



The Great Grace Receiving Vatican II Today

GREAT GRACE CONFERENCE AUSTRALIA'S MOST SIGNIFICANT RELIGIOUS EVENT SINCE WYD08

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More than 650 men and women from parishes, communities and cities across Australia and Oceania will attend The Great Grace Conference in Sydney next May with thousands more participating via live podcasts and streaming.

A national conference of international significance and the most important religious gathering in Sydney since the city hosted World Youth Day back in 2008, the Great Grace will focus on the teachings of Vatican II and not only look back at the momentous events Vatican II bequeathed to the Church 50 years ago, but look ahead to its vital and continuing legacy into the future.

The Conference, featuring 30 intensive workshops as well as a line up of nine of some of the world's most renowned theological minds and authorities on Vatican II will run from 20 - 23 May. It is regarded with such importance that students attending the intensive four day event will be able to claim study credits for courses they are taking at the Australian Catholic University, University of Notre Dame, the Catholic Institute of Sydney, Campion College or the Broken Bay Institute.

In addition, once the Conference ends, DVDs of the keynote addresses will be made available along with other resources. Also a book will feature each of the important addresses and notes on the workshops of those who participated.

"The Conference will reach out to everyone of faith across Australia," says Bishop Peter Comensoli, Auxiliary Bishop for the Archdiocese of Sydney and one of the organisers and driving forces behind the event, explaining that prior to Vatican II the Church operated in a far more clerical mode.

Vatican II changed this to make the Church far more inclusive and just as Vatican II teaches, the Conference is designed not only for clergy and religious but lay men and women of all ages.

"The Conference is for anyone involved with their parish or working in youth and other ministries or simply wanting to deepen their faith and proclaim their faith to others who share the same joy and deep love of Jesus Christ," Bishop Comensoli says.

In October the world's bishops recreated the procession that marked the start of Vatican II half a century ago

The full name of the Conference is "The Great Grace: Receiving Vatican II Today" and is not only the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the start of Vatican II in 1962, but its ongoing relevance into the future.

"Blessed John Paul II described Vatican II as 'The Great Grace of the Church for the 21st Century,' from which we have taken the name of our conference," the Bishop explains.

An initiative of the Archdiocese and the Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal George Pell, planning and organisation for the Conference began 12 months ago. Since then the nine impressive keynote speakers have accepted invitations to deliver addresses over the four days, and 30 important intensive workshops have been organised.

"The fact the event not only marks the 50th anniversary of the start of Vatican II but will be held in this Year of Faith gives the Conference a particular resonance and significance , and provides an opportunity to all who attend to deepen this faith and share it with the world," Bishop Comensoli says.

The keynote speakers at the Conference include Cardinal Pell who will deliver the opening address at St Mary's Cathedral. In this free-of-charge public lecture entitled "Yesterday's Council for Tomorrow's World " , His Eminence will discuss the teachings and findings of Vatican II and their continuing relevance to the present as well as our future.

Other outstanding minds who have signed on as keynote speakers at the Conference are Cardinal Marc Ouellet, OMI, Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops and President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America; the Most Rev Allen Vigneron, Archbishop of Detroit; Archbishop Arthur Roche, Bishop of Leeds and Secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments; British Catholic journalist, author and commentator Austin Ivereigh, who writes regularly for Britain's Guardian as well as the America magazine in New York; Jack Valero, press officer for Opus Dei in the UK and co-ordinator with Austin Ivereigh of 2006's Da Vinci Code Response Group; Professor Anthony Kelly CSSR, Professor of Theology at the Australian Catholic University and long time member of the Pontifical International Theological Commission; the Most Rev Michael Putney, Bishop of Townsville and Chair of the Bishops Commission for Mission and Faith

Formation of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference; Professor Tracey Rowland, Dean of the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family (Melbourne) and Adjunct Professor at the University of Notre Dame's Centre of Faith Ethics and Society; and Professor Anne Hunt at the Australian Catholic University, a specialist in Trinitarian theology and authority on the profound influence of Vatican II's rediscovery of the Church's origins in the mystery of the Trinity.

One of the major reforms brought about by Vatican II was recognition of the importance of the role of women in the Church and this will be reinforced not only from the keynote speakers at the Conference but in many of the planned workshops.

Some of the topics the workshops will deal with include the Church's Mission in the World; A Family Centred Council amidst the Sexual Revolution; the Vocation of Co-Responsibility and the Mission of the Laity; recognised the role of women in the Church and Mary, Mother and Model of the Conciliar Church.

"At the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII called the Church to embrace a 'new enthusiasm for the entirety of the Christian faith: a faith to be accepted in a 'new joy and serenity of mind,'" the Archbishop of Sydney, Cardinal Pell explains, adding that "Fifty years on, Pope Benedict XVI has again called on the Church to grasp anew her essential mission to proclaim the saving message of Jesus Christ to the world."

The momentous events of Vatican II bequeathed to the Church and to the world a vital and permanent legacy, even as the context in which the Church now lives has shifted dramatically since the 1960s, he says and predicts the Great Grace Conference will be an ideal opportunity for the Church community in Australia to gather with eminent speakers from across Australia, Rome, Britain and the USA to reflect on the ongoing contribution of the Council to the Church and the World.

"I extend my invitation to attend the Conference in May next year to all in the Church who wish to reflect more deeply on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and most especially to students and young leaders in our various communities," the Cardinal says and adds that while not all of us remember the times of the Council, it has given us a legacy that will be taken up and continue long into the future.

To find out more about The Great Grace Conference, how to register and for details of the program, workshops, speakers and accommodation go to www.thegreatgrace.org.au