

address by **BARBARA BOLSTER RSM**

I would like to add my thanks to all of you for your attendance here this morning.

As president of CLRI it is indeed a pleasure to have this opportunity to speak with you and to outline some of the history of this document. A very timely document in these days of change and rumours of change in education.

I want to begin by thanking Fr. Chris Gleeson and Mr. Brian Croke for their words of acknowledgement and encouragement. The contribution of religious congregations to the Catholic education of young people in NSW and Australia has been and is, without doubt, an enormous one. That we are here today to acknowledge this contribution is very pleasing indeed. There is value and encouragement in knowing that educators believe congregations still have much to offer to the education of this nation.

For some years the Education Committee of CLRI(NSW) has been working on this booklet which gives a brief history of congregational education in NSW. A number of people have contributed to the production of this publication which we are launching today, I wish to recognize the dedicated time and effort they have put into it.

Firstly I commend the current and past members of the Education Committee who have investigated, studied, debated and eventually created this document.

The writing began with Br Paul Oakley, who is here with us today. Thank you Paul for your contribution and for getting this publication started. It soon became apparent, however, that with a professional writer the document could be brought to completion more quickly. This being the case Dr Berenice Kerr rsm, a member of the Committee, was invited to take up this project.

Berenice, who is here today, is an historian, and given her expertise and experience in education, and as a published author, she was well-placed to write this booklet. On behalf of CLRI(NSW) I would like to acknowledge with thanks the professionalism and heart that she brought to the project. Thank you and congratulations Berenice.

Berenice' contribution includes a PowerPoint presentation for use with school staff and board members and the text for a tri-fold brochure which will be distributed to the families of all congregational school students.

Of course every publication needs a proof reader. Sr Marie White and Dr Kristin Johnston did the very painstaking and essential work of proofreading the manuscript. CLRI gratefully acknowledges their efforts for this project.

The design and layout of the document was yet another task. CLRI is very appreciative of the generosity of the Principal of St Augustine's College Brookvale, Mr. Tim Cleary, and that of Mr. Matt Anglicas, the College graphic designer. Matt's professional and engaging design and layout features a raft of historical photos contributed by congregational and school archives. His work complements, and engages with, the words Berenice has written. Matt, we thank you for your commitment to all aspects of this project - right through to the design of today's program.

Finally, Shane, we offer our thanks to you and the staff and students of St Ignatius' for your hospitality in hosting this launch.

You are probably aware that CLRI, The Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in New South Wales, is a membership organization representing leaders of institutes of women and men religious (Catholic sisters, brothers and priests) in New South Wales. Leaders are provided with a support system and a corporate voice by the Conference.

One of the stated goals of CLRI is to foster the education of young people in the life and mission of the Church. As we know religious congregations in NSW have been educating young people in congregational schools since the second half of the nineteenth century and remain committed to continuing that education today.

This booklet that we launch today traces the development of Catholic schooling in its parish, systemic and congregational contexts. It is a fascinating and sobering story as we remember the work and dedication of these men and women who established the Catholic School system throughout this land. It is important that we never lose sight of the tremendous contribution made to Catholic education in this state by members of religious congregations.

But the involvement of Religious Congregations is not over. It is important that we recognize and celebrate the fact that religious congregations continue to ensure the provision of quality education to the 36,800 students in the 45 congregational schools in New South Wales through collaboration with diverse individuals and groups.

Our booklet was written for the colleagues of congregations: those wonderful men and women who have taken up the charism of the congregation founders and continue to educate in association with the congregation leaders. Congregational leaders are most appreciative of the work done by these men and women. In particular they appreciate:

- the partnerships of principals and school staff members and boards;
- the involvement of parents and local communities;
- the support and advice of the secretariat of the Catholic Education Commission;
- the support of the Bishops of NSW/ACT.

This is a day to celebrate the achievements of Congregations and the contribution the congregational school has made to the education landscape.

As we highlight the characteristics of congregational schools and the contribution they make to Catholic education and the richness they bring to the educational landscape, it gives me much pleasure to officially launch

***THE CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL
ITS HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE IN NSW AND AUSTRALIA***