

The National Catholic Medical Association had its Victorian launch last Saturday night the 8<sup>th</sup> of September at the Athenaeum Club in Collins St. The dinner was well attended with over 100 guests, including doctors, allied health professionals and medical students. A warm and festive occasion was enjoyed by all in an elegant setting, with great food and good company. The evening coincided with the Feast Day of Our Lady's Birth and began with a beautiful version of Gounod's *Ave Maria*, sung by opera singer Georgia Wilkinson, to acknowledge this.

The evening also served several other purposes, including the opportunity to meet and welcome our new Archbishop Peter A. Comensoli, the opportunity to acknowledge and honor the long and distinguished career of our guest speaker, Prof John Murtagh and the opportunity to recognise and thank all those who had worked tirelessly against the introduction of Victoria's new euthanasia laws. And finally, it also served as a way of acknowledging the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Humane Vitae, an extraordinary and prophetic encyclical that has had an unprecedented effect on Catholic Healthcare and Catholic Medical Associations both here and throughout the world.

In addition to the new Archbishop Peter A. Comensoli, other special guests included the Episcopal Vicar for Health, Aged and Disability Care, Monsignor Tony Ireland as well as politicians Mr Robert Clark MP, Mr Kevin Andrews MP and the Hon Christine Campbell. Mr James Merlino MP and Mr Daniel Mulino MP and our chaplain Fr Justin Ford were unable to attend and sent their apologies.

At the beginning of the evening Dr Eamonn Mathieson, one of the conveners of the National Catholic Medical Association, revealed the new logo of the association and presented a brief overview of its recent formation on the background of the history of Catholic Medical Associations in Australia, previously known as the Guilds of St Luke. He noted that the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, through the leadership of Bishop Robert McGuckin had unanimously endorsed its formation recognising the importance of such an initiative at this time.

He spoke of the importance of formalising the relationships between the existing state-based organisations and the benefits of improved communication and cooperation it would bring. It would also better facilitate the relationships with international Catholic medical organisations. He said the Association would be a doctor-led initiative with several membership categories other than medical doctors, including: nurses, allied health professionals and students. Associate non-medical memberships will also be available to those wishing to support and be a part of this initiative. Registration for membership will be available via a new website in the next couple of weeks and would entail a moderate annual subscription fee.

Following the main course, and to an audience that included many young doctors and a number of medical students, the world-renowned Prof John Murtagh AM spoke on the topic: 'Called to Serve Life as a Doctor'. He delivered an inspiring speech, in which he spoke of how he found his vocation, his subsequent medical journey, his inspirations and his challenges along the way. In particular, he discussed the importance of his faith and his family throughout his career. He spoke of the importance of his time spent as a young doctor working in a small community in Neerim South alongside his wife Dr Jill Rosenblatt, also a GP, and together running their own rural practice. This experience, he said, was invaluable in his formation as a doctor and his understanding of what is at the heart of good medical practice.

Prof Murtagh said his early Catholic education helped form his sense of service that underpinned his medical career, claiming it partly came from the nun's continual emphasis on the Corporal Works of Mercy throughout his childhood schooling. He believed that it was such solid moral foundations, formed in the atmosphere of a Catholic family upbringing, sustained by an active prayer life and aided by the inspiration of extraordinary medical heroes, such as Dr Albert Schweitzer, that helped him strive to practice medicine with integrity and in accordance with his Catholic faith and the ancient tenets of the Hippocratic Oath and to genuinely help, serve and care for his patients, as well as his colleagues and students.

Prof Murtagh also cited several memorable cases over his long and distinguished career; one of which highlighted the importance of pastoral care and the need to be aware of and sensitive to the interior and spiritual lives of patients. He also spoke of the increasing difficulties and challenges that doctors now face, in particular he highlighted the issue of contraception for many Catholic doctors and the terrible looming threat of the introducing euthanasia and physician assisted suicide into 'acceptable' medical practice here in Victoria.

After the final aria, the evening concluded with a strong sense of hope and purpose for the establishment and future work of the new Catholic Medical Association of Australia.

If you are interested in joining the Association or learning more about it please visit the website [www.catholicmedicine.org](http://www.catholicmedicine.org) which will be online very soon.