

**Welcoming, Enabling, and Integrating Overseas Priests:
A Proposal for the Australian Church.¹
DRAFT**

Preamble:

Acknowledging the giftedness that overseas priests are able to bring to the Church of Australia:

- a) Each diocese accepts responsibility for a dignified process of welcome, acceptance, and orientation of priests from overseas, who have much to offer the Australian Church, by providing guidelines and directions to that end;²
- b) That dioceses within each Province agree to share their resources in the preparation of a welcoming, enabling, and integrating programme of mutual benefit to all;
- c) That people of suitable expertise agree to participate professionally in the conduct of such a programme for the good of the Australian Church;
- d) That drawing on such professional expertise, a thorough selection process be conducted with the diocese of origin, evaluating as far as possible the adaptability and genuineness of those nominated to serve within the Australian Church;
- e) That each diocese set in place a professional formation programme for mentors who will accompany overseas priests when they first arrive in Australia;
- f) That each diocese develop a process of preparation for its clergy and for parishes of the diocese so that they appreciate fully the expectations and challenges that are

¹ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, (Homebush, NSW: St Paul Publication, 1976), nos 62-63; no. 73, §6 and §7; see Appendix.

² An example of what has been done is *The Cross Cultural Ministry Policy* of the Diocese of Geraldton; see Appendix.

mutually experienced, especially in the first weeks and months of the newly arrived priests;

g) That in the spirit of Jesus' "*come and see*" (Jn 1:39), clergy and laity of the receiving parish will seek to become familiar with the culture, customs, traditions, and local church of the overseas priest;

h) That a formal welcome be given to the newly arrived priests, as soon as is practicable, by the clergy and laity of the receiving parish, as well as the bishops, priests, and deacons of the receiving deanery and presbyterium;

i) That it be appreciated that the process of welcome, acceptance, and orientation of priests from overseas is complex, not given to simple solutions, and will involve different levels or stages of orientation, provided at different times, when each priest is deemed--by his mentor and himself--to be ready;

j) That a welcoming and transition period of at least six months occurs, during which each overseas priest experiences the Australian culture, church life, the diocese and its structures, and is intentionally mentored until he is ready for the following formal programme.

General Proposal:

1. That Provinces conduct a four to five day live-in Conference (once or twice a year) which assists more formally those overseas priests who have been in Australia for at least six months;

2. That during this Conference the newly arrived priests, their mentors, the clergy and, at appropriate times, lay leaders--including both men and women--reflect in

³ Cf. Report by Fr Martin Ashe, Melbourne, attached. The Archdiocese of Melbourne has recently conducted such a conference for the Province; see Appendix.

⁴ Cf. The Vincentian Center for Church and Society, "Program Goals," *Fifth Annual Acculturation Seminar for International Priests*, June 6-10, 2005; see Appendix.

⁵ While not wishing to be too hard and fast about definitions, cultural anthropology generally defines enculturation as a once only process whereby an infant is socialised into the customs, habits and behaviours of the culture of birth. Acculturation, on the other hand, is a 'second' process whereby members of one cultural group adopt the customs, habits and behaviours of another group, usually a minority group adopting habits and language patterns of the dominant group(s). This process can well be reciprocal. "Welcoming, Enabling, and Integrating Overseas Priests into Australian Life" is properly a mutual, reciprocal process of recognition by both cultures, with deep respect both ways. For these reasons we use the word "acculturation".

and embrace both their mutual giftedness and the new realities each face for the mission of the church in Australia;³

3. That this four to five day Conference cover, as a minimum, aspects such as:

3.1 Culture and Transitions

3.2 Parish Life: Role of Priests in Parish and Ethnic Ministries

3.3 Integrity in Ministry: Professional Standards & Personal Boundaries

3.4 The Place of Women in the Church & Australian society

3.5 Language expectations

3.6 Pastoral Ministry and Practice in Australia

3.7 History of the Church in Australia: local, diocesan, national

3.8 Aboriginal Australia

3.9 Cross-Cultural Communication

3.10 Mentoring, Ongoing Education & Spiritual Care⁴

4. That an Implementation Committee for this Conference be established on the advice of the Diocesan Directors in each Province;

5. That an Acculturation⁵ Resource Team, under the guidance of the Council for Clergy Life and Ministry, be established as a resource for the various Provinces in undertaking this work and evaluating its on-going effectiveness;

⁶ The Council for Clergy Life and Ministry suggests that a general revision of this document would be timely, drawing on such documents as "Guidelines for Receiving Pastoral Ministers into the United States" of the USCCB. It also felt that statements such as the following need rewording or omitting: "The concept of saving face sometimes leaves an overseas priest handling conflict differently from the way Australian-born people handle it. The newcomer can appear devious or dishonest. To him, on the other hand, the Australian can appear confrontational, critical or rude."

6. That the Conference in each Province brings together the following: overseas priests (when ready); migrant chaplains; and local clergy, particularly those who are mentors; and at fitting times lay leaders including men and women;

7. That the location of the Conference in each Province and a suitable agenda be determined by the (Arch)bishop of the hosting diocese in consultation with his Director of Clergy Life and Ministry (or equivalent persons), and the costs of participation be carried by the diocese of each participant;

8. That building on this 4-5 day initial Conference, suitable follow up conferences and in-services be organised to assist the ongoing reception, enabling and integration of overseas priests as needed;

9. That the document prepared by the National Commission for Clergy Life and Ministry in conjunction with the National Migration Office, approved by the Bishops of Australia (November 2005: "*Some Issues to Consider when Welcoming Priests from Overseas*"), be revised to reflect present-day realities⁶ and be a resource document for all parties involved in welcoming, enabling, and integrating overseas priests into Australian life.

Resources

Footnoted Documents:

1. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos 62-63, no. 73, §6 and §7.
2. Bishop Justin Bianchini, "Catholic Diocese of Geraldton: The Cross Cultural Ministry Policy," 23 March 2007
3. Fr Martin Ashe, A Report: "Pilot Programme for Welcoming Priests from Overseas." Fr Ashe is Director of Ministry to Priests, Archdiocese of Melbourne,
4. The Vincentian Center for Church and Society, "Program Goals," *Fifth Annual Acculturation Seminar for International Priests*, June 6-10, 2005.

Evangelii Nuntiandi
(nos 62-63; 73, §6 and §7)

62. Nevertheless this universal Church is in practice incarnate in the individual Churches made up of such or such an actual part of mankind, speaking such and such a language, heirs of a cultural patrimony, of a vision of the world, of an historical past, of a particular human substratum. Receptivity to the wealth of the individual Church corresponds to a special sensitivity of modern man.

Let us be very careful not to conceive of the universal Church as the sum, or, if one can say so, the more or less anomalous federation of essentially different individual Churches. In the mind of the Lord the Church is universal by vocation and mission, but when she puts down her roots in a variety of cultural, social and human terrains, she takes on different external expressions and appearances in each part of the world.

Thus each individual Church that would voluntarily cut itself off from the universal Church would lose its relationship to God's plan and would be impoverished in its ecclesial dimension. But, at the same time, a Church *toto orbe diffusa* would become an abstraction if she did not take body and life precisely through the individual Churches. Only continual attention to these two poles of the Church will enable us to perceive the richness of this relationship between the universal Church and the individual Churches.

63. The individual Churches, intimately built up not only of people but also of aspirations, of riches and limitations, of ways of praying, of loving, of looking at life and the world, which distinguish this or that human gathering, have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language.

The transposition has to be done with the discernment, seriousness, respect and competence which the matter calls for in the field of liturgical expression⁹²¹ and in the areas of catechesis, theological formulation, secondary ecclesial structures, and ministries. And the word "language" should be understood here less in the semantic or literary sense than in the sense which one may call anthropological and cultural.

The question is undoubtedly a delicate one. Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. But on the other hand, evangelization risks losing its power and disappearing altogether if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it; if, in other words, one sacrifices this reality and destroys the unity without which

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(nos 62-63; 73, §6 and §7)

there is no universality, out of a wish to adapt a universal reality to a local situation. Now, only a Church which preserves the awareness of her universality and shows that she is in fact universal is capable of having a message which can be heard by all, regardless of regional frontiers.

Legitimate attention to individual Churches cannot fail to enrich the Church. Such attention is indispensable and urgent. It responds to the very deep aspirations of peoples and human communities to find their own identity ever more clearly.

73. (paragraphs 6 and 7)

A serious preparation is needed for all workers for evangelization. Such preparation is all the more necessary for those who devote themselves to the ministry of the Word. Being animated by the conviction, ceaselessly deepened, of the greatness and riches of the Word of God, those who have the mission of transmitting it must give the maximum attention to the dignity, precision and adaptation of their language. Everyone knows that the art of speaking takes on today a very great importance. How would preachers and catechists be able to neglect this?

We earnestly desire that in each individual Church the bishops should be vigilant concerning the adequate formation of all the ministers of the Word.

This serious preparation will increase in them the indispensable