



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

**Professor Greg Craven, Vice-Chancellor**

**“Times Change, Values Endure”**

**Opening reception - IFCU 25<sup>th</sup> General Assembly**

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### **Acknowledgements**

- His Excellency Archbishop, Vincenzo Zani
- President Father Pedro Rubens (Universidade Catolica de Pernambuco, Brazil)
- Secretary General, Professor Guy-Real Thivierge
- Vice-Presidents
- Father Garanzini
- Michael Galligan Stierle
- Members of the IFCU board
- Guests and colleagues

### **Introduction**

Good afternoon.

Welcome to the 25<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the International Federation of Catholic Universities.

My name is Professor Greg Craven. I am the Vice Chancellor of Australian Catholic University.

As the host of this Assembly, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the largest gathering of Catholic universities in the world.

The majority of you have taken significant time out of your busy schedules and travelled considerable distances to be here so we strongly appreciate the effort you have made.

I take comfort in knowing that this is in fact the second time that such a gathering has happened in Australia. It suggests to me that delegates consider Australia to be a place worthy enough for a repeat visit. So thank you.

I hope over the coming days that you may also be convinced that it is a place in fact deserving of many more frequent visits.

I should start by apologising to those you who are visiting Australia for the very first time.

Stepping off the plane at Melbourne airport you may have expected to have been greeted by warm weather, sun blessed beaches, kangaroos bounding down the city's streets and some sort of tropical fruit drink – for which our overseas tourism advertisements are famous for.

I am sorry to say that Melbourne weather is notoriously unpredictable and more often cold to very cold at this time of year. It is winter in the Southern Hemisphere after all.

Fortunately, it is city with many redeeming features, including two very important ones.

The coffee.

And the excellent company you will find here at Australian Catholic University's Melbourne Campus.

Now as the host of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the International Federation of Catholic Universities I am given two privileges.

Firstly I am granted an allowance to deliver a shameless advertisement for my own university.

Secondly I am given the opportunity to set the scene and remind you about what this week's General Assembly is all about.

So allow me to start by telling you a bit about Australian Catholic University.

### **About Australian Catholic University**

Our university is the country's largest Catholic university, with seven campuses that form an arch along the east coast of Australia.

We are one of the nation's fastest growing universities and now in 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year we have almost 32,000 students.

Our pillars of academic strength are education, arts, health, business, law theology and philosophy.

Our high performance in teaching and learning is matched by impressive employment outcomes for graduates.

In fact 93 per cent of Australian Catholic University students are employed within four months of graduating.

We have also made significant investments in research as part of a strategy that seeks to position Australian Catholic University as a leading research university within five years time.

Among our faculties and seven new research institutes we have bring together some of the best minds in the world in the areas of education, health, theology and the social justice.

Our Catholic values are embedded in our Core Curriculum – units of study that are part of all our undergraduate degrees. These units aim to teach students to think critically and ethically, and to be guided by social justice principles.

The International Core Curriculum enables students to undertake these units in Paris, Florence and London.

You will have to forgive me for the shameless advertisement but as I said it is one of the few privileges I am granted.

Now for the real reason we are all here.

### **About the 25<sup>th</sup> General Assembly**

The International Federation of Catholic Universities brings together more than 200 member institutions, spanning 62 countries and with representation from every continent.

It is an organisation where ancient universities – such as the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium, which was founded in 1425 or the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, which was founded in 1611 – sit comfortably alongside far younger institutions...

Institutions such as Uganda Martyrs University or the Catholic University of Mozambique

Its membership includes famous institutions such as Sophia University in Japan, UC Chile in Santiago, the University of Notre Dame Indiana and a cast of other famous and growing universities from around the world.

Our universities serve national communities that are overwhelming Catholic as well as those – such as Japan – where fewer than one per cent of people share our faith.

Yet what unites us all is:

- our proud Catholic identity, and
- our shared commitment to the Catholic intellectual tradition, to the pursuit of knowledge, to the dignity of the human person and to the common good

This universal truth combined with the impressive facts and statistics I've just outlined simply help to illustrate the unrivalled opportunity member institutions have for collaboration across the fields of:

- student exchange
- teaching and learning
- research
- community engagement
- And fulfilling our shared mission as Catholic institutions.

Examples of collaboration include The Catholic University of America's shared interest with Australian Catholic University in establishing a joint study centre in Rome.

It is a project that brings together personnel from three continents to create something new and exciting within in short distance of the Vatican. Scheduled to open its doors for the first time in September 2015, it will deliver untold opportunities for collaboration between the two universities.

Other important examples of collaboration include the Beijing Centre for Chinese Studies that provides programs and research opportunities for Jesuit and other Catholic universities in China.

Or Ateneo de Manila who work with Santa Clara University in the area of student mobility.

These are just some of the possibilities that discussions between members this week and thereafter could deliver.

It is my sincere hope that you will take every possible opportunity over the coming days to discover how we can in fact increase our collaboration.

### **Times Changes, Values Endure**

The theme for this year's General Assembly is: *Times Change, Values Endure*.

It is an appropriate theme for a gathering of Catholic universities, don't you think?

Our institutions trace their origins back to the early monasteries in Europe where monks transcribed the Bible and other important documents, enhancing the history of Christianity and western civilisation.

The very first gathering of International Federation of Catholic Universities took place in 1925 at the Catholic Institute of Paris. Its members at that time were 14 mostly European universities.

Reflecting on this we all appreciate the magnitude of change that has occurred since.

Globalisation and technological advances have closed the distance between nations, making it easier than ever before to access knowledge and education.

Massive Open Online Courses enable teenagers in Bangladesh and elsewhere to undertake programs from the Catholic University of Murcia or Georgetown University, who have been working with EdX on the delivery of programs internationally.

There is growth too in the number of students seeking an international experience as part of their degree.

In Australia alone, the proportion of Australian students with an international study experience increased from 8.8 per cent of domestic bachelor graduates in 2008 to 13.1 per cent in 2012.

And the number of international students that grace our shores is so significant that higher education ranks as Australia's third single largest export.

Set against this backdrop is the enduring mission of this Federation and the values that underpin us as Catholic institutions.

Our commitment to building a more just and humane world in the light of reason and faith with the ferment of the Gospel and the advances of knowledge and its applications means that we bear a responsibility to ensure that the promise of globalisation delivers for the many – not us just for the privileged few.

The coming week is our opportunity to grapple with both these challenges and opportunities.

These topics will be explored by our speakers, in workshops and on the sidelines of the General Assembly over drinks and dinner.

I implore you to make the most of this extraordinary opportunity, to share your thoughts and experiences, and to enjoy yourself.

Thank you.