

Establishment of Conference at West Wollongong.

28 July 1946

Representatives of the various South Coast Conferences assembled at the Little Flower Church, West Wollongong on Sunday, 28 July 1946, at 11.00a.m. The occasion being the inaugural meeting of the West Wollongong Conference.

Rev. Father Mulheren, (P.P. of West Wollongong), presided.

Other Clergy present were Rev. Father C.B. Callaghan, (P.P. of Wollongong), Rev. Father E. Downey, (P.P. of Corrimal) and Rev. Father Hills, (P.P. of Port Kembla).

Also present was Bro. T. Britten, (President of the Central Council) and other members of the Central Council.

“It is my pleasant duty”, said Father Mulheren, “to welcome you to the inaugural meeting of the Conference at West Wollongong. We have bided our time before asking the Central Council to inaugurate a Conference. We had intended to wait until conditions were more suitable for our meeting together; however, we have decided not to wait any longer. It is indeed an historic day for the Parish in as much as within fifty years, when the history of the Church in Wollongong is being written, it will be the proud memory of members to say that they were foundation members of the Conference at West Wollongong.

Two things appeal to me with regard to the Society.

Firstly, there is such a religious spirit pervading it. A spirit of prayer animates every meeting. Apart from the help to the indigent, the sick and the afflicted, the fundamental thing is that the brothers are learning to live in the spirit of Christ.

Pope Pious X1 sought to instil into every Catholic layman not to be idle.

In the past, the laity considered themselves as helpers of the priests, the Nuns and Brothers, but now all have come to realise that we are part of the Mystical Body of Christ and that all of us must live as other Christs.

That is the lesson we have to learn. That is the lesson that has been learnt by the Society through Frederick Ozanam.

Today the spirit of living in Christ is becoming quite understood and appreciated by every Catholic.

Secondly there is a fervent spirit of loyalty to those who have been placed in charge.

Loyalty to the Holy Father, loyalty to his Bishops, and to the direct superiors, the Parish Priests.

Not only does this apply in spiritual matters, but also with material things.

In many Parishes which are of a scattered nature, it has been found that the Society has been the pillar which supported the parochial structure.

I welcome you all on my behalf and on behalf of the members of the newly formed Conference. I extend to the Spiritual Director of the Central Council, Father Callaghan, to the President, Bro. Britten and to other members of the Central Council, a most hearty welcome and I am very happy that you are here on the occasion of the inaugural meeting of the first Conference since the foundation of the Parish.”

Bro. Britten then addressed the gathering. "I thank Father Mulheren for allowing one more link to be forged in the huge chain of Conferences that exist in the world. I congratulate the members of the West Wollongong Conference and I wish them every success and blessing. I would appeal to them, however, that because of the small amount of poverty that exists at the present time, to stick together and to increase their members, irrespective of having very little work to do.

The fundamental work is the visitation of the poor in their own homes, but there are other works which are known as Special Works of the Society in Australia.

These were begun and increased to occupy the time of the ever increasing number of members of the Society."

Bro. Britten enumerated these Special Works and briefly outlined the work of each.

"I would urge you to be regular in your attendance at your weekly meeting. I suggest that when you meet, your President will make the meetings attractive and pleasant. Brothers will look forward to meetings where they will meet other Brothers in whom they will come to see something superior to themselves.

I would suggest that when you visit the poor, try to see something better than what we see in ourselves."

"It now becomes my pleasant duty to appoint your President and Vice President, and it is my pleasure and privilege to appoint Bro. C. Heininger as President and Bro. A. McGoldrick as Vice President.

They will accept these positions as a burden, but I ask all members of the new Conference, to co-operate with them in their work.

Finally, they will be, and you will be too, subject to your Parish Priest in all matters. To him you will go for advice and I know that at all times he will be most helpful to your young Conference.

Before concluding, I am happy to announce that the Secretary will be Bro. J. Taafe and the Treasurer, Bro. C. McGoldrick."

Rev. Father C.B. Callaghan, of Wollongong, then addressed the meeting.

"I wish to thank Father Mulheren for his warm welcome. To me it is a great pleasure to come to West Wollongong to the inaugural meeting of the Conference. I wish to congratulate the new officers and offer them the very best wishes for success.

You are in a very fortunate position in having a number of members in your Conference who have been closely associated with the Society for many years.

I am pleased that the brothers of the West Wollongong Conference will be associated with hospital visitation."

"Looking at the men present, I think that West Wollongong is going to have the majority of members on the South Coast, a very bright outlook indeed.

The young members will, no doubt, become acquainted with the rules of the Society as explained in their handbook.

"With regard to the spiritual advantages to be secured, you will find them also in the manual where also will be explained the many indulgences to be obtained. With these you should make yourselves familiar."

“The great aim of the Society is the sanctification of your own soul and example is better than precept.

If you give good example, you will make good impressions on those with whom you come constantly in contact, and also on those whom you visit in their homes.”

“Yours is not just an alms-giving Society, you will be acting in charity, and charity is the basis of Christianity. Our Devine Lord practised charity, even towards his enemies. When he was being crucified, He did not reprimand His executioners, but prayed for their forgiveness, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

“As you become more familiar with your Society, you will be hearing of how Frederic Ozanam established his Society.

He was only a young man when he stood up to attacks on his religion. He banded a few students together and demanded answers to certain fundamental questions.

These were side-tracked by the Professors at his University. That was the age of Frederick Ozanam, but it is no different today.

Here in Sydney, attacks are made by University Professors on the Catholic religion.

Frederick Ozanam had eight students around him. He publically praised Christianity for what it had done for science and civilisation. He was asked to give proof of what the Church was doing then. “Perhaps in the past”, the critics had said, “but what about the present”.

Frederick Ozanam said, “let us give proof, let us go to the poor.”

“So began the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul with the visitation of the poor, to see them living in their poverty. The work has prospered for over 100 years. No doubt Frederick Ozanam was influenced in his charitable ideals by his own father and mother who vied with each other in their love of the poor.”

“You have the example of this great man, Frederick Ozanam.

If you emulate his example you will do tremendous work in the Parish of West Wollongong. He practised Catholic action in a two-fold way.

He stood up for his religion against attacks and yet he also practised charity, and that is what we all must do.”

“I offer you the best wishes and I sincerely congratulate Father Mulheren on having a band of young men to help him carry on the work of Christianising the people of West Wollongong.”

Rev. Father Hills, of Port Kembla, said he was very pleased to be present to congratulate the new branch and hoped that members would be zealous and would recruit new members of the Society.

“The Conference was fortunate in having so many young men who would be a great asset and would be a great help to Father Mulheren in the Parish.”

Rev. Father Downey, of Corrimal, thanked Father Mulheren for his welcome and said.

“I feel very happy to be present on such an auspicious occasion. It is certainly a great occasion, the establishment of a Conference.

We hope that before long, there will be a Conference in every Parish along the coast.

Looking over the history of the Society, it has certainly been an extraordinary one, starting off like the proverbial mustard seed; it is in practically every country today.

The fact that it has grown from a small band of eight members to the size it is today, is the sign of the hand of Almighty God.”

“As has already been pointed out, the chief work is the visitation of the poor in their own homes.

There were “New Orders” tried out in the days of Frederick Ozanam, but whereas they all failed, Ozanam and his little band prospered.”

“A Parish without a Conference is lacking in something. I feel sure that many blessings descend on a Parish where the Society exists.

I feel sure that the new Conference will be a tower of strength to Father Mulheren.”

“Charity, although a beautiful ideal, is nevertheless, in practise, a difficult thing.

Cases are at times, almost repulsive. Often times you may receive nothing but insults and base ingratitude. Consequently the Saint Vincent de Paul man must be imbued with the spirit of charity. Only then will our work succeed.

When we rely merely on human motives, our works fail.

It is only when we visualise Christ in the whole of the person we are helping, will we accomplish the aim of every Saint Vincent de Paul man.”

“I offer my congratulations to you and hope that in the future, your work will be abundantly blessed.”

The closing prayers were recited by Rev. Father Mulheren.

Present at the meeting

Rev. Fathers Mulheren, Callaghan, Downey and Hills.

Bros. T. Britten, C. Heining, A. Byron, A. McGoldrick, V. Ryan, J. Taafe, P. Driscoll, F. County, T. Cox, M. Brownlee, B. Ryan, A. Leeper, J. Gannon, J. Dowd, P. McGoldrick, A. Warwick, M. Rowan, T. Devlin, S. Thorne, Finnerty, J. McGoldrick, S. Hayes, S. Bach, F. Gamble, C. Hore, J. Cornock, T. Kelly, Wheeler, Baldwin, R. Taylor, F. Arkell, P. Quinn and J. Curran.

