

Bishops embark on ad limina visit to Rome

The Catholic Bishops of Australia are embarking on a spiritual pilgrimage to Rome this month, designed to celebrate and strengthen their communion with the universal Church and the Successor of Peter, Pope John Paul II.

The pilgrimage is known as the "ad limina Apostolorum" visit - or "to the threshold of the Apostles", and it will take place from March 14 to 28.

All bishops who are charged with the leadership of a diocese, are required to make an ad limina visit every five years. It is an important spiritual pilgrimage and a reminder of a local bishop's wider role, in communion with the bishops of the world.

Thirty-six of Australia's 44 bishops will undertake the ad limina visit, during which they will report to the Pope on the pastoral situation in Australia and visit the tombs of Sts Peter and Paul, pastors and pillars of the Roman Church.

The visit is also seen as an important part of the Holy Father's pastoral ministry, as he receives the bishops with whom he exercises pastoral ministry and listens and talks with them about their mission in their diocese.

Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference President Archbishop Francis Carroll of Canberra-Goulburn said he and his fellow bishops would be seeking the prayers of those in their diocesan community as they undertook the ad limina pilgrimage.

"We wish for all Catholics, through prayer and solidarity, to feel a part of the ad limina visit, which confirms and celebrates that which we profess each week when we express our belief in the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church'," Archbishop Carroll said.

"Our faith was handed down to us from Jesus by the apostles and as bishops we are charged with the enormous responsibility of continuing that tradition. The ad limina visit is an important physical and spiritual milestone in the carrying out of that ministry."

While in Rome, the bishops will also make a pilgrimage to Assisi, undertake a day of reflection at Castelgandolfo and visit 27 various Vatican organisations. Ad Limina visit gets underway with Italian TV appearance

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference President, Archbishop Francis Carroll has begun his ad limina visit to Rome by putting his linguistic skills to the test in a live appearance on Italian television.

Archbishop Carroll was the special guest on Rai International's religious program, Cristianita, which is broadcast on Sundays and includes a live cross to the Pope's Angelus address from St Peter's Square.

He was accompanied on the program by Bishop Mark Coleridge of Melbourne, who is fluent in Italian after several years spent working at the Vatican.

Both bishops took a series of questions from the host, Sr Myriam Castelli, on a variety of issues concerning the Church in Australia.

They touched on such topics as interfaith relations, the family and human dignity as well as issues surrounding evangelization in Australia's multicultural, multi-faith and secular society.

Following the show, Sr Myriam thanked Archbishop Carroll for appearing.

"My compliments to you on your Italian," she said.

Thirty-six of Australia's bishops are in Rome for the ad limina visit, which is a five-yearly pilgrimage to the tombs of the apostles, Sts Peter and Paul.

Their program of visits to various Vatican congregations gets underway on Monday.

A high point of the ad limina will occur on Tuesday when the bishops concelebrate Mass at St Peter's Basilica.