

FELICE MONTRONE'S SPEECH – Sunday, 1 March 2020

Acknowledge the distinguished guests.

I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, the Gadigal People, their elders, past and present.

Representatives of the Italian-Australian associations, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen – buongiorno.

Before I commence my conversation with you, I would like to acknowledge some outstanding Italian-Australian community members who are here with us today. On Australia Day this year, Cav. Peter Maniscalco received the Order of Australia Medal for services to the community. Last year we acknowledged Mr Angelo Maggiotto and Ms Grace Fava for receiving the Order of Australia. Can you please join me in giving them a big round of applause.

I would like to convey to you how humbled, honoured and grateful the Board of Directors of the Father Atanasio Gonelli Charitable Fund and I, as Chairman, are to see each and every one of you joining us today in celebrating the 26,000 days of apostolate to the Italian-Australian community by Father Atanasio Gonelli.

You have seen a short PowerPoint presentation, presented by Gianni Carelli, Christian Bracci and Natasha Liotta, about the impact Father Atanasio Gonelli has had on our community through his 62 years of work. We have also seen in the presentation, how our Charitable Fund has applied some of the funds you have donated.

The Italian-Australian community is today, more than ever, relevant and present in the life of everyday Australia. Our community is an integral and leading part of the Australian way of life. The grants we will be presenting today are a continuation of the commitment that Fr Atanasio Gonelli made on our behalf 62 years ago when he brought together the Italian-Australian community of New South Wales and forged it into a cohesive, harmonious and inclusive Australian community.

Following the death of Fr Atanasio, on 26 February 2012, the past **Premier of NSW, the Hon. Barry O'Farrell** and **Minister Victor Dominello**, who is here with us today with his mother Josephine, inducted Father Atanasio Gonelli into the NSW Multicultural Hall of Fame, and referred to Father Atanasio Gonelli as being an **inspiring hero** and a **great community and spiritual leader to whom everyone in NSW owes a great debt of gratitude.**

In September 2014, Leichhardt Council, under the leadership of Mayor Darcy Byrne who is with us here today, established a memorial garden on the Harbour Foreshore to honour the work of Father Atanasio Gonelli, the Capuchin Friars and the community they served.

In 2017, the Rookwood Catholic Cemetery included Father Atanasio Gonelli in their 150th anniversary commemorative book, written by author Wendy Lewis. This is a beautiful way that the Rookwood Catholic Cemeteries and Crematoria has paid homage and remembers Father Atanasio Gonelli. For this I wish to acknowledge the CEO of Catholic Cemeteries and Crematoria Trust, Mr Peter O'Meara, who is also here with us today.

Our Board has established a scholarship program titled "Young Leaders of the Future Scholarship". Our Charitable Fund's scholarship programme aims to support future young community leaders who have demonstrated qualities of leadership, initiative and willingness to be involved in community affairs.

Thus in collaboration with the Catholic Institute of Sydney, we made a five-year \$25,000 commitment to provide \$5,000 per year for research scholarships titled the “Father Paul Hanbridge Research Scholarship”. We have here with us today the Vice President of the Catholic Institute of Sydney, Dr Rohan Curnow.

Our scholarship grants commitment also includes a \$30,000 commitment two annual \$5,000 scholarship grants for a period of 3 years to be awarded to two Italian language teachers in Australia. This scholarship has been established in partnership with the Italian Media Corporation and the Gruppo dell’Amicizia in Memoria di Enrica Inglese. I am pleased to acknowledge here with us today our partners in this project, Julius Larobina the CEO of the Italian Media Corporation and Cav. Armando Tornari OAM, the founder of the Italian language scholarship program.

The funds our Charity has made available and will continue to make available in the future to help worthy causes and needy individuals, could not be possible without your individual and collective financial support.

I am so proud that more than 70 Italian-Australian and multicultural community associations and organisations in New South Wales are represented here today. Father Atanasio worked tirelessly for over 62 years of his pastoral life in the community, helping the less fortunate and needy members of our community. The community support we have received over the past 8 years is a continuing legacy of his commitment to our community.

With your support, we hope to continue the vision of Father Atanasio, whereby whenever he saw a need in the community, he always provided a solution.

Vi ringrazio per la vostra partecipazione e vi auguro una buona giornata. I wish to thank you for joining us here today.

Grazie.