

# **A Catholic University's Obligations to Its Communities: Community Engagement at Australian Catholic University in the Spirit of the Founding Religious Congregations**

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## **Abstract**

Catholic universities have a particular role to play in social development and cultural progress. Through their encounter with the Gospel, they have the opportunity to provide transformational experiences for students, faculty, and staff. One powerful means of such development and progress is to promote the engagement of students and staff with local communities. This article focuses on the transformative nature of community engagement at Australian Catholic University and describes how the university finds the inspiration for such engagement in the charisms of its founding religious congregations.

## **Introduction**

Religious congregations were involved extensively in the founding of Catholic colleges and universities, imbuing the institutions' identities and missions with their particular charism. This contribution has enriched and diversified higher education around the globe.

This article presents the efforts of one relatively new Catholic institution, Australian Catholic University (ACU), to "respond coherently to the demands of the times and to the continuous developments of social life"<sup>1</sup> in the spirit of the charisms of its founding religious

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<sup>1</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church," [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html), sec.160.

congregations. The article also documents how the community engagement program has developed new partnerships with agencies of the founding religious congregations.

### **Australian Catholic University**

Australian Catholic University's founding is unique. By Deed of Agreement, dated October 5, 1989, ACU's predecessor institutions<sup>2</sup> sought to participate in the federally implemented Unified System of Higher Education to obtain the benefits consequent upon participation and to secure, as one amalgamated institution, university status.<sup>3</sup> On November 5, 1990, ACU became incorporated as a public company limited by guarantee under the Corporations Act of Australia; it commenced operations on January 1, 1991. Its constituent members are its various founding archdioceses, dioceses, and religious congregations throughout Australia. The university is multistate, reporting to three State Education Ministers and to the federal government. In June 2008, there were 15,498 students enrolled at the university, with approximately 20% of these students coming from overseas.

### **The Charisms of the Founding Religious Congregations**

Unlike the United States, where Catholic colleges and universities are each typically founded by one particular congregation—Jesuit, Mercy, Franciscan, etc.—ACU's founding is rooted in several traditions. They included the Brothers of the Christian Schools (De La Salle Brothers), the Christian Brothers, the Dominican Sisters of Eastern Australia and the Solomon Islands, the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia, the Marist Brothers of the Schools, the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart. Their charisms profoundly shaped the university's predecessor colleges and now, in turn, shape the life of the university. This paper considers the influence of these religious charisms, with a specific focus upon community engagement.

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<sup>2</sup> Catholic College of Education Sydney Ltd, the Institute of Catholic Education in Victoria, McAuley College in Brisbane, and Signadou College of Education in Canberra.

<sup>3</sup> See John S. Dawkins, *Higher Education: A Policy Discussion Paper* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1987), 118-9, 121.

It is beneficial to consider the meaning of “charisms.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines charisms thus:

Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world.<sup>4</sup>

Elsewhere the *Catechism* notes that such charisms are “intended for the common good of the Church. They are at the service of charity which builds up the Church.”<sup>5</sup>

The Second Vatican Council in its *Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life* of October 28, 1965, spoke of the charisms of religious congregations in the following way:

It redounds to the good of the Church that institutes have their own particular characteristics and work. Therefore[,] let their founders’ spirit and special aims they set before them as well as their sound traditions—all of which make up the patrimony of each institute—be faithfully held in honor.<sup>6</sup>

Pope Paul VI addressed the charisms of religious congregations:

In reality, the charism of the religious life, far from being an impulse born of flesh and blood or one derived from a mentality which conforms itself to the modern world, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is always at work within the Church.<sup>7</sup>

In a recent study of the transmission of the charism of a particular religious congregation in a contemporary education context, Andrew Watson reviewed literature on the topic. Through this review, Watson concluded that such charisms must not only be understood as gifts but as “a way of living ... as building community ... [and] an enlivening energy,

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<sup>4</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM), sec. 799.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Pope Paul VI, “Perfectae Caritatis: Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life,” [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_perfectae-caritatis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html), sec. 2(b).

<sup>7</sup> Pope Paul VI, “Evangelica Testificatio: Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of Religious Life according to the Second Vatican Council,” [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19710629\\_evangelica-testificatio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19710629_evangelica-testificatio_en.html), sec. 11.

which inspires vision and action, especially on behalf of the poor.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, charisms in the context of Catholic higher education provide a way of living and engaging with the world, grounded in tradition and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

At ACU, that which unites the different charisms of the founding religious congregations is their commitment to those in society who can be characterized as *the last, the least, and the lost*.<sup>9</sup> Within the scope of this paper, a brief description of the essence of each of the seven founding religious congregations’ charisms must suffice to illustrate their particular commitments.<sup>10</sup> Of these seven religious congregations, only two were founded within Australia: the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict; and the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart. The other five religious congregations were founded at various times either in France or Ireland. Seeking to provide Catholic education for their dioceses, Australian bishops invited each congregation to send members to Australia in the nineteenth century.

### *Brothers of the Christian Schools (De La Salle Brothers)*

The purpose of this religious congregation founded by St. John Baptist De La Salle, the patron of teachers, is to give “a human and Christian education to the young, especially the poor, according to the Ministry which the Church has entrusted to it.”<sup>11</sup>

### *Christian Brothers*

Founded by Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice in Ireland who dedicated “his whole life to the deprived, disposed, marginalized and disempowered

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew M. Watson, “Perceptions of the Transmission of the Edmund Rice Charism: Changing Leadership from Religious to Lay in Christian Brothers’ Schools” (Ed.D diss., Sydney: Australian Catholic University, 2007), 26-32, <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/digitaltheses/public/>.

<sup>9</sup> For two decades, Australian Catholic University has worked in partnership with Caritas, Hong Kong and has been inspired by Caritas’ service to “the last, the least and the lost within the community,” [www.caritas.org.hk/](http://www.caritas.org.hk/).

<sup>10</sup> Detailed discussions of the religious congregations’ charisms may be found on the websites referenced in each brief summary.

<sup>11</sup> Brothers of the Christian Schools. “De La Salle ‘Mission Statement.’” For further information on the Australian congregation, see <http://www.delasalle.org.au/>.

persons in his society,”<sup>12</sup> this order initially served poor boys on the docks in Waterford. In the “joy of brotherhood,” Rice’s Christian Brothers “have a strong commitment to justice [and] ... the poor and disadvantaged” and seek to “empower people through education.”<sup>13</sup>

### *Dominican Sisters of Eastern Australia and the Solomon Islands*

The Sisters, who derive their charism from St. Dominic, the order’s founder, arrived in Maitland, New South Wales, in 1867, to educate poor children and train young women as Catholic teachers. They describe their charism as being “called to be faithful to the Truth in [themselves] and others and in our world,”<sup>14</sup> and thereby to “respond to the needs of our time, particularly as these relate to the global struggle for justice and peace and thus ... to make real the reign of God.”<sup>15</sup>

### *Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia*

Founded by Venerable Catherine McAuley in Dublin for “the instruction of poor girls, visitation of the sick and the protection of distressed women,”<sup>16</sup> the charism of the congregation is expressed as “a life long journey of discovery of the Mercy of God, which is often found in the lives and struggles of the suffering and the poor.”<sup>17</sup>

### *Brothers of the Schools (Marist Brothers)*

Founded by St. Marcellin Champagnat, the Congregation of Marist Teaching Brothers is “committed to the common principle of making Jesus

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<sup>12</sup> Watson, “Perceptions of the Transmission of the Edmund Rice Charism,” 50.

<sup>13</sup> Edmund Rice Oceania. “Joys of Brotherhood.” <http://www.edmundrice.org/er:Joy-of-Brotherhood>. For further information on the Australian congregation, see <http://www.christianbrothers.com.au/>.

<sup>14</sup> Dominican Sisters of Eastern Australia and the Solomon Islands. “Our Mission.” [http://www.opeast.org.au/our\\_mission/index.html](http://www.opeast.org.au/our_mission/index.html).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia. “Who We Are.” <http://www.mercy.org.au/whoweare/default.cfm?loadref=37>.

<sup>17</sup> Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of Australia. “Mercy Spirituality.” <http://www.mercy.org.au/spirituality/default.cfm?loadref=5>.

Christ known and loved, in the way of Mary, especially amongst the young and neglected.”<sup>18</sup>

In keeping with their founder’s charism, Marist Brothers’ ministries continue to address contemporary needs with a focus on education, social justice, and youth.

### *Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict*

In 1857, the first Archbishop of Sydney, John Bede Polding, a Benedictine monk

“anxious to help the destitute women of Sydney, gathered together five women and formed a new religious congregation. He named the congregation the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict. The specific ministries of the Sisters were the care of needy women and the education of children, although Polding also wanted the Sisters to apply themselves to every other charitable work.”<sup>19</sup>

The Good Samaritan parable and the influence of the Benedictine spirit provide the congregation’s particular inspiration.

### *Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart*

In 1866, Blessed Mary MacKillop and Fr. Julian Tenison Woods founded this order to serve those Australians most neglected by their society, through “education and support for the children and families living in rural areas as well as the cities.”<sup>20</sup> The clarity of their founders’ vision impels the Sisters of St. Joseph “to identify and walk with those who are today’s poor, harness all [their] energies for mission [and] have a heart for mission to [their] last breath.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Trinity College. “In The Marist Tradition.” [http://trinitycollege.qld.edu.au/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=18&Itemid=32](http://trinitycollege.qld.edu.au/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=18&Itemid=32). For further information on the Australian congregation, see [www.maristoz.edu.au/](http://www.maristoz.edu.au/).

<sup>19</sup> Sisters of the Good Samaritan. “History of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan.” <http://www.goodsams.org.au/html/who/history.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart. “Where We Are.” <http://www.sosj.org.au/where-we-are/index.cfm?loadref=100>.

<sup>21</sup> Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart. “Where We Are.”

## A Shared Mission of Service

A specific challenge for ACU has been to distill its own identity and values from each of these religious congregations' distinctive interpretations of the values and objectives of the Catholic educational mission. Uniting the charisms of the founding religious congregations is the commitment to the education of those in society who are the poorest and most disempowered. This commitment, as has been noted, inspired their members to vision and action, especially on behalf of the poor. The mission statement of the university seeks to capture the integration of this common commitment of the founding religious congregations in the following statement:

The University explicitly engages the social, ethical and religious dimensions of the questions it faces in teaching and research, and service. In its endeavors, it is guided by a fundamental concern for justice and equity and for the dignity of all human beings.<sup>22</sup>

The Vision Statement of the University, from its recently endorsed *Strategic Plan 2009-2011*, expands this statement of institutional commitment as follows:

The Australian Catholic University chooses to focus on areas of teaching and research that are closely connected with its particular character as a university that is Catholic, and that is public and national. The first focus area is Theology and Philosophy as being central to the elucidation, development and expression of Catholic intellectual thought. The second focus area is Health, with a particular emphasis on the *value of care, especially of the weak and vulnerable*. Within this focus, The Australian Catholic University has a *profound commitment to serving the great caring enterprise comprised by Catholic health institutions*. The third focus area is Education, especially in support of the *historic Mission of Catholic educational institutions and agencies in exercising an option for the poor and vulnerable*. ... The final focus area is the Common Good and Social Justice, as comprising the heart of Catholic social thought.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, a tangible way ACU has actualized the charisms of the founding congregations is through the shared commitment to service.

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<sup>22</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Mission Statement*, endorsed by the governing Senate, August 1998 (Sydney: Australian Catholic University, 1998), [http://www.acu.edu.au/about\\_acu/the\\_university/philosophy\\_values\\_and\\_mission/](http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/the_university/philosophy_values_and_mission/).

<sup>23</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Strategic Plan 2009-2011*, endorsed by the governing Senate, April 2009 (Sydney: Australian Catholic University, 2009); emphasis added.

The concept of *service* is an essential element of the mission of Catholic higher education and also of the charisms of all the founding religious congregations. A Catholic university is a member of the worldwide network of Catholic higher education providers and is also part of wider human communities. As such, it:

has obligations to the communities from which it draws its students, to the communities in which its graduates find employment as well as to the People of God in whose name and on whose behalf it lives out its mission.<sup>24</sup>

Catholic universities encourage faculty and students to reach out to individuals, groups, and communities beyond the university in various kinds of voluntary service. In doing so, they demonstrate a key characteristic of their Catholic identity:

A Catholic University, as any University, is immersed in human society; as an extension of its service to the Church and always within its proper competence, it is called on to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society.<sup>25</sup>

Catholic colleges and universities serve the Church and society through interaction with the wider community.

At ACU, service has been an expression of the university's exploration and development of the religious, ethical, and social justice dimensions of knowledge through applied activities.<sup>26</sup> In particular, the university's commitment to service has manifested primarily as support for those who are socially disadvantaged or excluded.

ACU's commitment to service is evidenced in several ways. The academic board adopted *A Community Service Management Plan*, which set out objectives and strategies for community-related activities, in December 1996. This document provided the first formal basis for community service activities undertaken by staff and students across the university. Further, ACU recognized academic staff for con-

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<sup>24</sup> R. Julian McDonald, "The University and the Social Doctrine of the Church: Continental Experiences, Australia" (paper presented at the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and Congregation for Catholic Education International Conference on *The University and the Social Doctrine of the Church: Working Together towards an Authentic and Integral Humanism*, Rome, Italy, November 17-18, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae: On Catholic Universities* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1990), sec. 32, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Mission Statement*.

tributions to the community as a criterion for promotion; it also instituted annual staff and student *Awards for Outstanding Community Service* to recognize exceptional and continuous contributions to the community.

In addition to individual contributions by staff and students, ACU sought to make institutional contributions to its communities. In all undergraduate degree programs, specific emphasis was placed upon ethical and social justice dimensions relevant to that field of study, and compulsory learning modules and courses in which students engaged in service-learning activities in community settings were incorporated into programs.

Further, the university identified communities experiencing significant disadvantage for special attention, particularly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities located in the territory and states in which the University's campuses are situated, namely the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria. Programs designed specifically to meet Indigenous community needs were developed and offered in close collaboration with these Indigenous communities.<sup>27</sup>

### **From Community Service to Community Engagement**

The charisms of the founding religious congregations inspired their members to act on behalf of the poor. Thus, in its early years, the university's *community service* activities, seeking to continue the historic mission of Catholic health, education, and social welfare congregations, mirrored this paradigm of *community service*.<sup>28</sup> This thrust sat easily with the professions of teaching, nursing, and social welfare. In response to both internal and external factors, however, the university experienced a paradigmatic shift from such service in the spirit of the founding religious congregations to the development of mutually beneficial and reciprocal partnerships that are fundamental to *community engagement*.

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<sup>27</sup> The Indigenous population of Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, constitutes 2.5% of Australia's estimated population (at July 2008) of 21.38 million people, <http://www.abs.gov.au/>; see Peter G. Carpenter, and Gabrielle L. McMullen, "Indigenous Australians' Access to Higher Education: A Catholic University's Response," *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education*, 25(2) (Summer 2006): 215-35.

<sup>28</sup> The authors are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for clarifying this point.

This emphasis stresses mutuality of benefit for the university's staff members, students, and community partners.<sup>29</sup>

Early in the new millennium, the university decided to redefine the nature of its relationships with the communities with which it was involved. Several factors contributed to this significant step. The first was the Australian federal government's establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) to carry out external audits of universities and other Australian institutions of higher education.<sup>30</sup> These quality assurance processes would be built around a core of an external audit conducted every five years. The audits would be based upon detailed self-assessment, including achievements against standards, with about 10 institutions being audited each year. The AUQA commenced these external audits in 2002 and by 2007 had reported on the complete first cycle of higher education institutions' audits. The second cycle of institutional audits commenced in 2008.

### *The Process*

In preparation for its first quality audit in 2002, ACU carried out formal internal reviews of all areas of the university's activities. During this process, the university determined to refine the nature of its relationships with the communities with which it was involved, and to adopt formally the concept of *community engagement* in place of *community service*. Consistent with the commitment that the university sought to make to its communities, the concept of engagement represents a more interactive and collaborative relationship through which the needs of both partners are addressed. In this way, each partner brings particular strengths and capacities to the process.

A second set of factors in support of the community engagement philosophy was the community organizations, including agencies of the founding religious congregations with which the university had worked. Their voices had been the cause of reflection on the structures and strategies necessary to make the university's initiatives more strategic and

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<sup>29</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Teaching and Learning Plan 2006-2008*, endorsed by the University Academic Board, July 2006 (Sydney: Australian Catholic University, 2006), 34-5, [http://www.acu.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/215293/ACU\\_Teaching\\_and\\_Learning\\_Plan\\_2006-2008a.pdf](http://www.acu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/215293/ACU_Teaching_and_Learning_Plan_2006-2008a.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> For details of the Australian Universities Quality Agency, including reports of its audits of institutions, see <http://www.auqa.edu.au>.

more sustainable. These voices had assisted faculty, students, and staff in learning the practice of community engagement, including working in partnership, identifying necessary relationships, and sharing agendas. Such community organization input prompted ACU to move its community outreach to a different level, one characterized by reciprocity rather than service, and marked by mutual learning as well as giving.

A third factor for this change was the university's foundational involvement with a small number of other Australian universities to form, in September 2002, a loose network—the Australia's Engaged Universities Interest Group—of committed university representatives interested in the value and scholarship of community engagement.<sup>31</sup> Over time, this interest group, including ACU, formalized its structure into a not-for-profit national association of universities, the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance.<sup>32</sup>

Basic to all its work in community engagement has been ACU's institutional identity as a Catholic university. ACU has been influenced by the strong commitment to the welfare of others, inherited from predecessor colleges led by religious women and men of great faith, who embodied concern for the vulnerable and marginalized in society (as noted above with respect to their charisms). As part of the international network of Catholic universities, ACU participates in an intellectual tradition based in the Christian Gospels in which principles of human dignity, social justice, and the common good have been developed and articulated for some 2,000 years. In this, the social statements of the Catholic Church have been formative, and the challenge of the Second Vatican Council to engage with “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties”<sup>33</sup> of the people of this age has been energizing. As a Catholic university, ACU must pay careful attention to the standards set

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<sup>31</sup> Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990); Ernest L. Boyer, “The Scholarship of Engagement,” *Journal of Public Service and Outreach*, 1(1) (1996): 11-20. The work of Boyer has inspired learning internationally where outreach to communities is promoted by universities as a means to teach social responsibility and to shape future citizens.

<sup>32</sup> For details of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance, see <http://www.aucea.net.au>.

<sup>33</sup> Pope Paul VI, “*Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*,” [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

for it in *Ex corde Ecclesiae*.<sup>34</sup> In its community engagement, it seeks to realize the following characteristic of a Catholic university enunciated therein:

The Gospel, interpreted in the social teachings of the Church, is an urgent call to promote “the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfillment.” Every Catholic university feels responsible to contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works: for example[,] it will be capable of searching for ways to make university education accessible to all those who are able to benefit from it, especially the poor or members of minority groups who customarily have been deprived of it. A Catholic University also has the responsibility, to the degree that it is able, to help to promote the development of the emerging nations.<sup>35</sup>

Within this matrix of contemporary and long-established thinking, ACU has sought to develop its understanding and practice of community engagement. Like its founding religious congregations, it has a special focus on communities characterized by a history of disadvantage. In such situations, engagement may be challenging to manage because these communities lack the regularity to which university staff members and students would normally be accustomed. It may take time and patience to negotiate the journey across the cultural divide separating the university from the communities with which it seeks to engage.<sup>36</sup>

In 2007, the university commissioned an external review of its community engagement activities. The report of this review concluded as follows:

Engagement requires us to develop partnership relationships that are mutually beneficial and reciprocal. The university gains experience and information inputs that enrich teaching, learning and research discoveries from community partners who have invaluable and essential expertise, knowledge, wisdom and

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<sup>34</sup> For a detailed analysis of how the University has sought to implement the *Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities* with reference to each of its sections and their related norms, see Peter G. Carpenter, and Gabrielle L. McMullen, “‘Born from the Heart of the Church’: Implementing the *Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities* at Australian Catholic University,” *The Australasian Catholic Record*, 28(4) (October 2005): 409-20.

<sup>35</sup> John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, sec. 34, 23.

<sup>36</sup> McDonald, “The University and the Social Doctrine.”

ideas. The community is strengthened by interaction with and knowledge inputs from students and staff in ways that increase the capacity of communities and individuals to engage in productive action and problem-solving in their own communities.<sup>37</sup>

In summary, the approach to community engagement at the university is informed by the university's mission, which articulates specific engagement with the "social, ethical and religious dimensions of the questions it faces in teaching and research, and service."<sup>38</sup>

The university is inspired by and committed to involving staff members and students in "good works,"<sup>39</sup> both in communities within Australia and internationally. These good works are essential to the distinctive character of learning and working in the university. The challenge lies in requiring that such community engagement arises from the university's academic objectives, and that the interactions with communities involve them as partners who have knowledge and expertise essential to meeting the university's objectives.<sup>40</sup>

## Strategic Engagements

Several specific community engagement programs have emerged since ACU's paradigmatic shift. These initiatives provide a means for the university to give expression to its mission as a Catholic university through teaching, learning, research, and scholarship, embedded in its local communities and enriching both the university and these communities. By focusing its community engagement activities upon the common good, upon solidarity with people suffering social injustices and marginalization, upon subsidiarity, and upon the dignity of the people with whom it engages, the university seeks to implement the social

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<sup>37</sup> Barbara A. Holland, "External Review of Community Engagement: A Report to the Vice-Chancellor, Australian Catholic University" (Unpublished report, Australian Catholic University, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Mission Statement*.

<sup>39</sup> Barbara A. Holland, "Graduates Told Life of Community Service Brings Personal and Professional Rewards" (graduation address, Appalachian State University's College of Arts and Sciences, 2003) <http://www.news.appstate.edu/2003/05/11/grads/>.

<sup>40</sup> The University was assisted greatly by an external review of its community engagement thrust. See Barbara A. Holland, "External Review of Community Engagement". The University had carefully studied Holland's earlier work, especially Barbara A. Holland, "A Comprehensive Model for Assessing Service-Learning and Community-University Partnerships," *New Directions for Higher Education*, 114 (Summer 2001): 51-60.

teaching of the Catholic Church and to build on the works of its founding religious congregations.

### *Engagement Offshore*

ACU looks out to its neighbors in the Pacific and southeast and south Asia, with a particular interest in capacity-building among groups who are marginalized and disadvantaged. In pursuing these partnerships, the university strengthens networks in areas established by religious congregations, working collaboratively and in academic solidarity with higher education institutions in these regions.

To promote such connections, the university has partnered with both Caritas Australia and Catholic Religious Australia in the Catholic Alliance for International Development. The Alliance seeks to maximize collaborative international development work by Australian Catholic Church agencies, with a focus on the Pacific region and East Timor. Priority is given to health and education services. Currently, the Alliance is mapping the Australian Church's development work in this area.

The university has established a number of projects to date, each with its own focus, although all are framed within the Church's mission of hope and are directed toward people and toward institutional capacity building. The examples below describe projects in the new nation of East Timor (Timor-Leste), on the Thai-Burma border, and in Vanuatu.

### *Timor-Leste*

Baucau, Timor-Leste<sup>41</sup> is an international community precinct in which Australian Catholic University and partners collaborate with the Catholic Teachers College, Instituto Católico para Formação de Professores (ICFP), and the East Timorese community in capacity building. ACU has been involved in Timor-Leste since 2001; the initial focus on

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<sup>41</sup> Timor-Leste, the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, gained independence in 1999 following a period of brutal repression by Indonesia. Its first years of nationhood have been a politically unstable period with United Nations troops required to maintain order. The country will need years of further assistance to develop its infrastructure and to build the capacity of its peoples. See "Impunity Reigns: Timor-Leste," *The Economist*, 387 (April 12, 2008): 65. For a recent examination of the movement to independence in Timor-Leste, see Paul Kelly, *The March of Patriots* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2009).

educational capacity building has now been expanded to include health-care (through the clinic in Baucau) and sport (as part of an active after-school program for youth at the village level).

ICFP was established in the Diocese of Baucau in 2000 as a work of the Melbourne Province of the Marist Brothers of the Schools. At the invitation of the Marist Brothers, the university has been working with ICFP for seven years and provides formal recognition of the ICFP Bachelor of Teaching (Primary). The teacher education program is supported locally by a staff member from ACU's faculty of education, who has now been employed full-time in Baucau for five years, and by staff from different campuses of the university who visit ICFP on a regular basis. The first cohort of 48 teacher education graduates received their degrees in 2006; the second and third cohorts graduated in 2007 and 2008, respectively. The graduates are employed in schools across Timor-Leste and are the only teacher education graduates of an internationally accredited higher degree program in the country since independence.

A mentoring program for recently graduated teachers is being implemented in two schools, one in Dili and the other in Ermera, each of which has three ICFP graduates. This mentoring project, which includes ICFP, ACU, and Caritas Australia, embodies engagement across the beginning teachers, the school, and their local community.

Further, in preparation for progressive transfer of ICFP to local leadership, a small number of East Timorese staff members are currently completing master's degrees at ACU.

### *Thai-Burma Border*

A second major offshore partnership concerns the introduction of tertiary education to Karen refugees in camps on the Thai-Burma border. In 2000, an Australian member of the Society of Jesus, Rev. Michael Smith, visited the Mae La Refugee Camp on the Thai-Burma border where there were more than 40,000 refugees from the Karen ethnic group who had been displaced by the Burmese government.<sup>42</sup> During his visit, Rev. Smith found that, while young people could study up to secondary level in the camps, there was no provision for university

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<sup>42</sup> It is estimated that there are now some 600,000 refugees belonging to a variety of ethnic groups who have been similarly displaced from Burma and are living in camps. For further background on the situation in Burma, see <http://refugeesinternational.org/where-we-work/asia/burma>.

education, despite a strong demand at the Mae La Camp for further education. Returning to Australia, he approached ACU to explore the possibility of offering, by distance mode, a tertiary education program in business skills to residents in the Mae La Camp. The university accepted the challenge. Rev. Smith established the Refugee Tertiary Education Committee, which brought together representatives from the university and the Society of Jesus, as well as a number of external consultants with skills in technology-supported delivery of education programs.

The university's initiative, which began in 2003, introduced a full tertiary level program, the Diploma of Business Administration, to the camp. To date, 16 refugees have completed the University's Diploma in Business Administration, one has completed the Certificate of Business Administration, and five the Certificate in Theology. The program primarily uses distance education and online materials, while staff members based in the nearby town of Mae Sot provide some supplementary tutorial support. Of those who have completed studies, several have been accepted into university courses in Thailand, the United States, and Australia. Others have acquired employment, mostly with local nongovernmental or community-based organizations, allowing them to work for their own Karen people in the camps.

In 2006, the Refugee Tertiary Education Committee approached the Board of Open Universities Australia for assistance.<sup>43</sup> After this meeting, Open Universities Australia made a commitment to provide 25 scholarships for refugees from Burma to study online. This provision has given impetus for negotiations between international nongovernmental organizations and the Royal Thai Government to open the refugee camps to the Internet. At this time, however, the Thai Ministry of the Interior still does not allow Internet access inside the camps, and the university has to bring its students just outside their camp so that they can download or upload online materials.

Having shown that it is possible to deliver tertiary education to refugees on the Thai-Burmese border by distance mode, the next task is to expand delivery there and potentially to other parts of the world. ACU recently appointed former Vatican-based Secretary-General of Caritas Internationalis, Duncan MacLaren, to coordinate the Karen refugee program, and to develop a sustainable system which the university, in partnership, can replicate elsewhere. In October 2008, ACU introduced

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<sup>43</sup> Open Universities Australia is a consortium of seven Australian universities, which offers studies by distance and online education, <https://www.open.edu.au/wps/portal>.

its Diploma in Liberal Studies to Mae Sot, and Jesuit universities in the United States were invited and indicated their willingness to offer courses to expand the program. The developing relationships between ACU, Open Universities Australia, and the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities in the United States are an example of how community educational engagement for social justice can work across international boundaries.

Upon evaluating the Karen refugee project, MacLaren recorded that “lecturers who have been involved say it has changed their lives, and it has given a massive boost to the Karen people themselves.”<sup>44</sup> On August 6, 2008, the federal government’s Australian Learning and Teaching Council presented the project and the staff involved with a Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning. The citation for this prestigious award read:

For developing a replicable and sustainable model that delivers empowering tertiary education to camp-based refugees.<sup>45</sup>

Further, in November 2008, the Business/Higher Education Round Table (B-HERT), a forum for leaders of Australia’s business, research, professional, and academic communities, recognized the initiative with the 2008 B-HERT Award for the Best International Collaboration in Education and Training.<sup>46</sup>

### *Vanuatu*

A third initiative is located in Vanuatu. Each year since 2002, groups of sophomore Bachelor of Nursing students and staff travel from one or more of the university’s campuses to villages in the Republic of Vanuatu<sup>47</sup> as part of their semester-long course *Health and Healing*

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<sup>44</sup> Australian Catholic University, *ACUnique*, 9 (Winter 2008): 12-3, [http://inet.acu.edu.au/acunique/Vol\\_9/story7.html](http://inet.acu.edu.au/acunique/Vol_9/story7.html).

<sup>45</sup> Australian Learning and Teaching Council. “Awards Recipients 2008.” <http://www.altc.edu.au/award-outstanding-contribution-recipient-2008-robert-compton-etc>.

<sup>46</sup> For information on the Business/Higher Education Round Table, see <http://www.bhert.com/>.

<sup>47</sup> Formerly the New Hebrides settled by the British and French in the 19th century, the Republic of Vanuatu comprises over 80 islands with an estimated population in 2008 of 215,500 people who speak over 100 local languages. The South Pacific republic’s economy is based primarily on small-scale agriculture, fishing, offshore financial services, and tourism, with substantial aid provided by Australia and New Zealand, <http://www.drhuang.com/Regional/factbook/print/nh.html>.

*Practices in Indigenous Communities.* They work alongside Ni-Vanuatu (Indigenous) primary healthcare nurses who, because there are very few doctors throughout the Republic of Vanuatu, are the backbone of that country's healthcare services. ACU's students support local healthcare nurses in villages by vaccinating children, assisting with births, and providing primary healthcare, including helping to treat patients with tuberculosis, leprosy, and malaria.

Like the Karen refugee project, the Vanuatu initiative was also recognized through an Australian Learning and Teaching Council Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning:

For pioneering an innovative model of experiential learning for nursing students in partnership with a healthcare system in a developing country.<sup>48</sup>

Upon return to their home campuses, students and faculty have initiated intense fundraising to send much-needed equipment and other resources to hospitals and village nursing stations. This experience allows students to gain an understanding of another culture and an appreciation for the influence of customs and beliefs on healthcare in a developing country.

### *Engagement Onshore*

Guided by its mission statement and the long-standing traditions of its founding religious congregations, ACU seeks to bring about a better world in which social justice is forged through shared knowledge and action. In parallel with the international community engagement examples, the university also seeks to influence change locally. It does this through partnerships with other national organizations. The onshore examples of community engagement each involve a collaborative partnership based on high levels of trust. Like the international examples, these initiatives aim to achieve a common purpose through sharing resources and the enhancement of capabilities.<sup>49</sup> The university expects to be changed by the partnerships while also contributing to change within each of the partnering communities.

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<sup>48</sup> Australian Learning and Teaching Council. "Awards Recipients 2007." <http://www.altc.edu.au/award-outstanding-contribution-recipient-2007-jacqueline-guy>.

<sup>49</sup> Arthur T. Himmelman, *Collaboration for a Change: Definitions, Decision-making Models, Roles and Collaboration Process Guide*, Revised Edition, 2002, [http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf\\_files/4achange.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/4achange.pdf).

*Clemente Australia*

In 2003, ACU commenced the Clemente Australia program in East Sydney in partnership with the St. Vincent de Paul Society.<sup>50</sup> Initiated by ACU faculty member Peter Howard, this program provides education in the humanities for homeless people with the purpose of re-engaging them with the community. The delivery of this program is modeled upon the *Clemente Course in the Humanities*, initiated in the mid-1990s in New York by Earl Shorris, who visited Australia in 2003 to workshop his program.<sup>51</sup> ACU faculty members teach the courses with volunteers, normally from the business sector, serving as individual learning partners for each of the participants. The first courses offered have included beginning level studies in Art History and Theory, Australian History, Australian Indigenous Peoples, Ethics, the Nature of Drama, Shakespeare, Sociology, and Spirituality.

Eight Clemente Australia sites have now been established in Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra, Campbelltown (south-west from Sydney), Perth, Melbourne, Newcastle, and Ballarat. Partners across the different sites include the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Mission Australia,<sup>52</sup> The Smith Family,<sup>53</sup> Edith Cowan University, the University of Ballarat, and religious congregations. To date, 165 people have participated in the program with 25 already completing ACU's Certificate in Liberal Studies and subsequently enrolling in degree programs at the university or at other

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<sup>50</sup> An international organization with almost one million members, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul identifies its mission as working "with the poor in development, by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope, and encouraging them to take control of their destiny." The first Australian conference was established in Melbourne in 1854, just 21 years after the Society's founding in Paris by Blessed Frederic Ozanam. In Australia, the Society's services include aged care, migrant and refugee services, visitation of homes, hospitals, prisons and detention centers, homeless person's services, clothing and assistance centers, care for people with psychiatric disabilities, vocational services for people with a disability, drug, alcohol, gambling and financial counseling, disaster recovery, and street vans; <http://www.vinnies.org.au/home.cfm>.

<sup>51</sup> Earl Shorris, *Riches for the Poor: The Clemente Course in the Humanities* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000).

<sup>52</sup> *Mission Australia* was formed in 2000 from separate City Missions that had operated in the major cities of Australia for almost 150 years. As a single, unified organization with an integrated approach to meeting Australia's changing social needs, Mission Australia seeks to provide holistic assistance, catering to people's emotional, physical, social, and spiritual needs, <http://www.missionaustralia.com.au>.

<sup>53</sup> *The Smith Family*, a national, independent, non-profit organization, supports children and families living in financial disadvantage, and seeks to unlock opportunities to participate more fully in society by using education as the key, <http://www.thesmithfamily.com.au>.

higher education providers. As evidenced by the evaluation of the Clemente Australia program, the participants have found the initiative transformative, as it seeks to break the cycle of poverty, inequity, and social injustice for disadvantaged and marginalized people.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the lecturers and learning partners “have found the experience enriching ... [and] have valued the students’ insights.”<sup>55</sup> They have also reported that the students “are working from their own experience, which is very rich.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Reinforcement of Community Engagement Programming**

A major challenge for the university, in continuing the work of the founding religious congregations (and dioceses), is to introduce undergraduate students to the Church’s social teaching and then to develop students, in the light of this teaching, who are aware of social responsibility to the wider community. The university’s approach to facilitating this integration has been based on academic incorporation and the provision of volunteer experiences.

First, based on a principle set out in ACU’s *Procedures for Course Approval, Amendment and Review*,<sup>57</sup> each academic program must specify to the satisfaction of the university’s academic board how the university’s Catholicity is incorporated. Along with specific undergraduate and graduate program offerings in theology, and major and minor sequences in theology and philosophy within degrees, the use of compulsory mission-focused courses in each undergraduate program is designed to ensure that students examine Catholic values during their studies. Courses in theology, philosophy, and ethics have an explicit place in undergraduate programs, and a formal analysis of how Catholic values are reflected in the University’s curriculum has been conducted and subsequently published.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Peter Howard et al., “Promoting Social Inclusion: Emerging Evidence from the *Catalyst-Clemente* Program,” *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 48(3) (2008): 479-501.

<sup>55</sup> Australian Catholic University, *ACUnique*, 1 (May 2005): 2-5 (quote from 3), [http://www.acu.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/7905/acunique\\_Vol01\\_A-Mission-Possible.pdf](http://www.acu.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/7905/acunique_Vol01_A-Mission-Possible.pdf); and 8 (Summer 2007): 4-7, [http://inet.acu.edu.au/acunique/Vol\\_8/downloads/ACUnique\\_Vol8.pdf](http://inet.acu.edu.au/acunique/Vol_8/downloads/ACUnique_Vol8.pdf).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Procedures for Course Approval, Amendment and Review* (Sydney: Australian Catholic University, 2008), <http://my.acu.edu.au/38271>.

<sup>58</sup> Gabrielle L. McMullen, “How the Mission Statement of Australian Catholic University is Reflected in its Curriculum,” *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education*, 22(1) (Fall 2001): 81-94.

Second, undergraduate degree programs also contain a specific volunteer experience or community engagement course. Such opportunities combine fieldwork in social welfare or not-for-profit organizations with scholarly and personal reflection to facilitate the students' service to the common good and the development of their concern for social justice and the dignity of all human beings. These courses are especially valuable in the disciplines of marketing, financial services, human resource management, information systems, and accountancy, which might not otherwise address these topics. Such community engagement provides opportunities for experiential learning that can transform students' thinking about themselves and their communities.<sup>59</sup>

To provide an example, at the Melbourne campus based in Fitzroy, students undertaking volunteer experience courses are involved in the Atherton Gardens high-rise community housing project. Fitzroy is one of the oldest inner-urban precincts of Melbourne, populated over the last 150 years by people of low socioeconomic levels. While parts of the precinct are currently undergoing gentrification, the local population also includes large numbers of recently arrived refugees and asylum seekers, as well as residents with a long association with Fitzroy and a profile of intergenerational disadvantage. Atherton Gardens is in close proximity to the Melbourne campus of ACU. Two specific examples of student engagement here are the breakfast club and the homework club. In each instance, university students engage with school students and their families to support their transitions to life in Australian society and to improve their educational outcomes and life skills. ACU students realize learning outcomes of their degree programs, such as communication, teamwork, reflective practice skills, and efficacy for social engagement. They also gain an appreciation for the principles associated with the Church's social teachings, while continuing the work of the founding religious congregations.

### **Assessing the Impact of Community Engagement**

How can any impact of the university's community engagement activities on the university, its students, staff, and partners be assessed? Assessing transformation is difficult because effects are frequently idiosyncratic and do not emerge on a fixed time scale. We offer several suggestions.

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<sup>59</sup> Suzanne C. Toton, *Justice Education: From Service to Solidarity* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2006).

First, as noted earlier in this paper, a key factor has been the use of an international evaluator<sup>60</sup> to review the university's community engagement activities with a special focus upon the assessment of their impact. Second, the university committed itself to the necessary organizational learning from other institutions to inculcate careful evaluation of its own community engagement projects from their commencement.<sup>61</sup> Third, the university, having adopted community engagement as a defining aspect of its work with communities, formally adopted the Holland Matrix to compile baseline data regarding such community engagement.<sup>62</sup>

Fourth, staff reports and community members' reflections and evaluations of their experiences in particular community engagements—for example, among the Karen refugees on the Thai-Burma border,<sup>63</sup> with Australian Indigenous children in rural and remote areas of Australia,<sup>64</sup> with inner city homeless persons in an effort to empower them to provide solutions to their plight both in policy and in practical terms,<sup>65</sup> and in the work of the Clemente Program<sup>66</sup>—have been subject to external assessment and subsequently published.

Fifth, as appropriate and relevant, ACU has used the framework set out in its *Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Learning*<sup>67</sup> to monitor the quality of teaching and learning processes and outcomes

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<sup>60</sup> Holland, "External Review of Community Engagement".

<sup>61</sup> For example, the University is a founding member of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance, <http://www.aucea.net.au>, and, in subscribing to reports of The Hanover Research Council, Washington, has gained insights from the report, Hanover Research, *Managing Service Learning/Community Engagement* (Washington: The Hanover Research Council, 2008).

<sup>62</sup> Barbara A. Holland, "Analyzing Institutional Commitment to Service: A Model of Key Institutional Factors," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 4 (Fall 1997): 30-41.

<sup>63</sup> Terry Veling, "One of the Best Classrooms Ever': A Reflection on Karen Refugee Students on the Thai-Burma Border," *Compass: A Review of Topical Theology*, 41(4) (Summer 2007): 4-8.

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Warren et al., "Bridging the Educational Gap: Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Beliefs, Attitudes and Practices in a Remote Australian School," *Educational Practice and Theory*, 30(1) (2008): 41-56.

<sup>65</sup> Klaus Serr, ed., *Thinking about Poverty*. Third Edition (Annandale, NSW: The Federation Press, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> John Lusty, "Building Confidence," *The Record—St. Vincent de Paul Society* (Autumn 2009): 18-20, [http://vinnies.org.au/files/NAT/Publications/The\\_Record\\_-\\_Autumn\\_2009.pdf](http://vinnies.org.au/files/NAT/Publications/The_Record_-_Autumn_2009.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Learning* (Sydney: Australian Catholic University, March 2008), [http://www.acu.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0012/101190/Policy\\_on\\_Evaluation\\_of\\_Teaching\\_and\\_Learning.pdf](http://www.acu.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/101190/Policy_on_Evaluation_of_Teaching_and_Learning.pdf).

and, thus, to provide the university with an informed basis for decision-making related to academic programs. One element of this policy is the *Learning and Teaching Evaluation Program*; it is designed to obtain student perceptions about the quality of a program's courses taught at the university, including community engagement courses. This evaluation uses a customized instrument consisting of twelve core items, one identity and mission item, and up to seven other items selected from a bank of 175 items distributed across the following categories: course learning outcomes, course organization, course presentation, course content, course resources, course assessment, staff characteristics, students' efforts and characteristics, evaluation of teaching, fieldwork/clinical/practicum experience, and online presence.<sup>68</sup> Scores range from 1-5, with 5 the best outcome.

Sixth, as already cited in this paper, assessment of specific community engagement programs by external bodies has resulted in awards from both the Australian Learning and Teaching Council<sup>69</sup> and the Business/Higher Education Round Table.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, the university's efforts in community engagement have been subject to the intense scrutiny of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). This body is charged with examining the quality of Australian universities, their programs, teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.

In Australia, universities are subject to regular external quality audits of their operations, including whether they have realized the goals contained in their particular mission statement. These audits are conducted by the AUQA and involve not only the examination of docu-

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<sup>68</sup> Australian Catholic University, *Learning and Teaching Evaluation Program*, <http://www.acu.edu.au/138862>. Within this program, the terminology "unit" is the equivalent of what is referred to in United States colleges and universities as a "course." In the text which follows, the word "course" is used to avoid confusion for readers.

<sup>69</sup> Established by the Australian Government, "the Australian Learning and Teaching Council is dedicated to improving the student learning experience by supporting quality teaching and practice" in Australian higher education institutions. The Council works with higher education institutions, discipline groups within these institutions, and individuals "as a collaborative and supportive partner in change, providing access to a network of knowledge, ideas and people," <http://www.alt.edu.au/who-we-are>.

<sup>70</sup> A not-for-profit organization established in 1990, the Business/Higher Education Round Table (B-HERT) seeks "to strengthen the relationship between business and higher education ... B-HERT is the *only* [Australian] organisation with members who are leaders in higher education, business, industry bodies and research institutions," <http://www.bhert.com/about.html>.

mentation specifically requested from the university by the AUQA, but also searching interviews with members of the governing body; senior executive staff; academic and administrative staff at all levels of appointment; undergraduate, postgraduate and research higher degree students; and external stakeholders such as employing authorities. Upon completion of the audit of a university's operations, the AUQA audit report is made public.

In 2002, ACU was audited by the AUQA. On its assessment of the University's realization of its mission and identity the AUQA noted as follows:

ACU is commended for substantially achieving its distinctive Mission goal of engaging 'the social, ethical and religious dimensions of the questions it faces in teaching, research and service.'

AUQA commends the valuable service that is provided to the community by ACU students engaged in learning activities in a community setting.<sup>71</sup>

During July and August 2008, ACU underwent its second AUQA audit, which, by agreement of the university and AUQA, focused on two themes of particular relevance to the university's strategic direction, namely *Community Engagement* and *Learning Outcomes*. The report of this audit appeared in December 2008, and provides a means for the university to gain insights into its achievements and how to enhance further its engagement with its communities.<sup>72</sup> The audit team, comprising senior representatives from Australian and New Zealand universities and the AUQA audit director, conducted site visits at three of the university's six campuses and interviewed some 300 staff, students, and external stakeholders from across the university. The publicly-available findings of the audit panel concerning community engagement can be summarized as follows:

A striking aspect of the conceptualization of community engagement at ACU National has been its focus on social justice. Rooted in Catholic social teaching, community engagement is a distinguishing feature of ACU National as a Catholic university. There is a significant justification on ethical grounds for undertaking community engagement.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> AUQA, *Report of an Audit of Australian Catholic University* (Melbourne: AUQA, 2002), 10, <http://www.auqa.edu.au/qualityaudit/universities/>.

<sup>72</sup> AUQA, *Report of an Audit of Australian Catholic University* (Melbourne: AUQA, 2008), <http://www.auqa.edu.au/qualityaudit/universities/>.

<sup>73</sup> AUQA, *Report of an Audit of Australian Catholic University* (2008), 27.

The audit panel then gave the following three separate commendations to the University:

AUQA commends ACU National for achieving a shared understanding among staff, students and partners of the University's intention to shift from a community service to a community engagement paradigm.

AUQA commends ACU National for the high level commitment to, and support for, community engagement as evidenced by the establishment of the Institute for Advancement of Community Engagement, the Community Engagement Advisory Committee and the strong leadership provided for the development and promotion of community engagement across the University.

AUQA commends ACU National for the wide range of effective community engagement partnerships in operation across the disciplines and campuses of the University.<sup>74</sup>

Through community engagement activities consistently based upon memoranda of understanding with partners both within Australia and overseas, ACU continues to manifest the charisms of its founding religious congregations, especially at a time when the Church in Australia is witnessing a decline in vocations to these same congregations. The above audit commendations are a spur to further improvement of such community engagement partnerships through refined planning and risk management and the continuing application of key performance indicators to ensure community engagement activities are always aligned with the university's strategic direction.

## Conclusion

This article has described the manner in which ACU seeks to “respond coherently to the demands of the times and to the continuous developments of social life.”<sup>75</sup> ACU seeks to do so in alignment with the charisms of the founding religious congregations and by engaging with “the communities from which it draws its students ... the communities in which its graduates find employment ... [and] the People of God in whose name and on whose behalf it lives out its [Catholic] mission.”<sup>76</sup>

The amalgamating colleges of ACU gave the university a sure foundation built upon the Church's intellectual tradition, its social teaching,

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>75</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church”, sec. 160.

<sup>76</sup> McDonald, “The University and the Social Doctrine.”

commitment to the dignity of all people, and service for the common good. This foundation is central to the shift from community service to community engagement, which has been transformative for the university as well as for the communities with which it engages.

Evidence of the transformations within the university is found in its priorities for and its approaches to community engagement detailed in this paper. This shift has given increasing priority to transformative partnerships in which all parties are committed to

an agenda greater than their individual priorities. These partnerships focus on values held in common, mutual benefits, capacity building, learning that makes a difference, and creating new knowledge and opportunities.<sup>77</sup>

The transformative effects of community engagement partnerships allow ACU to continue the spirit of the founding religious congregations today, and ensure their legacy for the future.

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<sup>77</sup> Jude Butcher et al., “Transformational Partnerships: A New Agenda for Higher Education” (Unpublished manuscript. Sydney: Australian Catholic University, 2009), 2. Professor Jude Butcher C.F.C., a Christian Brother and Director of the university’s Institute for Advancing Community Engagement, is a member of one of the founding religious congregations.