

“Nobody marries their soul mate...”

You *become* soul mates by living life together through the ups and downs of marriage

This perspective was shared by the guest speakers at the Faith in Marriage conference, including Bishop Anthony Fisher OP, President of Campion College Dr Ryan Messmore, Vice Chancellor of Australian Catholic University (ACU) Prof Greg Craven, and Australian personality Robyn Moore. The conference was held on Sunday 15 September at Our Lady of Mercy College Parramatta.

About 140 people participated in the conference, which was jointly presented by CatholicCare Social Services Parramatta and ACU to incorporate the inaugural Ray Reid Memorial Lecture on the Gifts and Graces of Marriage given by Bishop Anthony. Ray's widow, Jean, introduced the lecture by sharing a reflection on Ray's life and work.

Ray Reid was Director of Centacare Parramatta for more 30 years and provided a great deal of input to the development of the CatholicCare Social Services (CCSS) Pre-Marriage Education Course, training many of the married couple educators.

The course has guided thousands of engaged couples to loving and holy marriages. Ray died in April 2012 and prior to his death he discussed how he would like his work to continue. He was happy to agree to a memorial lecture that would present hope and faith in marriage.

Bishop Anthony said Ray had a profound and lasting impact on the Diocese. He went on to discuss the high marital breakdown in the West saying we have become conditioned to think of marriage as conditional, as a state that lasts for as long as it works.

“In our culture, nothing is for keeps anymore whether that is relationships, work, housing, appliance

es, bodies, causes or morals. All is transient, revisable, renegotiable” Bishop Anthony said.

He emphasised the benefits of marriage to individuals, children, the community and society as a whole.

“The Church offers an alternative love story to the one that dominates in society today, a story whose centre of gravity is covenant faithfulness rather than romantic feeling”
~ Dr Ryan Messmore.

Dr Ryan Messmore said he encourages students at Campion College to remove from their vocabulary language that perpetuates superficial romantic notions such as “falling in/falling out of love” as if love is something we have no control over when the reality is that giving our love to another is a choice.

He said young couples on their wedding day will often profess that they are marrying their soul mate but, most often, their life as a couple to this point has been relatively untested and their love still relatively new.

“You become soul mates” Ryan said, “by living life together through the ups and downs of marriage.”

Referencing 1 *Corinthians* 13, known as the ‘love chapter’, Dr Messmore said the apostle Paul used 15 different descriptors of love — patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, etc. “In the original Greek, each one of those 15 descriptors is a verb, which suggests that love is, first and foremost, a verb.”

Thus asserting that true love has to do with a decision to serve and

give oneself for the good of another. “It is an action, not just an attraction,” Ryan said.

All speakers, including Prof Neil Ormerod, Francine Pirola and Ann O’Brien, acknowledged the inevitable challenges of life that can strain even the healthiest of marriages, such as financial pressures, family issues, illness and disability of children or family members.

But they suggested there were many simple measures that could be practised to build the resilience of a marriage against these challenges. Ann presented 10 Basic Principles for building a healthy marriage (see next column).

Robyn Moore is a well-known Australian entertainer and presenter who discussed the importance of maintaining three vital characteristics in a marriage: optimism, humour and passion.

Some of the practical strategies Robyn presented included ‘dismantling the upset’ during arguments by bringing humour to the fore and using laughter to defuse the tension.

Robyn suggested looking at your partner today as if you are seeing them for the first time and, likewise, engage with your children as if you are seeing them for the first time, or cook dinner for the family as if it was your first time. “In so doing we can often be reminded we have far more to be thankful for and to work on than not,” she said.

Prof Greg Craven presented information about the Constitutional Position of Marriage, which outlined the legal definition of marriage in the current debate over ‘same sex marriage’ and the role of the states and the commonwealth in legislation.

While the speakers also



Presenter Robyn Moore

acknowledged that there may be exceptional circumstances where a marriage cannot be sustained, such as where physical or emotional abuse exists, very often marital conflict can be resolved and with huge benefit for the couple concerned, their children in particular and society in general.

10 Basic Principles for a healthy and loving marriage

1. Respect
2. Understanding
3. Accepting Difference
4. Make Connections
5. Effective Communication
6. Expressing Feelings Effectively
7. Negotiating Conflict
8. Affirmation and Gratitude
9. Sharing Power
10. Forgiveness

Marriage Support Services

To speak to someone about strengthening your marriage you can contact CatholicCare Social Services Parramatta on (02) 9933 0222 (Parramatta) or (02) 8822 2222 (Blacktown)