

ACU awards Honorary Doctorate to the Chaldean Archbishop of Erbil, Iraq

Australian Catholic University (ACU) conferred an honorary doctor of the University (*Honoris Causa*) on Archbishop Bashar Matti Warda CSsR, Chaldean Archbishop of Erbil, Iraq on Tuesday 23 July.

ACU Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Greg Craven presented the honorary doctorate in front of more than 50 distinguished guests at ACU's St Mary of the Cross MacKillop Chapel in Fitzroy, including Most Rev Amel Nona, DD, Archbishop of the Chaldean Diocese of St Thomas, Chaldean Diocese of St Thomas; Mrs Rosette Shamoun Chancellor; Chaldean Catholic Church; Fr Hadell Albabo; Parish Priest, St. Thomas The Apostle Chaldean Catholic Cathedral, Sydney; Fr Maher Gorges; Parish Priest, St. George Chaldean Catholic, Melbourne; Fr Paul Mingana; Parish Priest, St. Mary's Assumption Chaldean Church, Sydney; and Fr Thair Sheikh, Parish Priest, Chaldean Church.

His Excellency received the award in recognition of his distinguished service to the Christian community in the Middle East and especially in Catholic education, particularly in the establishment of the Catholic University in Erbil, in promoting interfaith dialogue and reconciliation, and a lifetime of outstanding service to Catholic education and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition in the interests of serving the common good.

Professor Craven said ACU honorary doctorate degrees recognised individuals who have provided outstanding contributions to the community and to humanity.

“Our honorary degrees exemplify the exceptional contribution being made by individuals, on a local or international scale in line with the University's mission, goals and philosophy.

“Archbishop Warda is renowned for his support of persecuted people, namely the Christian and Yezidi refugees of Iraq. He has made a significant contribution to Catholic education in the Middle East, promoting education as a means of bringing peace and harmony to the region.”

Archbishop Warda's responsibilities have extended far beyond normal peacetime pastoral duties. While ministering in Erbil during the years of the ISIS war, the Archbishop served as de facto chief administrator of relief services for displaced people.

As thousands of refugees fled ISIS attacks from neighbouring areas and poured into his diocese, Archbishop Warda provided oversight of food, housing, education and pastoral care for nearly twenty thousand threatened Christian families.

Since the ISIS threat has diminished, Archbishop Warda has focused his efforts on returning thousands of refugees back to their homelands and re-establishing the Catholic presence in Iraq. Archbishop Warda has become a spokesperson on behalf of the persecuted Christian and Yezidi people of northern Iraq.

He has appeared in broadcasts and interviews in major news outlets around the world, raising awareness of the plight of religious minorities and calling for support. Archbishop Warda has been recognised as a leading voice in promoting open and peaceful dialogue among people of diverse faiths.

One of Archbishop Warda's missions has been to promote peace and harmony among the people of his region, especially through the means of Catholic education. In 2015, he founded the Catholic University of Erbil, which is open to students and scholars of all faiths. The university has become a source of opportunity for persecuted peoples to advance in the world and manifests the power of education to improve lives and positively influence attitudes.

Among his many achievements, Archbishop Warda has founded several Catholic schools in Baghdad. He founded the Mar Qardakh School in Erbil, which received its International Baccalaureate accreditation in 2015. Archbishop Warda has authored numerous books and articles and has been honoured as distinguished speaker at the University of Notre Dame, Georgetown University, the University of San Diego, and the Franciscan University of Steubenville, among others.

In 2016, Archbishop Warda was honoured with the Pope Francis Charity and Leadership Award. Bestowed upon him by the Caritas in Veritate International, the award honours young volunteers who bring “charity in truth” and human progress to all.

To this day, Archbishop Warda continues to advocate for the dignity of all peoples. He is heavily involved in establishing the Maryamana Hospital in Erbil, an institution which will provide healthcare and employment

within a recovering region. Archbishop Warda teaches at Babel Theological Seminary in Erbil, while working to establish a viable Catholic presence in Iraq.

Despite his lifetime of outstanding service to Catholic education, Archbishop Warda is humbled by those he has worked with through many difficult years. Archbishop Warda expresses a sense of gratitude that his cause has been recognised within the Catholic intellectual tradition as serving in the interests of the common good.

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