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MEDIA RELEASE

Jesuit composer conferred Honorary Doctorate by ACU for contribution to liturgical music

Australian Jesuit composer Fr Christopher Willcock SJ has been awarded an honorary doctorate by Australian Catholic University (ACU) for his contribution to liturgical music within the Catholic Church.

ACU conferred the honour on Fr Willcock at a graduation ceremony at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre on 28 April 2021.

"We are so delighted to honour Fr Willcock for his outstanding contribution to the sacred art of music. His inspirational and creative compositions sound the core of the Christian message in musical form, giving voice to the divine. Fr Willcock's commitment to advancing the mission of Christ through his life of service as a priest, professor, and composer is a wonderful inspiration for the students, staff, and alumni of ACU" said ACU Vice Chancellor Professor Zlatko Skrbis.

Fr Willcock delivered the Occasional Address at the graduation ceremony. In accepting the honour, Fr Willcock said "Whilst the honour has me as its target, I am not the full story. That is to be found in the people among whom my life and ministry as priest and composer has been spent: the many parishes, communities and individuals who have sung and played what I have written, either in their worship or outside their worship.

"Music, more than words, images, textures and aromas, brings us into contact with the utterly inexpressible, in short, it brings us into contact with the divine.

"For myself I would describe music as a critical part of my spiritual life, the 'sound-wave' along which God communicates with me, and along which I, as a composer, communicate with God." The award celebrates Fr Willcock's decades-long career as a renowned composer of both sacred and secular music.

His vast array of liturgical works includes Mass, psalm and hymn settings, as well as motets, folk songs, carols and settings of contemporary texts. He has also prepared a variety of compositions for the concert hall, including the *Tallis Scholars*, *Melbourne Chamber Orchestra*, *Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and Chorus*, *Musica Viva Australia* and *The Melbourne Chorale*.

"Music makes a tremendous contribution to the cultural and liturgical life of society. Through his compositions Fr Willcock shares the divine with others and demonstrates that God truly is found in all things, especially in music. We are very grateful that Fr Willcock's music has been honoured in this way and continues to bring God's love and joy to so many" said the Provincial of the Australian Jesuits Fr Quyen Vu SJ.

Christopher Willcock was born in Sydney in 1947 and completed his studies in piano under Alexander Sverjensky at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music and in composition under Peter Sculthorpe at the University of Sydney.

He was ordained a Jesuit priest in 1977, and, following doctoral studies in Paris, he taught sacramental theology and liturgical studies within the United Faculty of Theology, Parkville, Victoria.

Fr Christopher Willcock SJ currently resides in Melbourne as a minister and composer.

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About the Australian Jesuits

Active in Australia since 1848, The Society of Jesus is the largest male religious congregation in the world comprising some 15,536 members globally. Headquartered in Rome, it has more than 100 priests and brothers in Australia and employs more than 1800 people across its various Australian ministries in Education, Social Justice, Spirituality, Parishes and Communications.

Image: Rev Dr Christopher Willcock SJ (Image attributable to GPT Events)

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