



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

PLENARY MEETING

May 3-10, 2019

On Friday, May 3, the Catholic Bishops of Australia gathered for the biannual Plenary Meeting at the Catholic Leadership Centre in East Melbourne. The eight Commissions of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference held meetings on the first day of the gathering, followed by the Plenary Meeting over the seven subsequent days.

Opening Mass

The Mass of the Holy Spirit was concelebrated on May 4 in St John the Evangelist Church. The President of Conference, Archbishop Mark Coleridge, was the principal celebrant and preached the homily.

Welcome

Archbishop Coleridge welcomed his fellow Bishops and the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana. Archbishop Yllana concelebrated Mass, met bishops informally and addressed the Plenary Meeting.

Archbishop Coleridge also welcomed the Second Secretary to the Apostolic Nunciature, Monsignor Sebastiano Sanna, as well as the observers from Catholic Religious Australia: Sr Anne Lane PBVM, Sr Stancia Vichie MSS and Br Peter Carroll FMS.

Episcopal Appointments since the last Plenary Meeting

Appointment of Ordinary

Monsignor Carl Reid, Ordinary of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross, appointed March 26, 2019. He will be installed on August 27.

Resignation of Ordinary

Monsignor Harry Entwistle, Ordinary of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross, resignation March 26, 2019

Message from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to the Holy Father

As is customary, the Bishops sent a message to the Holy Father. The message addressed the impending Australian election and the Conference's election statement, *Politics in Service of Peace*, the title of which cites Pope Francis. The message acknowledged the great desire for peace in the world, especially in the wake of terror attacks in Christchurch and Sri Lanka.

The Bishops expressed their anticipation ahead of the June visit *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, when they will pray at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, celebrate Mass in the Papal Basilicas and meet with Pope Francis and members of the Roman Curia.

The message provided an update on the overwhelming response of the People of God in Australia to the Listening and Dialogue phase of the Plenary Council 2020, during which 222,000 people contributed to more than 17,000 submissions.

The Bishops thanked Pope Francis for his recent Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, following the 2018 Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment. They also expressed gratitude for Pope Francis' convocation of the presidents of episcopal conferences to discuss the Church's ongoing response to child sexual abuse. That international emphasis is being lived out in Australia, including in the Church's implementation of recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and dioceses' participation in the Australian Government's National Redress Scheme, the message explained.

Membership and elections

Elections were held to fill two positions on the Permanent Committee. Archbishop Comensoli and Bishop O'Kelly were elected to the Permanent Committee, joining Archbishop Costelloe and Bishops McGuckin, O'Regan and Tarabay, who were elected in 2018. Archbishops Coleridge and Fisher, as Conference President and Vice-President respectively, are *ex officio* members of the Permanent Committee.

Archbishop Comensoli's election to the Permanent Committee created a vacancy on the Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council. Bishop Edwards was appointed to that Commission.

Professional Standards and Safeguarding

The Conference devoted a number of sessions of the Plenary Meeting to the issues of professional standards and safeguarding.

The Conference considered and approved the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, which have been developed by Catholic Professional Standards Ltd (CPSL) in line with the Child Safe Standards recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It was noted that CPSL is due to conduct audits of a number of dioceses, in relation to those Standards, in the coming months.

Mr Jack de Groot, chair of the Implementation Advisory Group, and executive officer Ms Anna Tydd addressed the meeting on its current work plan. The Conference asked the Implementation Advisory Group to prioritise its work developing nationally consistent guidelines for responding to complaints and allegations against clergy, religious and lay Church workers. It was observed that *Towards Healing* and the Melbourne Response remain in effect, despite 34 dioceses having entered the National Redress Scheme.

Review of Church governance

Mr de Groot also provided an update for the bishops on the recently established review of diocesan and parish governance. He highlighted the importance of contemporary insights and best practice in corporate approaches to governance, harmonised with canon law, Catholic ecclesiology and foundational scriptural and theological perspectives to better inform future directions in diocesan and parish governance.

Preparation for visit *Ad Limina Apostolorum*

The General Secretary provided an update on plans for the Bishops' *Ad Limina Apostolorum* visit to Rome in late June, as well as the preceding retreat. The visit will include an audience with the Holy Father, meetings with various dicasteries and congregations of the Holy See, Mass at the Papal Basilicas and prayer at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

Pastoral Discussion on the Church in contemporary Australia

The Bishops discussed the current circumstances of the Catholic Church and its hierarchy in Australian society, acknowledging that significant scandals have been a cause of hurt and confusion, that there is a lack of confidence in the leadership of the Church and there is a new era of engagement between the Church and the wider society. They also acknowledged the ongoing support of many – both inside and outside the Church – as signs of God’s ongoing presence and grace.

The Bishops affirmed a focus on Jesus Christ, mutual support and solidarity among the faithful and a rediscovery of the heart of the Catholic faith were critical at this time in the Church’s history.

Pastoral Discussion on Social Media

Bishop Umbers led a pastoral discussion on social media, along with Mr Gavin Abraham and Ms Daniela Tan from the Bishops Conference’s Media and Communications Department. The discussion focused on the important opportunities Bishops, and the wider Church, have available to them using online platforms. Examples of effective social media users within and beyond the Church were shared and Bishops were encouraged to embrace such means of communication, either personally or with the support of staff.

Bishops’ visit to Eastern Rite parishes

On Sunday, May 5, most Latin Rite Bishops celebrated Mass with the five Eastern Rite parishes in Melbourne: the Chaldean, Maronite, Melkite, Syro-Malabar and Ukrainian Churches. It is believed to have been the first time such a large number of Latin Rite Bishops have celebrated Mass with Eastern Rite parishes on the same day in Australia.

Reports from Bishops Commission and Episcopal Panels

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

- i. Ms Jacinta Collins, the new executive director of the National Catholic Education Commission, briefed the Bishops on a number of issues of importance for Catholic schools, including: sustainable and equitable funding; the provision of early childhood education; safeguarding and abuse prevention measures; delivering quality educational outcomes; and religious freedom. The Bishops also discussed education of Indigenous students, capital funding for older Catholic schools and the mission of Catholic education.
- ii. Plans are being developed to mark the 200th anniversary of Catholic education in Australia, which will occur in 2020. The milestone recognises the earliest Catholic school with continuity up until the present day, in the Diocese of Parramatta.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

The 10th National Forum of the National Council of Churches in Australia will be held in Canberra in June 2019, while the Australian Bishops will be in Rome. The Catholic Church is entitled to send six representatives. The Conference approved the nomination of the following delegates: Associate Professor Nasir Butrous, Rev Professor Gerard Kelly, Ms Margaret Naylor, Mr Geoff Officer, Dr Matthew Tan and Mrs Louise Zavone. The theme of the triennial forum is “Living and Walking in the Holy Spirit: called to transforming discipleship”.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR EVANGELISATION, LAITY AND MINISTRY

- i. Bishops were reminded that Pope Francis has declared October 2019 an Extraordinary Mission Month. They have received materials from the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples and additional resources will be made available in the coming months.
- ii. Feedback from those who attended World Youth Day 2019 in Panama has been positive. Bishops were reminded that the next major youth gathering in Australia will be the Australian Catholic Youth Festival in Perth this December. More than 6,000 young people are expected to make the pilgrimage.
- iii. Work is progressing on the development of the *Ratio Nationalis* for priestly formation in Australia. Consultation has taken place with key collaborators and it is expected a draft will be presented to the November 2019 Plenary Meeting for consideration. It would then be submitted to Rome for approval.
- iv. The Archdiocese of Melbourne has confirmed it will support the production and broadcasting of *Mass for You at Home* in 2019 and 2020.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR LIFE, FAMILY AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

- i. It was observed that both major political parties were avoiding speaking about religious freedom in the election campaign. Key questions for the consideration of the Bishops included their attitude to a Bill of Rights or legislation to protect religious freedom and proposed amendments to the *Sex Discrimination Act* with regard especially to staff and students of Catholic schools. The implications of changes to gender identification on civil birth certificates were also noted.
- ii. The bishops were advised that the development of a national nuptial formation program, initiated following the promulgation of Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, is continuing through the collaboration of diocesan marriage and family offices. The program is intended to provide couples with substantive formation in living the sacrament of marriage. Equivalent resources developed by some overseas dioceses have been reviewed to assist the process of developing and ensuring best practice in formation for married life in Australia.
- iii. The Conference gave in principle support to the hosting of a colloquium for men to be held in early 2020, similar to the colloquium for women that is periodically hosted by the Council for Australian Catholic Women and the Office for the Participation of Women. The event is seen as being preparatory for the Plenary Council 2020.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR LITURGY

- i. It was noted that as part of formation for clergy outlined in the *Ratio Nationalis*, it was important seminarians, deacons, priests and bishops also undertook liturgical formation. That should include both academic formation and the praxis of celebrating liturgical and sacramental rites.
- ii. The Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments is preparing guidelines on *Magnum Principium*, a document that gives episcopal conferences greater say over the translation of liturgical texts. Some Bishops noted that some prayers in the *Roman Missal* are difficult to proclaim, prompting questions about the ability to review and propose new translations of those prayers.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR RELATIONS WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

- i. The Commission, upon the release of the Commonwealth Government's *Closing the Gap* report in February, had noted its disappointment over the systemic failure to reduce gaps between various measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. The Bishops spoke in particular of the alarming rates of suicide, especially among young Indigenous people.
- ii. In discussion about the spiritual richness of Indigenous culture, the Bishops noted the importance of ongoing opportunities for Indigenous men and women to minister to their communities and for the Church to promote Indigenous faith and culture.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE – MISSION AND SERVICE

- i. The Bishops' 2019-2020 Social Justice Statement is entitled *Making it Real: Genuine human encounter in our digital world*. It draws upon principles of Catholic Social Teaching and World Communications Day messages from Pope Francis, including his 2019 message. The statement has been prepared in conjunction with social justice officials, social media and communications officers, and service providers.
- ii. The Bishops proposed mental health as the theme for the 2020-21 Social Justice Statement, mindful of the results of the survey of young Australian Catholics in 2017, who cited mental health as one of their key concerns, as well as the challenges young Indigenous people (among others) are facing currently.
- iii. The Commission chair noted two important recent appointments: Dr Ursula Stephens as chief executive officer of Catholic Social Services Australia; and Fr Maurizio Pettenà CS as the representative in Oceania of the Section for Migrants and Refugees of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. Fr Pettenà will undertake the duties of this new role while continuing to serve as the director of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR THE PLENARY COUNCIL

The Bishops received an update on the completion of the Listening and Dialogue phase of the Plenary Council, during which 17,457 submissions were received on behalf of more than 222,000 people. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the submissions will help inform the development of National Themes for Discernment, to be announced at Pentecost (June 9).

EPISCOPAL PANEL FOR CANON LAW

The Panel chair noted that with the possibility of birth certificates no longer requiring gender to be specified, it was important that baptismal certificates include information about gender. Such details will be important in the context of vocations to marriage, the priesthood and religious life.