parramatta Vincent Long van Nguyen, who will speak of his unique vision for the Church, framed by his experience as a refugee. Oxford University lecturer in mission Dr Cathy Ross and Sister Elaine Wainwright rsm will also speak on Day 2.