

# Healing hands reflect on the bigger picture

Doctors, nurses and those in the healing professions meet to reflect on their unique role in life

## ■ Dr Wanda Skowronska

LIKE ANY other medical body, the Australian Catholic Medical Association talked about the issues of the day – such as Covid and euthanasia – at its annual gathering in Sydney on 11 December.

Unlike most other medical associations, however, those present had their hands blessed with holy oil as ACMA chaplain Fr Anthony Bernard exhorted members to reach out to the body and soul of each patient they treat.

The ACMA has had a long legacy of integrating the best of medical practice with a Catholic theological understanding of the human person.

Sydney obstetrician and gynaecologist Dr Simon McCaffrey recounted the sacrifices his parents made to attain a Jesuit education for him and recalled his subsequent medical training.

When pressured to do abortions, in the era of its legalisation, early in his career, he did not do so. Instead, he went to Soweto in South Africa, working in hospitals much larger than any he had previously encountered, healing patients, delivering children, staying true to his Catholic values, and gaining invaluable experience.

After further training in Ireland, he returned to Australia (where abortions now occurred in ‘clinics’ outside the hospital setting). Since then, he has worked in various hospitals, and has been at Liverpool Hospital for a long time. He spoke emphatically of the dignity of the human person, naming daily Mass as the central spiritual support of his life.

It would be rare for any other medical body to consider the evidence for miracles, but a conference highlight came in the shape of a recorded interview with Italian



Hands of hope: Catholic healthcare professionals had their hands blessed with holy oil at their annual gathering in Sydney in December.

IMAGE: FREEPIK.COM

cardiologist Dr Franco Serafini, whose recently launched book *A Cardiologist Examines Jesus* looks at what are termed ‘Eucharistic miracles’ around the world.

Fr Brendan Purcell, who assisted in the translation of the book, outlined several fascinating aspects of the work. Every Eucharist is miraculous, yet in some places, such as Lanciano, Buenos Aires, Sokółka and Legnica (among others), there has been visible evidence of flesh and blood on the host.

In the case of Sokółka in Poland, the flesh on a white host which had fallen on the floor and was placed in a ‘vasculum’ a small silver liturgical vessel in a sacristy. Days later,

it was found with ‘something’ on it, and declared by independent researchers to be myocardial tissue throughout.

The host and tissue ‘were making contact with one another in an inexplicable way’; the ‘segmentation and fragmentation’ in the muscle fibers were signs of ‘truly suffering heart muscle tissue’ which was clearly ‘in the context of imminent death.’ (pp. 85-86). Dr Serafini’s book is written in a clear and engaging way, showing the increasing interface between science and theology in our day.

At the end of this occasion, special ACMA Awards for Excellence in Catholic Medicine were presented to



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Dr Deirdre T. Little, Dr Elvis I Šeman, and Anna L Walsh. These co-authors of a well-researched study published recently in Law and Medicine, entitled “COVID-19 Vaccination: Guidance for Ethical, Informed Consent in a National Context”, stress the need for ‘fully informed consent’ as ‘very pertinent to an investigational vaccine.’ They see this as a little-discussed aspect

regarding the current Covid vaccinations. The authors add that “Consent should not be coerced but be free of inducements and reprisals, respecting declarations of human rights, particularly given the investigational nature of COVID-19 vaccines.”

In her acceptance speech, Dr Deirdre Little stated:

The bioethical philosophy of informed consent can em-

body either one of two concepts - the first that Medicine is predicated on informed consent. The second is that the end justifies the means. If we take the first maxim: then doctors are responsible for ensuring informed consent is obtained. Now, perhaps more than ever before, with a vaccine only provisionally registered and awaiting further safety and efficacy trials, this responsibility is a bounden duty. It is our job – and no one else’s – to make sure that ‘knowns’ and ‘significant unknowns’ are addressed and presented to the patient. No excuses. If we follow the second maxim, that the ‘end justifies the means, then we have abrogated this responsibility to the press or to the Premier.

Professor Maria Cigolini, head of Palliative Care at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and professor at Sydney University, was also given the ACMA Award for Excellence in Catholic Medicine, for her outstanding, tireless work, especially in the recent context of the political push for euthanasia.

She is an expert in her field and continual advocate for life, despite the many confusions of our age. She says, with palliative care at such a high standard, no-one need suffer pain at the end of life. When I asked Professor Cigolini, what to do with those insisting that such pain cannot be assuaged, she said: “tell them to ring Palliative Care at RPA”

It was inspiring to see young doctors with such accomplished professionals, finding a way around the difficulties ensnaring them in our strange times, adhering to their faith, and always seeking to reach out to spiritual as well as physical realms of the human person.

Dr Wanda Skowronska is a Sydney Psychologist

## Licence restored to MCs

THE INDIAN government has restored the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act registration of the Missionaries of Charity, clearing the decks for the globally renowned charity to receive and utilise foreign funds, reported ucanews.com.

“I am delighted that the Indian government has restored our FCRA licence,” said Sunita Kumar, spokeswoman for the order founded by St Teresa of Kolkata. The change of decision comes less than a fortnight after the federal minis-

try for home affairs declined to renew the order’s FCRA registration, citing “adverse inputs.”

“We never expected that our registration could be canceled, but it happened,” Kumar told ucanews.com on 8 January, a day after the government restored the license of the charity organisation. “We are happy that the restoration of our license happened without much delay.”

The congregation was finding it difficult to carry forward its charitable works ever since

news broke on Christmas Day that its application for renewal had been refused.

The ministry issued a statement 27 December saying the charity did not meet “eligibility conditions” under the FCRA and cited “adverse input” for its decision, without further details.

The congregation confirmed this on the same day while announcing that “as a measure to ensure there is no lapse, we have asked our centres not to operate any of the FC (foreign contributions)

accounts until the matter is resolved.”

The government, however, allowed the order to operate its foreign contributions accounts until 31 December.

Since then, the congregation had faced difficulties in raising resources, struggling to maintain its regular supply of food, nutritional supplements and medicines for those it served in orphanages and homes for the elderly and destitute. Poor Hindus form nearly 99 percent of those they serve.



A member of the Missionaries of Charity interacts with the children of a kindergarten in Kolkata, India. PHOTO: CNS/RUPAK DE CHOWDHURI