

ACHEA Research Conference - *Christian Education - Reason and Relevance*

31 July – 2 August 2019

Alphacrucis College is a member institution of the Australian Christian Higher Education Alliance (ACHEA), a national, faith-based body comprising a consortium of Christian higher educational institutions. An organisation centred on discussions around the ongoing needs of the Christian Higher education sector, ACHEA hosts an annual conference to bring together practitioners, scholars, pastors and doctoral students from across Australia and abroad to explore questions around the nature of Christian education. Held between 31st July – 2nd August, this year's conference, *Christian Education – Reason and Relevance*, was underpinned by the following critical questions – what makes 'Christian' education distinct? What theological and biblical convictions characterise educational theory? How are various Christian worldviews expressed in the education setting? What is the relationship between Christian theory and its practical implementation in the institution governed by secular requirements and processes?

Alphacrucis sent seven delegates to this year's conference and five of our representatives presented papers. Prof. Denise Austin and Dr David Perry's paper, "Developing a Christian Research and Scholarship Framework" problematized existing views on 'scholarship' activity within the Christian academic sector, arguing that most academics produce it for purely pragmatic and missional purposes. The result is work that often lacks creativity or is stifled by denominational distinctives. Austin and Perry's framework seeks to stimulate research, learning and curiosity by providing a helpful structure that encourages the formulation of new 'expressive' knowledge which can make a positive and tangible impact for the community.

Dr David Hastie's, "Shifting the paradigm of initial teacher training: The Hub cohort model for teacher training in Australian Christian affiliated schools" addressed the discord between existing tertiary training models for teacher education and actual industry needs, presenting an alternative training model offered in the NSW Hunter Region developed by Alphacrucis. Drawing variously upon the clinical practice model for teacher education, community and financial incentives and a 'business to business' partnership arrangement, the model seeks to nurture aspiring Christian teachers by providing onsite training to nurture local talent and increase classroom readiness in a Christian setting.

Engaging with one of the main themes underpinning the conference, Dr DJ Konz explored the distinctive nature of Christian Education, proposing that a "Christological basis for unity in Christian Education" emerges from a Spirit-led realisation of reconciliation fashioned out of the cross, empty tomb and a Chalcedonian exposition of Jesus' incarnation. Further, Konz drew on the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth who, as pivotal Christocentric theologians of the 20th century, offer a rationale to move past a mere Christ-attentiveness, to a purposeful Christocentric unity in the Christian tertiary setting.

Glenda Hepplewhite's paper historicised Pentecostal theological education in Australia with special reference to women's participation in the tertiary sphere. Hepplewhite considered the denomination's early aversion to theological education, pointing to the denomination's early anti-intellectualism, the historically missional priority of Pentecostal Christians and the congregational profile of early Pentecostalism. Hepplewhite then drew parallels between the later growth of formal theological training in the Pentecostal tradition and the simultaneous institutionalisation of the Pentecostal church.