



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian bishops meet Pope Francis, pray at St Peter's tomb

Media Release

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Pope Francis has given his apostolic blessing to the Australian Catholic bishops and encouraged them to explore new ways of being missionary in Australia at this time.

Almost 40 Australian bishops today met with Pope Francis for more than two hours as part of their *Ad Limina Apostolorum* visit, translated as "To the Threshold of the Apostles".

It was a high point of a memorable first day of the *Ad Limina*, which began with the bishops celebrating Mass at the tomb of St Peter.

"To celebrate the Eucharist at the tomb of Peter and then to engage in pastoral dialogue with his successor was a unique and grace-filled way to start our week in Rome," Australian Catholic Bishops Conference president Archbishop Mark Coleridge said.

The bishops raised with Pope Francis a number of topics that are of deep concern to the Catholic Church in Australia.

Among them were the Church's work to eliminate child sexual abuse and to accompany survivors of abuse, the bishops' desire to support and minister to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the hopes for the Plenary Council and the need to find new ways of witnessing to Jesus Christ in Australian society in a time of change.

"There was an ease and a fraternal warmth in the way Pope Francis spoke and an attentiveness in his listening to the questions the bishops asked," Archbishop Coleridge said.

"For a man of his years, the Holy Father's energy through a long and complex conversation was amazing."

Conference vice president Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP said the meeting with Pope Francis was "moving and deeply encouraging". He said it showed the benefit of the Petrine ministry, "of being our solid 'rock' and 'confirming the brethren'".

"The Holy Father clearly understood our situation in Australia. It was a real moment of grace," Archbishop Fisher said.

Bishop Charles Gauci, the most recently ordained of the Australian bishops, having become Bishop of Darwin last September, said he was "deeply impressed" by Pope Francis.

"I was impressed by his humanity, his compassion, his sense of collegiality, his passion for working with all the people of God in a synodal Church and his true commitment to the Gospel," Bishop Gauci said.

"I felt a deep sense of connection with the Holy Father as a fellow member of the College of Bishops, as bishops in service of the People of God and in partnership with the People of God."

Melbourne Archbishop Peter A. Comensoli posted on social media that the meeting with the Holy Father was "an extraordinary conversation, brother to brothers". He said it was "spiritually intense, deeply honest, pastorally astute, free and frank".

The *Ad Limina* visit continues until Friday, June 28. The Australian bishops will meet in the coming days with the various departments of the Holy See with responsibilities for different aspects of Church life.