



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

PLENARY MEETING November 27-December 1, 2017

On Monday, November 27, the Catholic bishops of Australia gathered for the biannual Plenary Meeting at Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney. The 14 Commissions of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference held meetings on the first day of the gathering, followed by the Plenary Meeting over the four subsequent days.

Opening Mass

The Mass of the Holy Spirit was concelebrated on November 28 in the Mary MacKillop Memorial Chapel. Conference president Archbishop Denis Hart was the principal celebrant and preached the homily.

Welcome

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

Archbishop Hart also welcomed the new First Secretary to the Apostolic Nunciature, Monsignor Emmanuel Olakunle Fadeyi, as well as the observers from the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (Catholic Religious Australia): Sr Ruth Durick OSU and Sr Monica Cavanagh RSJ. Fr Tom McDonough CP was unable to attend.

Episcopal Appointments since the last Plenary Meeting

Appointment of Bishops

Bishop Michael Morrissey of Geraldton, appointed 15 May 2017

Resignation of Bishops

Bishop Justin Bianchini of Geraldton, resignation 15 May 2017

Message from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to the Holy Father

The Bishops endorsed the president's message to the Holy Father, which sent Pope Francis special greetings during his visit to Myanmar and Bangladesh. The message spoke of the upcoming Australian Catholic Youth Festival, the Year of Youth and the 2018 Synod on "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment".

The message also acknowledged the impending release of the final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and underlined the Church's commitment to ongoing efforts to safeguard children and young people and to support healing for survivors and victims.

The bishops finally spoke of the Plenary Council of the Church in Australia in 2020 and the expectation that the process of listening and discernment can help to renew the mission of the Church.

Membership of Commissions

Bishop Les Tomlinson advised that Archbishop Coleridge has withdrawn from the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry. The Membership Panel nominated Bishop Michael Morrissey to fill this vacancy; the appointment was approved by the Conference.

Mass in Sorrow for Child Sexual Abuse and for Healing of Victims and Survivors

Mindful of the wishes of the Holy Father and of the forthcoming conclusion of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the bishops offered Mass in sorrow for child sexual abuse and for healing of victims and survivors on November 29.

Formation of Church Leaders

Archbishop Christopher Prowse announced that a review of formation practices for Church leadership and governance has been completed. Ongoing work will be carried out, including with Catholic tertiary providers, to identify existing programs that can support the formation of Church leaders, both lay and clerical, and to understand how programs can be tailored to address specific formation needs.

Royal Commission Final Report and Church Response

The Hon. Neville Owen, Chairman of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council, and Mr Francis Sullivan, the Council's chief executive officer, addressed the bishops on the impending release of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the Church's response – in the short term, medium term and long term. Consideration was given to pastoral responses as well as communicating with the Catholic faithful and the broader community.

Catholic Professional Standards Limited (CPSL)

CPSL chair the Hon. Geoffrey Giudice and chief executive Sheree Limbrick, accompanied by members of the CPSL board, addressed the bishops about the organisation's work to develop a whole-of-Church approach to issues relating to professional standards. Justice Giudice described CPSL as being operationally independent of the Church. Ms Limbrick outlined the functions of CPSL and the ways in which it was already developing policies and building relationships.

National Census 2016 and National Church Life Survey 2016

Mr Stephen Reid, acting director of the Pastoral Research Office, made presentations to the bishops on the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of Population and Housing and the 2016 National Church Life Survey. He provided a comparative overview of Census data for 2011 and 2016, noting some of the reasons indicated for shifts during the five-year period, including the Census form, social change, religious de-identification and the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

He reviewed information already available from Church Life Survey reports, setting forth observations about Mass attendance, parish affiliation and Church experience, correlated with data about age, sex and birthplace.

Further Census and Church Life Survey information will be provided to dioceses and parishes as the collected data is studied and analysed.

Launch of *Our Work Matters: Catholic Church Employers and Employees in Australia*

Bishop Gerard Holohan presented the report, *Our Work Matters: Catholic Church Employers and Employees in Australia*, to the bishops and thanked those involved in the related

research project. The report is the outcome of a project commissioned by the Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations (ACCER) and undertaken by the Pastoral Research Office.

Bishop Holohan explained that the report reveals the breadth of works and the good that is done by 220,000 employees of Catholic organisations throughout Australia, and the millions of people who benefit. He highlighted the ways in which the diverse works surveyed contribute to the Church, fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ.

Mr Tony Farley, acting ACCER chairman, spoke of the significant contribution Church employees make to Australian life and commended those who would use the report to recognise the purposes of God in the many works of Catholic organisations.

Youth Survey 2017 and Year of Youth 2018

The bishops heard presentations from Mr Stephen Reid, acting director of the Pastoral Research Office, Ms Kelly Paget of the Diocese of Broken Bay and Ms Annaleise Ros of the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

Mr Reid reported on the preliminary findings of the Australian Survey of Young Catholics undertaken in preparation for the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops next year, on “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment”. The bishops requested that the report be made publicly available.

In the discussion that followed, the bishops spoke of the importance of finding opportunities for young people to relate with the Church apart from large Catholic youth events, noting the disconnect experienced by many young people from Church life and especially the Eucharist.

Ms Paget and Ms Ros outlined initiatives taken in their respective dioceses to engage young people in Church life, including use of social media, a Year of Youth Pilgrim Cross (akin to the World Youth Day Cross and Icon), support for parish Year of Youth activities and the importance of inviting young people to participate in the Church. It was observed that the forthcoming Year of Youth is for the whole Church and not only for its younger members.

Plenary Council 2020

The bishops welcomed Ms Lana-Turvey Collins, facilitator of Plenary Council 2020, together with Fr Noel Connolly SSC and Mr Peter Gates of the Facilitation Team.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge provided an overview of developments, to date, in preparing for the Plenary Council. He and Ms Turvey-Collins set out for the bishops the steps that needed to be taken.

The bishops agreed that the Plenary Council would be held over two sessions – one in late 2020 and one in May 2021. They also endorsed the establishment of diocesan working groups by the end of March 2018 to support bishops in their engagement with the Plenary Council and the Facilitation Team.

Archbishop Coleridge outlined the variety of approaches that might be taken by dioceses in the journey of preparation for the Plenary Council. These include a diocesan synod, a diocesan assembly or another diocesan gathering that is already established as part of diocesan life. He also noted the importance of coordination of the preparatory journey within each diocese. The approaches taken by the dioceses will need to be tailored to the circumstances of each diocese, its needs and the available opportunities, he explained.

Review of Pre-Nuptial Inquiry Form

The bishops approved the revision of the Pre-Nuptial Inquiry Form to allow for liturgical and canonical consistency with the recently introduced Rite of Matrimony. The revised form will be prepared by the General Secretariat of the Conference.

Establishment of Catholic Medical Association of Australia

Following a request from a number of existing state-based Catholic medical associations, the bishops approved the establishment of a national body to be known as the Catholic Medical Association of Australia.

Update from the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC)

The Conference considered how the Australian Education Amendment Act 2017 would affect Catholic schools and education more broadly. It was noted that the new school funding model disadvantages Catholic schools, relative to other sectors, and the NCEC is continuing its advocacy to seek a fairer funding model.

The bishops heard that an NCEC document on the formation of school staff and those working in school systems has been well received and is being used widely to support local formation activities.

Committee to Draft New National Directory on Priestly Formation

In December 2016, the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy produced a new directory on the formation of priests entitled *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*. It replaced an earlier document published in 1970 and revised in 1985.

The bishops agreed to establish a committee to prepare the new national directory, appointing Bishop Anthony Randazzo to chair the committee, with Very Rev Dr Shane Mackinlay and Dr Maeve Heaney as the other members. The committee will co-opt additional members with specialist competence to support its work.

Australian Catholic Diocesan Vocations Directors Conference

The bishops recognised the recent establishment of the Australian Catholic Diocesan Vocations Directors Conference (ACDVDC) and set up formal liaison with the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference through the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry. The ACDVDC plans to share vocations resources and offer support to all diocesan vocation directors.

Nominations to National Organisations

The bishops approved the nomination of Mr Geoff Officer, business manager and finance administrator of the Diocese of Parramatta, as a director of National Council of Churches in Australia Ltd.

The bishops approved the nomination of Ms Kim Hill, executive officer, Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Archdiocese of Sydney, to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Council.

Visit by delegation of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

A four-member delegation of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue intends to visit Australia in mid-September 2018. The delegation will be led by the secretary of the Council, Bishop Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, and will travel to Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne.

Confirmatio of the English Language Text of the *Ordo Benedicendi Oleum Catechumenorum et Infirmorum et Conficiendi Chrisma*

The Conference was advised that the Decree granting the *confirmatio* to the English language text of *The Order of Blessing the Oil of Catechumens and of the Sick and of Consecrating the Chrism* from the Roman Pontifical has recently been received.

International Eucharistic Congress – Budapest 2020

Bishop Richard Umbers accepted the nomination from the Bishops Commission for Liturgy to be the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference's national delegate to the next Eucharistic Congress, to take place in Budapest in September 2020.

Formation of Overseas Clergy and Religious

The bishops asked the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry to develop a program to support the formation of overseas clergy and religious coming to Australia for ministry. The work would be carried out in partnership with the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office.

Appointment of New National Director of Apostleship of the Sea

Following the recommendation of the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life, the bishops approved the appointment of Mrs Roslyn Rajasingam as the national director of the Church's ministry to seafarers through the Apostleship of the Sea.

Endorsement of Statement on Slavery

The bishops endorsed the draft "Statement of Support for an Australian Modern Slavery Act" prepared by the Human Rights Commission Roundtable in September 2017. The Australian bishops have spoken out about the damaging effect of modern slavery, echoing comments from Pope Francis on the issue.

Support for Acknowledgement Plaques on Catholic buildings

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference approved the use of its logo on the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council acknowledgement plaque. The Conference supported and encouraged all Catholic agencies, including parishes and schools, to display the plaque.

Australian Catholic Youth Festival 2019

Because of other significant Catholic events, including World Youth Day in early 2019 and the first session of the Plenary Council in late 2020, the next Australian Catholic Youth Festival will be held in Perth in December 2019.

Postal Survey

Archbishop Anthony Fisher observed that the introduction of legislation enabling same-sex marriage without inclusion of religious protections would likely have challenging consequences for the Church, particularly in its schools, as well as in its health care, aged care and social service works. The bishops noted the potential risks to religious freedom and the potential for civil action against preaching and teaching Catholic belief about marriage.

The bishops also recognised the importance of accompanying same-sex-attracted people who belong to Church communities.

Nuptial Formation

The bishops discussed the development of a national Nuptial Formation Program and resolved to work with diocesan family and life offices to consider existing resources and how they might support a national program. There will also be a review of similar programs in English-speaking countries, as well as consideration of *Amoris Laetitia's* insights on marriage.

Australian Delegates for the World Meeting of Families

The Bishops Commission for Family, Youth and Life has selected the family of Shane and Leanne Hyland from the Diocese of Broken Bay as the Australian delegate family to the World Meeting of Families, in Dublin, in August 2018.