



# AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

## PLENARY MEETING

May 3-10, 2018

On Thursday, May 3, 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 seven subsequent days.

### **Opening Mass**

The Mass of the Holy Spirit was concelebrated on May 4 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 Mass, met bishops informally and addressed the Plenary Meeting.

Archbishop Hart also welcomed the first secretary to the Apostolic Nunciature, Monsignor Emmanuel Olakunle Fadeyi, as well as the observers from Catholic Religious Australia: Sr Ruth Durick OSU, Sr Monica Cavanagh RSJ and Fr Tom McDonough CP.

### **Episcopal Appointments since the last Plenary Meeting**

#### ***Appointment of Bishops***

Bishop Brian Mascord of Wollongong, appointed November 30, 2017; ordained February 22, 2018.

#### ***Resignation of Bishops***

Bishop Peter Ingham of Wollongong, resignation November 30, 2017.

### **Message from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to the Holy Father**

The Bishops endorsed the president's message to the Holy Father, which noted that the Pope's recent exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* would be a helpful guide for the bishops' deliberations.

The message described the recent gathering of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania, saying that the many Australian bishops who attended "received new heart from the deep faith of the Catholic community" in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea.

The bishops expressed their gratitude to Pope Francis for approving a Plenary Council in Australia, to be held in 2020 and 2021. They said it will help the Catholic Church in Australia to discern the mission to which God is calling the Church and the faithful, and also allow growth in the spirit of synodality.

The statement also spoke of the success of last December's Australian Catholic Youth Festival, as well as Australia's celebration of the Year of Youth and the importance of the 2018 Synod on "Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment".

It acknowledged the important considerations that the bishops, in partnership with lay people and consecrated religious, are undertaking following the final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The bishops reiterated their strong commitment to the healing of victims and survivors and enhancing safeguarding practices in Church settings.

### **Elections**

Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Brisbane was elected president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference for a two-year term.

Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP of Sydney was elected vice-president of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference for a two-year term.

In addition to Archbishops Coleridge and Fisher, the following bishops were elected to the Permanent Committee: Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB; Bishop Patrick O'Regan; Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay OLM; and Bishop Robert McGuckin. Archbishop Christopher Prowse and Bishop Eugene Hurley remain on the Permanent Committee after having been elected in 2017.

### **Child protection and safeguarding**

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference dedicated significant time to the issues of child protection and safeguarding during the plenary meeting.

On May 5, the Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia devoted much of their annual joint gathering to the final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. They listened to presentations from the Truth, Justice and Healing Council chair Justice Neville Owen and CEO Francis Sullivan.

Sr Ruth Durick OSU, president of Catholic Religious Australia, and Archbishop Denis Hart, president of the Conference, extended their deep gratitude to Justice Owen and Mr Sullivan on behalf of the Catholic Church in Australia for their leadership, advice and support throughout the Royal Commission. They also thanked other members of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council who joined the gathering.

On May 8, Justice Owen and Mr Sullivan again addressed the Conference, predominantly on the issue of the Catholic Church's support for and involvement in the national redress scheme for survivors of child sexual abuse. The Church has been a long-standing supporter of the scheme and, while unable to enter the scheme as a national collective until all states and territories have joined the program, the bishops discussed options for ensuring a streamlined process for Catholic entities to participate once the scheme is in place.

On May 9, Catholic Professional Standards Limited chair Justice Geoffrey Giudice and CEO Sheree Limbrick gave a presentation on the work of CPSL, including the draft safeguarding standards that were recently published and are currently being piloted and receiving feedback.

Ms Limbrick said CPSL are conducting nationwide consultations with survivors, family, advocates, religious leaders, educators, social service agencies, disability and children's services, government authorities and other groups about those standards.

Justice Giudice told the Conference that it is critical that the Royal Commission is a genuine catalyst for change and that the momentum it generated be allowed to continue.

### **Support for dioceses in need**

Mindful of the financial challenges that some dioceses – including in remote areas – are facing, the Conference approved the establishment of a taskforce of diocesan financial administrators and members of the Finance Council to progress work to improve the sustainability of those dioceses.

It was observed that dioceses that are currently financially sound might face challenges in the future due to demographic changes, so there was a need to have a long-term approach to the issue of dioceses in need.

The Conference approved the establishment of a panel of three senior bishops who would draw upon expertise from people in a range of areas, including finance, investment and fundraising.

### **Visit by Archbishop Basilios Georges Casmoussa**

Archbishop Georges Casmoussa, Apostolic Visitor for the Syriac Catholic Church in Australia and New Zealand, visited the plenary meeting. He gave a presentation to the bishops on the presence, life and mission of Syriac Catholic communities in Melbourne, Geelong, Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane. He expressed his gratitude for the hospitality Syriac Catholics have received and for the personal welcome he has received since arriving in Australia in 2017.

### **Formation for leadership and governance**

The Conference approved the establishment of a seminar for new bishops during their first year of episcopal ministry to support their formation in the areas of leadership and governance, as well as understanding of the work of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and its agencies and offices.

### **Victorian assisted-dying legislation**

Representatives of Catholic Health Australia and St Vincent's Health Australia gave a presentation to the bishops on the implications of voluntary assisted dying legislation in Victoria.

They considered the impacts for Catholic hospital physicians, nursing staff and patients, highlighting potential ethical conflicts, psychological and spiritual complexities, and the centrality of the pastoral response to patients who may raise the possibility of assisted dying. They also noted that the Victorian legislation allows both patients and doctors to initiate the voluntary assisted dying process.

The bishops went on to discuss how the Church might best engage in the public forum to present a different view from those who advocate for euthanasia and assisted dying.

### **The Catholic Church and Australian society**

The bishops held a conversation about the place of the Catholic Church in Australian society. The harm caused by the Church's mishandling of allegations of child sexual abuse was observed by a number of bishops. While the Church has come under reproach from many corners of society, there was agreement that there is a necessity for the Church to witness to Jesus Christ through the mission and service that the Church carries out across the country.

Bishops spoke of the need for families, parishes and schools to be supported and nurtured by the Church. They spoke of the need to change widespread perceptions of what the

Church is and does, of the people who together constitute the Catholic community, and of the need to lay the foundations of a future that can only be fashioned with God's grace. It was noted that digital media have much to offer to the work of spreading the good news of Christ and his Church.

The fundamental necessity of focussing on Jesus Christ and of discerning the faithful presence of God was highlighted, together with the primacy of discipleship and the importance of a commitment to loving as Jesus loved.

### **Faith formation and religious education in Catholic schools**

The bishops heard that the National Catholic Education Commission's framing paper, *Religious Education in Australian Catholic Schools*, has been well received. It was observed that the need for the document reveals the importance for re-evangelisation of teachers and staff in Catholic schools if they are to educate and form children in the Catholic Faith.

### **Document on lay pastoral ministry**

The Conference approved the publication of a new document to support those working in lay pastoral ministry – a growing area within the Church. *Faithful Stewards of God's Grace* will be launched at the Proclaim conference later this year.

### **Visit of Vatican officials**

Archbishop Christopher Prowse, chairman of the Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations, reminded bishops of the forthcoming visit by a delegation from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in September. The delegation, which will be led by Council secretary Bishop Miguel Guixot, will visit Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne.

### **Social Justice Statement 2018-19**

The bishops approved the Social Justice Statement for 2018-19, *A Place to Call Home: Making a home for everyone in our land*. The statement looks at the issue of homelessness in Australian society. It was written as a collaboration between the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council and Catholic Social Services Australia. It draws upon the thinking and work of a number of Catholic agencies, including the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and other community organisations.

The Social Justice Statement will be released in September.

### **Reverent reception of Holy Communion**

The Bishops Commission for Liturgy provided a revised text of the document *Guidelines on Reverent Reception of Holy Communion*. The bishops discussed various pastoral and catechetical considerations and emphasised the importance of using scriptural, liturgical and theological terms to support clear teaching around Holy Communion. The bishops approved the release of the document. It will be published in due course.

### **Proclaim 2018**

The chairman of the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Archbishop Mark Coleridge, reported that the 2018 Proclaim conference, being held in Brisbane in July, has reached its maximum number of delegates. It will focus on evangelisation in Catholic life and parish mission today, and has been planned to constitute part of the journey to the Plenary Council to be held in 2020 and 2021.

### **Mental illness**

The Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life outlined its concern about the widespread effects of mental illness. It was observed that mental illness is pervasive in society and warrants the attention of the Church, in particular with regard to what the Church can offer that governments cannot.

The Conference decided to refer the matter to the Bishops Commission for Health and Community Services, which will become part of the new Bishops Commission for Social Justice – Mission and Service, with the request that the Commission recommend to the Conference how it might best address current wide-ranging concerns about mental illness.

### **World Youth Day 2019**

More than 800 Australians have indicated their intention to attend World Youth Day next January. In addition to diocesan pilgrimages, it is expected that there will be a national pilgrimage for young people whose home diocese is not taking a group of pilgrims. Bishops Commission for Family, Youth and Life chairman Archbishop Fisher said the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade considers Panama a safe country to visit.

### **Plenary Council 2020**

The bishops approved the recommendation that the first session of the Plenary Council be held in Adelaide from October 4-10, 2020. It was also decided that all diocesan bishops nominate two people to a national network of Plenary Council diocesan coordinators.

Facilitator Lana Turvey-Collins told the bishops that the official launch of the Plenary Council would take place at Pentecost, with a new website, additional resources and the guides for hosting listening and dialogue sessions due to be available at that time.

### **Testimonial of Holy Matrimony**

In view of significant changes to the Australian Government's Certificate of Marriage following legislation enabling same-sex marriage, it was proposed that the Church provide its own Testimonial of Holy Matrimony to document the solemnising of marriage according to the Church's *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*.

Such a document would be pastoral in purpose, serving to affirm Catholic marriages and, as applicable, its sacramental nature. The Conference decided that the proposal be referred to the Bishops Commission for Liturgy for investigation and development.

### **Gathering of Catholic men**

The bishops approved the hosting of a national gathering in 2020, as part of preparation for the Plenary Council, of Catholic groups and movements of men. The Bishops Commission for Family, Youth and Life, which will become the Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement, will offer support for the national gathering. A similar opportunity for women to gather was also explored.

### **Australian Catholic Bishops Conference structure**

Mr Steve Sedgwick gave a presentation to the bishops on the recommendations in his report on the structure of the Bishops Conference, including his consideration of the 14 commissions that are in place and their mandates. The bishops passed a number of motions to restructure some of those commissions, including:

- That the Bishops Commission for Administration and Information cease, with oversight functions given to the Permanent Committee and management functions undertaken by the general secretariat.
- That the Bishops Commissions for Canon Law and for Doctrine and Morals become Episcopal Panels, allowing greater flexibility for those groups in their work.
- That the Bishops Commissions for Church Ministry and for Evangelisation cease and, taking on responsibility for matters relating to youth, together become the Bishops Commission for Catholic Life – Evangelisation and Ministry.
- That the Bishops Commissions for Health and Community Services, for Justice, Ecology and Development, and for Pastoral Life cease and together become the Bishops Commission for Social Justice – Mission and Service.
- The Conference revising the mandate of the Bishops Commission for Family, Youth and Life to include the area of public engagement, with youth now being the responsibility for the Commission for Catholic Life.
- That the title of the rationalised commissions remain open to further consideration.

To facilitate the changes outlined above, the Conference approved a number of related measures, including:

- Seeing the existing 14 commissions and their members continue their work until the ACBC plenary meeting in November 2018, at which time the new commissions and episcopal panels would commence their work.
- Requesting the chairmen of the new commissions and episcopal panels to work with the general secretary and their executive secretaries to consider draft mandates, to be brought to the November plenary meeting for review and approval.

The Conference also made a number of decisions relevant to the work of the general secretariat and its offices and agencies.

- The bishops approved the renaming of the Pastoral Research Office to the National Centre for Pastoral Research.
- The bishops endorsed, after considering the findings of an external review, the establishment of the Policy and Research Department and the Media and Communications Department within the general secretariat.
- The bishops established a Research Reference Group to oversee and coordinate research projects undertaken by commissions and Conference agencies.

#### **EPISCOPAL COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP (effective from November 2018)**

##### **Bishops Commission for Catholic Education: Four members**

Archbishop Fisher, Chairman  
Bishop Edwards

Bishop Foley  
Bishop Holohan

##### **Bishops Commission for Catholic Life – Evangelisation and Ministry: Eight members**

Archbishop Prowse, Chairman  
Archbishop Porteous  
Bishop Homeming  
Bishop Macbeth-Green

Bishop Mascord  
Bishop McCarthy  
Bishop Morrissey  
Bishop Wright

**Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations: Four members**

Bishop McKenna, Chairman  
Archbishop Nona

Bishop Davis  
Bishop Rabbat

**Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement: Four members**

Bishop Comensoli, Chairman  
Bishop Harris

Bishop Kennedy  
Bishop Umbers

**Bishops Commission for Liturgy: Three members**

Bishop O'Regan, Chairman  
Bishop Bird  
Bishop Howell

**Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples:  
Three members**

Bishop Macbeth-Green, Chairman  
Bishop Harris  
Bishop Sproxtton

**Bishops Commission for Social Justice – Mission and Service: Eight members**

Bishop Long Van Nguyen, Chairman  
Bishop Bird  
Bishop Brady  
Bishop Davis

Bishop Puthur  
Bishop Saunders  
Bishop Sproxtton  
Bishop Wright

**Bishops Commission for the Plenary Council: Five members**

Archbishop Costelloe, Chairman  
Bishop Comensoli  
Bishop Kennedy

Bishop Randazzo  
Bishop Tarabay

**EPISCOPAL PANEL MEMBERSHIP (from November 2018)**

**Episcopal Panel for Canon Law: Three members**

Bishop McGuckin, Chairman  
Archbishop Wilson  
Bishop Randazzo

**Episcopal Panel for Doctrine and Morals:  
Four members**

Bishop Curtin, Chairman  
Bishop Elliott  
Bishop Foley  
Bishop Homeming