



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

May 11, 2006

A Pastoral Letter on the Restructure of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Bishops of Australia have for some time been seeking to create more opportunities to discuss pastoral issues of national significance during their twice-yearly Plenary Meetings.

To this end, we have voted during our meeting at Mary Mackillop Place in Sydney this week to reconfigure the operations of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in a way which provides us with the flexibility and the support to do this.

This reconfiguration will allow us to consider in depth the major pastoral issues facing the Catholic community in Australia.

It will also provide for greater collaboration in dealing with these issues by creating a mode of operation where Bishops' Commissions work closely with lay men and women, religious and clergy.

The work of Conference and the responsibility of the bishops will also be spread more evenly among members of the Commissions.

The reconfiguration of the ACBC streamlines the committees and agencies which serve the Conference.

It replaces the current 19 Bishops' Committees with 12 Bishops' Commissions. They are: Doctrine and Morals; Liturgy; Mission and Faith Formation; Catholic Education; Pastoral Life; Relations with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders; Justice and Service; Church Ministry; Caritas; Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations; Administration and Information; and Canon Law.

We wish to reassure Catholic people that all current activities and areas of interest of the ACBC have been preserved under the new Commission structure and there should in fact be better co-ordination among the different areas.

The fact that an area of pastoral care may no longer be the subject of an individual Committee is in no way to devalue its importance. Each Bishops' Commission will be

served by advisory bodies, providing for the appropriate expertise and ensuring a balance between clergy, religious, lay men and women.

For example, the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office will continue in its current form, providing advice to the new Commission for Pastoral Life. And the Commission for Australian Catholic Women will become the Council for Australian Catholic Women, a permanent advisory council to the Bishops' Commission for Church Ministry and the Bishops' Commission for Pastoral Life.

As part of the new structure, all Commissions will now have access to more stable executive support.

We pray that this reconfiguration of the ACBC operations will provide a more flexible structure to respond to the current and emerging needs of the Catholic Church in Australia.

In particular, we trust it will allow us as bishops to respond creatively to these needs, in close collaboration with clergy, religious and lay people.

We seek your prayers for us and for the work of the new Bishops' Commissions and for all those who carry out the mission of the Church in this way.

Chairmen of Bishops' Commissions

Doctrine and Morals

Cardinal George Pell

Liturgy

Bishop Mark Coleridge

Mission and Faith Formation

Archbishop John Bathersby

Catholic Education

Bishop Gerard Holohan

Pastoral Life

Bishop Eugene Hurley

Relations with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders

Archbishop Barry Hickey

Justice and Service

Bishop Christopher Toohey

Church Ministry

Bishop Michael Malone

Caritas

Archbishop Adrian Doyle

Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations

Bishop Michael Putney

Canon Law

Bishop Peter Connors

Administration and Information

Archbishop Denis Hart