

Australian elected President

The former Director of the Australian Catholic Film Office, Fr Peter Malone MSC has been elected the inaugural President of SIGNIS, the World Catholic Association for Communications. Delegates from 133 countries elected Fr Malone on the first ballot. Previously Fr Malone had been the World President of OCIC, the international Catholic Cinema Organisation. It along with UNDA, the Catholic Television and Radio Association combined last week at Rome to form the Church's new media organisation.

Archbishop John Foley, President of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, the Vatican department to which SIGNIS is responsible, was present at the election and assured Fr Malone of the Pope's blessing and best wishes. Archbishop Foley announced that as an expression of Pope John Paul's gratitude, he was honouring Fr Malone and Sr Angela Ann Zukowski, the former President of Unda, with the Pro Ecclesiae et Pontifice Cross.

The elections were the culmination of a nine-day international congress of the two organisations at Rome that saw delegates dissolve the old associations and establish SIGNIS. Pope John Paul took a keen interest in the proceedings receiving the delegates in a private audience in the Vatican. In his address he stressed the importance of the media for the Church and the world and encouraged the participants to use the media to proclaim the Gospel, as well as working with the secular media to promote human dignity and development. Practising what he preaches, later that day the Pope used email for the first time to send the Oceania Synod document to his brother bishops in the Pacific.

At the Rome meeting Mr Peter Thomas, Director of the Australian Catholic Television Library and Melbourne-based Albert Street Productions was awarded SIGNIS' Agnellus Andrew Award for outstanding contribution to Catholic Media. Former Director of Catholic Communications Melbourne and a veteran documentary filmmaker for Australian TV, Peter Thomas was recognised for his commitment to promoting Gospel values in a secular and sometimes hostile media environment.

Completing a hat trick of Australian electoral success and service at the Rome meeting Mr Thomas and Fr Richard Leonard SJ, Director of the Australian Catholic Film Office, were elected delegates to the SIGNIS International Assembly, the governing council of the new organisation over which Fr Malone will preside.

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