

APRO Media Forum
“Religion and the media: Why good news is not good news”
NSW Parliament House, Sydney, 25 August 2008

Background

The mainstream media plays an important role in informing and shaping the views of many Australians about religion and religious issues. Most faith communities recognise the influence and potential of the media, and the need to work with the media effectively. Yet there are many challenges. Some feel their communities are unfairly targeted by the media, while others feel ignored. Many perceive the media to be focussed on division and “bad news” stories, while all wish their faiths to be presented accurately and in a positive light.

The forum was inspired by recommendations made at the “Australian Faiths: Building Community Together” forum for religious leaders held in Sydney in June 2007.

Aim of the Media Forum

The aim of the APRO media forum was to bring representatives of Australia’s diverse faith communities together with media professionals who have an interest in religion and religious issues. It was designed to build knowledge, skills and understanding between the religions and the media, and among the faith representatives themselves.

Objectives

The objectives of the forum were to:

- Bring together representatives of all faith traditions in Australia who work with the media, in order that they can learn from each other through dialogue, interaction and cooperation
- Enable participants to improve their knowledge about how the media works and increase their skills to work with the media more effectively
- Provide participants with an opportunity to meet and learn from key journalists who are engaged and interested in stories about religion
- Provide journalists with an opportunity to meet and learn from representatives of diverse faith traditions.

Participants

A total of 55 delegates attended the forum representing seven religion/belief groups. Attendance included representatives from religion partnership groups as

well as media personalities. The Hon Barbara Perry, Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Western Sydney, Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship, representing The Premier, gave the closing remarks.

Forum Program

Program highlights included:

- Presentations by Mr Barney Zwartz, Religion Writer, The Age and Professor Lynette Sheridan Burns, Head of the School of Communication Arts, University of Western Sydney, on 'The news agenda: Why good news doesn't make good news'
- Presentation by Jack Herman, Executive Secretary, Australian Press Council on 'Responding to inaccurate or negative coverage' :
- Two panel discussions were held on: pitching practice, introduced and facilitated by Rachael Kohn, The Spirit of Things, ABC Radio National; and Putting faith in the media, introduced and facilitated by Professor Lynette Sheridan Burns..

Other media journalists and presenters were: John Cleary and Stephen Crittenden, ABC, Rose Hesp, Executive Producer, Compass; and Paula Masselos, SBS.

The forum was supported by FECCA and sponsored by NSW Government under the Community Development Grants Program, the Australian Human Rights Commission, and InvoCare: Guardian Funeral Services.

Outcomes

APRO was very pleased by the warm and inclusive spirit achieved by the forum, as well as the quality of the consultation and exchange between participants. This success was due in no small part to the standard of the presenters and panel members

Feedback received from the evaluation forms was very positive. Positive comments were received around information provision that was very helpful, the impressive caliber of speakers and high standard of facilitation.