

## **Catholic Communicators Unite**

The Australian Catholic Church will be represented at an historic occasion in the Vatican on Friday 23rd November. Pope John Paul II will receive in private audience delegates of OCIC, the International Catholic Film Organisation and Unda, the International Catholic Radio and Television Association. He will accept the dissolution of these organisations into SIGNIS, a new International Catholic Media Association.

Unda (the Latin word for wave) represents 133 national and 22 international televisions and radio organisations. It coordinates a network of Catholic associations and individuals involved in broadcasting, and provides them with a forum for professional collaboration. It liaises with Catholic and non-Catholic organizations.

Unda aims to ensure a human and Christian spirit in media, to promote media training and education, and to achieve effective religious broadcasting.

Founded in April 1928, OCIC, the International Catholic Organization for Cinema is made up of 160 member associations, operating in more than 140 countries and territories.

Since 1935, OCIC has been recognized by the Vatican as the official organization of the Catholic Church in the field of cinema.

OCIC is a member of the International Council for Cinema and Television, and the International Center of Films for Children and Young People and provides juries and prizes at some of the world's most famous film festivals, including Cannes, Berlin, Moscow and Venice.

Both organisations enjoy consultative status with UNESCO, the U.N. Economic and Social Council and with the Council of Europe and are members of the Conference of International Catholic Organizations.

The new institution, SIGNIS, a hybrid Latin word from 'sign' and 'fire', will take over the administration and co-ordination of the Church's ministry in visual and broadcast media. The amalgamation is the result of years of negotiations between the two organisations under the leadership of the Vatican's media department: the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. It recognises the growing convergence of media and the need for the Church to have a unified and coordinated approach to influencing communications for good.

Its headquarters will be in Brussels with a permanent official in Rome.

The Australian Bishops are sending as their representatives Fr Richard Leonard SJ, head of OCIC Australia and Director of the Australian Catholic Film Office and Mr Peter Thomas, Director of the Australian Catholic Television Library and International Vice President of Unda. Another Australian, Fr Peter Malone MSC, International President of OCIC, has played a key role in bringing these organisations together.

"It is an enormous honour to be asked to represent the Australian Church on this occasion." Fr Leonard said. "Global media is shrinking the world. The Church, as one of the world's largest multinational organisations, has an obligation to do all we can to mount a co-ordinated and concerted effort to support good media, promote our Catholic values and principles, encourage cultural diversity and media inculturation

and to defend human dignity. SIGNIS will help us be a constructive and effective voice in international bodies that can influence media policy, while also supporting projects in the third world that enable the voiceless to be heard."

SIGNIS will have national associations made up of nominated delegates, confirmed by the Bishops Committee for the Media. SIGNIS Australia will belong to the Pacific region where many dioceses in 17 Pacific nations rely on funding from OCIC and Unda, and now SIGNIS, to undertake vital communications work. From the world's regions an International Assembly and Board will be selected and confirmed by the Vatican.

For more information, see <http://www.signis.net>.

Spokesperson: Father Richard Leonard SJ

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