

The vision for the 2015 conference

The theme of the 2015 NAD national conference in Melbourne is 'The Deacon as Minister of Social Justice'. Here NAD chair, Deacon Nick Kerr, asks chair of the conference planning committee, Deacon Jim Curtain, about the conference.

I asked Deacon Jim Curtain about his vision for the NAD national conference – and I almost laughed when he started to tell me. His answer reminded me of the homily I'd given at 11am Mass that day. In it I'd quoted from Pope Francis' message for the 2015 World Day of Prayer for Vocations:

The Church is faithful to her Master to the extent that she is a Church which "goes forth", a Church which is less concerned about herself, her structures and successes, and more about her ability to go out and meet God's children wherever they are, to feel compassion (*com-passio*) for their hurt and pain.



Jim, who chairs the planning committee for the national conference, was saying much the same thing, in slightly different words.

"I, like many people, have been inspired by Pope Francis," he said. "He's saying the church needs to be out there, taking on 'the smell of the sheep', in that famous phrase, being involved in justice and compassion with the poor and those on the margins.

"I also feel that sometimes in the church we tend to be fascinated by our own navels. We get very involved with intra-church matters that are of no interest or relevance to people outside the church. I thought it was important to have an outward looking conference.

"I put the idea to the planning committee – and we went from there."

Jim said he had really been encouraged by the last three conferences – Broken Bay, Brisbane and Canberra.

"Each had a slightly different theme, each had excellent speakers and presentations and each gave wonderful opportunities for fellowship," he said. "We hope this conference will build on them.

"Having been a deacon longer than any of the other Melbourne guys, I'd always felt that, when Melbourne had a proper diaconal community, it would be really good to have a deacons' conference here.

"The diaconal community here is really only a couple of years old. The first group of guys were ordained in 2012. There's a very good communal feeling as a group, with a strong feeling of being brothers within the order.

"Melbourne has been very good about recognising the need for mutual support and building on what we have. One way to do that was to invite the deacons of Australia to Melbourne."

The planning committee includes two deacons from Sale diocese.

Jim said members of the committee are very open, always willing to take on work.

"Everyone loved the theme," he said, "but we had quite a lot of discussion around how to present it and who we should invite as speakers.

"There was a strong feeling that we wanted the speakers to express the full range of ministry within the church. So, for example, Archbishop Hart is opening the conference, Fr Frank Brennan is our keynote speaker, and we have deacons speaking as well as lay people involved in ministry and a religious sister. So it won't be an all-clerical thing.

“We had a lot of discussion about Indigenous ministry and refugee ministry.

“We felt there was a need for time for deacons to be able to just talk with each other, and for our spouses to talk to each other – time for community.

“We’ll make sure people have a chance to reflect on what they hear and to talk things over with others.”

[Link to conference details, registration brochure.](#)

Jim has been ordained 20 years this year. He was ordained for the Military Vicariate, and served for 12 years as an Air Force chaplain. He returned to Melbourne in 2008. For the last six years he has been director of mission for the St John of God Health Care, first of all in a hospital, now in their disability service. He is also appointed to Nazareth Parish, Rickett’s Point.