



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

PLENARY MEETING

5-11 May 2016

On Thursday 5 May, the Catholic bishops of Australia gathered for their biannual plenary meeting at Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney. The thirteen Commissions of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference held meetings on the first day of the gathering and this was followed by the six-day plenary meeting.

Opening Mass

The Mass of the Holy Spirit was concelebrated on Thursday 5 May in the Mary MacKillop Memorial Chapel, North Sydney at 7 am. The President of Conference, Archbishop Denis Hart, was the principal celebrant and preached the homily.

Welcome and visit from Apostolic Nuncio to Australia

On Thursday 5 May, Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana, the Apostolic Nuncio in Australia, addressed the Bishops Conference. The Apostolic Nuncio offered a reflection on the relationship between a bishop and the priests of his diocese. Drawing upon the Apostolic Exhortation '*Pastores Gregis*' of Saint John Paul II, he encouraged the bishops to accompany priests as both father and brother to them, always offering them welcome and hospitality as well as pastoral care.

Observers

Archbishop Hart welcomed the observers from the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (Catholic Religious Australia). The observers were Sr Berneice Loch RSM, Sr Ruth Durick OSU and Fr Tom McDonough CP.

Episcopal appointments since the last plenary

5 May 2016 - Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFMConv was appointed the fourth Bishop of Parramatta

Retired Bishops

30 December 2015 – Pope Francis accepted the resignation of Bishop Brian Finnegan, Auxiliary Bishop of Brisbane

Bishops who have died since the last plenary

Bishop Raymond Benjamin, Emeritus Bishop of Townsville
Bishop Ronald Mulkearns, Emeritus Bishop of Ballarat
Bishop John Satterthwaite, Emeritus Bishop of Lismore
Bishop Myles McKeon, Emeritus Bishop of Bunbury

Message to the Holy Father

The bishops of Australia wrote to the Holy Father expressing gratitude for the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, The Joy of Love: On Love in the Family. The bishops thanked the Holy Father for the priority given to rediscovering the authentic collegiality of the bishops and the synodality of the whole Church. They noted that many of them are looking forward to gathering with the Holy Father at Krakow, Poland in July for World Youth Day.

Membership Panel

Vacancies on some bishops commissions were filled: Archbishop Philip Wilson was appointed to the Bishops Commission for Canon Law, Bishop Terry Curtin to the Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Interreligious Relations and Bishop Paul Bird to the Bishops Commission for Health and Community Services.

Elections

Archbishop Denis Hart was elected President of Conference for a third term and Archbishop Mark Coleridge was elected Vice-President.

There were also elections to the Permanent Committee: Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, Archbishop Philip Wilson, and Bishop Vincent Long van Nguyen OFMConv. The following members, elected in 2015, will continue their membership: Archbishop Christopher Prowse, Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP and Bishop Eugene Hurley.

Special sessions

Review of Conference

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference is currently undergoing a statutory review that occurs every ten years. The review is taking place in two phases and takes account of the biannual plenary meeting process, operations of bishops commissions and a review of the General Secretariat. The review process began after the plenary meeting last November; a final report on the review will be presented at the November plenary meeting this year.

Australian Catholic Ministry Register

Fr Tim Brennan MSC, Executive Officer, National Committee for Professional Standards, led a presentation about the Australian Catholic Ministry Register (ACMR) that was first endorsed by the Conference in 2006. This register is being implemented in dioceses and religious institutes across Australia. The register fulfils the requirements of Towards Healing and will help ensure that priests and religious visiting other jurisdictions have the necessary approval to work with children and vulnerable people.

***Amoris Laetitia*, Apostolic Exhortation**

A wide-ranging discussion took place about the post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*. Archbishop Coleridge led the discussion following his attendance at the Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2016. He highlighted that Pope Francis speaks with the authority of the Petrine Office while his style was to be present as a bishop among bishops. The exhortation highlights that Pope Francis is more concerned about creating spaces than dominating processes. Archbishop Coleridge described the two synods on the family, the jubilee Year of Mercy and the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* as being part of a synodal journey to which Pope Francis has called the whole Church.

The bishops discussed how *Amoris Laetitia* could assist priests in their pastoral ministry, particularly in relation to speaking the truth and showing mercy. The exhortation also highlights the need for clergy to help people to work through the external and the internal forum, which requires discernment and a well formed conscience.

The need for pastoral listening and the accompanying of people on the journey of life was also identified as a significant part of the exhortation. The bishops noted the important statements on moral theology throughout the exhortation. Bishop Eugene Hurley, who also participated in the Synod, described the exhortation as mirroring its spirit. He said Pope Francis turned the messiness of the Synod into something focussed and encouraging.

Same-Sex Marriage

The bishops continued the conversation begun during the plenary meeting last November about proposed changes to the Marriage Act. They discussed the intended plebiscite and possible parliamentary vote. They decided upon a number of initiatives that will help present Catholic teaching about marriage, mindful of doing so in ways that are truthful, respectful, and concerned not only for the Church community but for the good of the nation.

Permanent Committee

Royal Commission

Preparations are under way by the Truth, Justice and Healing Council for the Royal Commission Catholic Church Final Hearing in February 2017. Conference was informed that the Church can nominate people to appear before the Royal Commission during the Catholic Church Final Hearing.

On 5 May the Royal Commission invited submissions 'from individuals and organisations about any factors which may have contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in Catholic institutions, or affected the institutional response to child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church'. Bishops were encouraged to invite appropriately informed people to make submissions to the Royal Commission.

Election Statement

After considering how best to address the Catholic community and wider Australian community in the lead-up to the forthcoming federal election, the bishops opted to draft a statement articulating key concerns that ought to be considered by voters and appeal for a positive engagement with the Catholic community in the election process.

The Drafting Panel presented for consideration a new text titled '*A Vote for the Voiceless*'. This statement was approved by Conference and referred to the Public Policy Office for design and distribution to Catholic parishes, workplaces and Church agencies.

Bishops Commission for Administration and Information

A proposal was presented regarding the naming of ACBC General Secretariat buildings at Braddon in Canberra now that renovation of the former Mercy Convent is nearing completion. Conference approved naming the former Mercy Convent as "McGilvray House" and the naming of the Conference Secretariat building as "The Dougherty Centre".

Employment Relations

The Commission reported that early results from the Census of Catholic Employment project, which the Pastoral Research Office has undertaken, show a number of trends such as the large numbers of part-time and casual workers, and a greater proportion of female workers. A number of major diocese and Catholic employers are yet to respond to the survey. Separate reports from the Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations and the Office for Employment Relations are available upon request.

National Church Life Survey

The Conference was informed that the process of selecting a random sample of parishes from each diocese to participate in the 2016 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) is underway. The main Catholic questionnaire for Mass attenders has been revised and shortened and is being trialled in a few parishes. For the first time, the eparchies have been invited to include a sample of their parishes in the national random sample.

Pastoral Research

The Commission highlighted that as part of the National Catholic Census Project, the process of updating parish boundary specifications will begin this year, so that the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census areas can be matched to parish areas, thereby enabling the acquisition of 2016 Census data for every parish, a practice that has been in place since the 1991 Census.

Bishops Commission for Canon Law

Eastern Catholics in Australia

A new booklet *Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia* has been distributed to each Diocese and Eparchy. The booklet aims to inform the Latin clergy about the Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia. The Commission recommends that clergy be in-serviced about the Eastern Churches in Australia. Each priest was sent a copy and a digital version is available on the ACBC website to download:

https://www.catholic.org.au/images/pdf/2016_Eastern_Catholic_Churches_in_Australia.pdf

Bishops Commission for Catholic Education

A discussion took place about the significant developments in relation to the regulation and scrutiny of the use of financial resources by schools. A paper was provided to each bishop on 'Government Requirements for School Funding'. The conference accepted a request that all bishops consider the implications, detailed in the paper, in their own diocese in collaboration with state and territory Catholic education commissions.

The Commission noted that school funding policy beyond 2017 remains under discussion, most recently in the context of the meeting of the Council of Australian Governments.

An ongoing priority of the Commission and of the National Catholic Education Commission has been the faith formation of Catholic school staff. The Commission regards the formation of staff as vital for the transmission of faith to students. This is all the more important in an era when so relatively few children regularly and actively participate in Sunday Mass and parish life.

Bishops Commission for Church Ministry

Spiritual direction

The Conference approved the establishment of a course to train priests in the art of spiritual accompaniment. The course will be a joint venture between the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry and the Centre for Christian Spirituality at Randwick. The Conference expressed hope that the course might be available in external mode to make it possible for priests distant from Sydney to participate.

Council for Australian Catholic Women

The Council will host a colloquium on 17 and 18 September 2016 at Mary MacKillop Place, Sydney. The theme is '*Women as Witnesses to the Joy of the Gospel*', which is based on *Evangelii Gaudium* #103/4.

Australian Catholic Council for Lay Pastoral Ministry

A report, commissioned by the bishops in 2014 about Lay Pastoral Ministry, has been completed. The report highlights the needs for bishops to have guidelines for lay pastoral workers that includes issues of training, support, supervision, mentoring,

voluntary and paid work and designing a just workplace. The report is to be published electronically later this year.

Bishops Commission for Doctrine and Morals

The Commission reported on its communication with the Council for Australian Catholic Women (CACW) regarding gender justice in the Catholic Church. The Commission noted the Council's current strategic focus on formation, education and research into the theology of women and the implications this will have on improving the participation of women in decision-making, leadership and ministry in the Catholic Church in Australia. The Commission also acknowledged the communications between the CACW and the Australian Catholic Theological Association regarding the issue of gender justice.

Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Interreligious Relations

The Conference approved a proposal from the Commission that following the resignation of Bishop Vincent Long as Co-Chairman of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Australian National Dialogue, Bishop Terrence Curtin will now fill this role.

The Conference approved a proposal from the Commission that following the resignation of Mrs Elizabeth Harrington from the Australian Roman Catholic – Uniting Church Dialogue, the vacant position will be filled by Dr Antonia Pizzey.

Common date for Easter

Bishop Rabbat provided an update on progress towards agreement about a common date for Easter between the Eastern and Western Churches. He noted that further progress may depend on what occurs at the forthcoming Pan-Orthodox Synod. There are differences among the Eastern Churches at present, depending on which calendar they follow. He noted that some Eastern Churches are open to agreeing to a common date for Easter while others may not be ready to take this step.

Upcoming ecumenical and interreligious events

Attention was drawn to forthcoming ecumenical and interreligious events:
The 9th National Council of Churches of Australia National Forum will be held in Sydney 24-27 June 2016.

In late October 2016 a National Gathering of diocesan commissions for ecumenism and interreligious relations will be held in Melbourne. Fr Philipp G. Renczes, SJ, Professor of Dogmatic and Patristic Theology, Pontifical Gregorian University, has accepted an invitation to be the keynote speaker at this Gathering. Apart from the Gathering itself, an event with the Jewish community in Melbourne is envisaged, and also an event in Sydney involving the Eastern Catholic bishops that will focus on East-West dialogue, and dialogue with the Orthodox.

Bishops Commission for Health and Community Services

The Conference approved of the recommendation from the Commission that Dr Maria Harries AM be appointed as Chairperson of the Board of Catholic Social Services Australia for a second three year term commencing on 29 November 2016.

The Conference acknowledged the completion of the appointment term of Ms Rowena McNally as Chair of Catholic Health Australia and expressed sincere appreciation for her significant contribution to the life of the Catholic Church's health ministry in Australia. The Conference acknowledged the appointment of Mr Tony Howarth AO, as the new Board Chair of Catholic Health Australia.

The commissioned reported that Catholic Social Services Australia has been actively advocating for family tax benefits, the future role and contribution of regional 'capital' cities, mental health reforms, and refugees and asylum seekers. Marcelle Mogg, Chief Executive Officer of CSSA, has been in regular liaison with the Department of Social Services regarding the resettlement of 12,000 Syrian refugees, of which only 500-600 Australian visas have been granted.

The Commission reported that the uncertainty regarding the ongoing future of the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC) has been problematic for the social services sector, especially in progressing red-tape reduction initiatives with both state regulators and other Commonwealth agencies.

The Conference noted that CSSA is developing mentoring and support processes for new leaders and partnering with Catholic Health Australia to bring a leadership formation program to Australia. This program is a joint initiative for leaders in health and community services.

The Commission noted that Catholic Health Australia launched four new publications in March 2016 including; *Welcome Inclusion Attentive Presence: The central role of pastoral care in Catholic health and aged care*, *Language at the Heart of Mission*, *Code of Ethical Standards: Supplementary Papers*, and *Pastoral Care Survey Report*.

Bishops Commission for Justice, Ecology and Development

The Conference approved the appointment of Patrice Scales and Kate Fogarty as members of the National Council of Caritas Australia.

Social Justice Statement 2016 - 2017

The bishops edited and approved the draft text of the Social Justice Statement for 2016-2017, 'A Place at the Table: Social Justice in an ageing society', which addresses key challenges as well as great opportunities presented to Australian society in the face of an ageing population.

The Holy Father has regularly spoken of the need for societies to foster respect for the dignity of older people, to promote their participation in the heart of community life, and to strengthen the bonds between young and old. The words of Pope Francis underpin and guide the message of this Social Justice Statement. They highlight the need for a collective sense of gratitude and hospitality and provide the central motif of 'the table', which alludes to the gathering place of the family and the sacramental heart of our Church.

Previous pronouncements of Conference and its agencies were used in the preparation of the Statement, as were reports from a wide range of academic, human rights and Church and community-based sources.

Bishops Commission for Liturgy

The bishops agreed to continue endorsing the Australian Catholic University Centre for Liturgy.

Bishop Patrick O'Regan was appointed as the Australian representative on the International Commission on English in the Liturgy in place of Archbishop Denis Hart who is stepping down in the near future.

The Conference approved the proposal that the Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ Eternal High Priest and will seek the confirmation of the Holy See for the celebration of the

Feast day on the Thursday after Pentecost. The bishops also approved the texts for the Feast day that will be used in Australia.

Bishop O'Regan, Chair of the Bishops Commission for Liturgy noted that two advisory bodies of the Commission, the National Liturgical Architecture and Art Board and the National Liturgical Music Board have recently produced publications that would serve as the principal resources for liturgical art, architecture and music in Australia. The publications are: *And when churches are to be built ...': preparation, planning and construction of places of worship*, and the *Catholic Worship Book II*.

Bishops Commission for Evangelisation

The Commission noted that the Diocese of Broken Bay will host the PROCLAIM conference on behalf of the ACBC from 1 – 3 September 2016 at The Concourse, Chatswood, Sydney. Further details available: <http://www.proclaimconference.com.au/>

Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life

The bishops approved a proposal from the Commission to review the Apostleship of the Sea in Australia. Sunday 10 July is designated as Sea Sunday and will be celebrated in parishes across Australia.

Prisoners Pastoral Care Council

Conference approved a plan from the Commission that the Australian Catholic Prisoners Pastoral Care Council will publish and distribute a statement on restorative justice on Sunday 6 November 2016, the day that Pope Francis has dedicated as a Jubilee for Prisoners.

Refugees

The 2015 Social Justice Statement on Asylum Seekers, '*For Those Who've Come Across the Seas*', was well received with exceptionally high demand for hard copies. It was a very popular discussion resource for parishes and schools.

Sport & Health

The Commission advised Conference that a working group will be established to articulate the purpose and develop a framework for a future Advisory Group on Sport & Health within the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life.

Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

The Conference approved a proposal to change the name of the Commission. The proposed name change follows a series of discussions between the Commission and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC). The Commission was known as the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. It will now be known as the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (BCRATSIP).

On 29 November 2016, the 30th anniversary of the visit of St John Paul II to Blatherskite Park in Alice Springs and his address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples there will be commemorated.

A new brochure, developed by the Commission, will be distributed as guide for Catholic communities in hosting and conducting a Welcome to Country or an Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners. The Conference will now adopt the practice of Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners at meetings when appropriate.

In collaboration with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, the Commission participated in a formation retreat for diocesan personnel engaged in ministry to Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The retreat ran from Monday 18 to Friday 22 April 2016.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday will be celebrated on 3 July 2016. The theme centres on the Year of Mercy and Pope Francis' message that 'we don't believe that there is a chance for redemption; for a hand to raise you up, flood you with infinite, patient, indulgent love; to put you back on your feet. We need mercy'. A parish kit will be distributed to every parish and school in advance of ATSI Sunday.

The Commission highlighted that Fr Jim Knight SVD is providing Aboriginal cultural awareness and formation for seminarians. Bishop Eugene Hurley, Chair of the Commission, extended an invitation to all dioceses to consider sending seminarians to Alice Springs to participate in the immersion program and experience cultural awareness with a local Aboriginal community.

Bishops Commission for Family, Youth & Life

Conference noted a number of new appointments to the Councils of the Bishops Commission for Family, Youth and Life. These included: the Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council; Francine and Byron Pirola as Chair-couple and Ursula (Tink) and Mark Boyd as Deputy Chair-couple. Australian Catholic Life Council; Anna Krohn as Chairperson and Ann O'Brien as Deputy Chair. Australian Catholic Youth Council Anita Parker as Chairperson and Fr Chris Ryan MGL as Deputy Chair.

General business

Eastern Eparchs

The Eastern Eparchs reported on the situation for their people in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Ukraine. Archbishop Amel Nona, Bishop Robert Rabbat, Bishop Antoine Tarabay and Bishop Peter Stasiuk gave heartfelt accounts of what is happening in their home countries and the persecution of Christians in their Churches.

At present the homelands of Eparchs' Churches are afflicted by division and war. Christians are being persecuted and driven from their homes. Many have been killed. Many more have become refugees and are seeking asylum in countries that will welcome them. Those able to remain in their homes have little choice but to live with poverty, social dysfunction, civil unrest, political oppression and religious persecution.

The Eastern Eparchs expressed gratitude for the support of the Latin Bishops and asked especially for their prayers and the prayers of the Catholic community in Australia.

Future Plenary meeting dates

21 November – 25 November 2016

4 May - 11 May 2017

27 November – 1 December 2017

The Plenary meeting concluded with a Mass for the deceased bishops of Australia and a formal dinner to acknowledge the silver and golden anniversaries as priest, bishop and cardinal of the bishops and the retired bishops.

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