

FELICE MONTRONE'S SPEECH – Sunday, 7 March 2021

Acknowledge the distinguished guests.

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

On the occasion of International Women's Day, I would also like to acknowledge Concetta Cirigliano Perna, the President of Associazione Donne Italo-Australiane, and Giulia Carelli, President of the Associazione Donne Pugliesi d'Australia and their Boards for being with us today.

Representatives of all the Italian-Australian associations here present, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen – Buongiorno.

Before I commence my conversation with you, I would like you to please be upstanding and join me in acknowledging our Charitable Fund's Spiritual Leader, Fr John Cooper, who is here with us today, and Fr Julian Messina who is serving as the rector of the St Anthony Shrine in Hawthorn VIC, on their 50th anniversary of religious profession and service to the community. Can you please join me in giving them a standing ovation.

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 the 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, 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 Order of the Capuchin Friars and the community they have 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.

This year, together with our media partners, the Italian Media Corporation (Il Globo, La Fiamma and Rete Italia), we have committed to support the Italian-Australian youth association, GIA Network, chaired by Christian Bracci, whose objective is to be a youth agency helping young men and women who find themselves in difficulty and require assistance.

Members of the GIA Network were at the frontline of last year's Italian-Australian COVID-19 emergency assistance program, which was set up in April last year, to help hundreds of young Italian men and women living in Australia on temporary visas, who found themselves stranded, with no family support, no jobs and no income. This program resulted in providing tangible assistance to 827 individuals throughout Australia. We are very proud that they were able to help in this way.

We have also committed \$30,000 towards 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 one of our partners in this project, Cav. Armando Tornari OAM, the founder of the Italian language scholarship program.

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

I am so proud that more than 50 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 9 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.