



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

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Catholic Bishops and Islamic leaders meet together for lunch and dialogue

In a landmark meeting, the Catholic Bishops of Australia invited a group of Islamic leaders to their Plenary Meeting this week, to have lunch together, to engage in Interfaith Dialogue and to visit the tomb of Blessed Mary Mackillop.

Bishop Issam Darwish, the Melkite Bishop in Australia welcomed the Islamic delegation and said the luncheon and dialogue meeting was one of the fruits of the Australian Christian-Muslim Friendship Society, formed some years ago.

Following the meal at Mary Mackillop Place, a group of bishops accompanied the Islamic leaders on a visit to the tomb of Blessed Mary Mackillop, who is on the path to becoming Australia's first saint.

The Islamic delegation then met with the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations for a dialogue.

The delegation included Sheikh Yahia Safi, Sheikh Kamal Mouselmani, Dr Moustapha Alameldin, Dr Khalil Moustapha, Mr Houssein Hajj and Mr Ahmad Kamaledine. They were received by both the outgoing President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Archbishop Francis Carroll and the incoming President, Archbishop Philip Wilson.

Sheikh Kamal Mousselmani, the Australian Representative of the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council of Lebanon, said face to face meetings with people of different faiths was important.

"When we meet is when we dialogue," he said. "We must believe that we are not doing this for our benefit, but for the sake of Allah, of God, and the benefit of the people. "This is what God has requested of us."

Ahmad Kamaledine, President of the Lebanese Muslim Association, said the meeting with the bishops had been a good experience.

"It is good to get together with fellow religious faithfuls," he said. "We must be united and be seen to be united."

Mr Kamaledine said he hoped such dialogue would concentrate on encouraging people to return to the practice of religion in order to help fight anti-social behaviour in the community.

"Knowledge, not ignorance, these are the things we hope to produce," he said.

Dr Moustapha Alameldin was one of those who addressed the meeting and Bishop Kevin Manning of Parramatta said the dialogue and the luncheon, during the Bishops' Plenary Meeting had been most fruitful.

"This was a very cordial and happy encounter," he said. "The representatives of Islam manifested a kindly attitude to the Church and its role in society, in bringing people together. It was all most positive."

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