

**Media Release
August 29, 2006.**

Eastern Catholic Church Association Formed

The Eastern Catholic Bishops of Australia and New Zealand have formed an association which will meet annually to discuss various issues which affect their Churches in the region.

The Bishops formed the association during the recent meeting of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania, in Suva, Fiji.

Bishop Ad Abikaram (Maronite), Bishop Issam Darwish (Melkite) and Bishop Peter Stasiuk (Ukrainian Catholic) attended this meeting and formed the association. The three bishops discussed a range of topics and decided that it is important to meet at least once a year to study various issues which affect the Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia and New Zealand.

A meeting, which would include two or three clergy from each Eastern Catholic Church in the region, would be called in Sydney for the end of February 2007. Eastern Churches which do not have bishops in Australia or New Zealand will also be invited to attend.

A proposed agenda was suggested. Amongst the topics of immediate interest to the Eastern Catholic Churches were: World Youth Day 2008, married clergy – their ordination and ministry, the diaconate, vocations to religious life, and the formation of an Eastern Catholic radio station.

Eastern Catholic Churches have been present in Australia for almost a century. They are in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, but have distinct liturgies, according to their tradition, as well as some different emphases in theology and canon law. Immigration to Australia has increased their numbers and has also recently introduced new Eastern Catholic Churches to the region.

The Bishops said the new association would benefit the entire Catholic Church in Australia and that Eastern Catholic Churches would be better able to share their riches with all the faithful.

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