

Media Release
March 7, 2008

EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND MEET

The four Bishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches, Most Rev. Peter Stasiuk (Ukrainian), Most Rev. Issam Darwish (Melkite), Most Rev. Ad Abikaram (Maronite) and Most Rev. Gabriel Kassab (Chaldean) and Fr. Zakaria Gayed from the Catholic Coptic Church in Australia, have held their annual meeting, at St Andrew's Ukrainian Church in Lidcombe, NSW.

The Association was formed two years ago. The Ukrainian Catholic representatives at the meeting were Bishop Peter (chairman), Rt. Rev. Fr. Alex Kenez, Very Rev. Fr. Simon Ckuj, who acted as host and Fr. Paul Babie from Adelaide. Mr Michael Demkiw from Melbourne was also invited to the meeting.

"Besides being a point of unity amongst the churches, the meeting also addressed a lot of practical issues," Bishop Stasiuk said.

Fr. John Murphy from the Catholic Immigration Office in Canberra pointed out the issues of bringing in clergy and religious to Australia. Mr Michael Demkiw spoke about pension funds, clergy welfare including those of married priests and their families and the matters related to taxation.

Fr. Frank Devoy spoke about the ongoing formation of all clergy in Australia. Bishop Issam Darwish presented the project of writing a booklet for Australian secondary school children to introduce them to the Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia. Fr. Alex Kenez was elected to the committee along with Bishop Issam.

Fr Paul Babie was given the responsibility to write a set of Statutes for the Association. He has started this work but it will take a few years to complete.

Bishop Peter read a letter from the Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA), a papal agency involved in the promotion of Eastern Catholic Churches in the world. Those present voted to support their intention to set up an office in Australia. The matter is under further consideration.

Fr Simon Ckuj led a discussion on one common event at World Youth Day in Sydney. A committee was set up to organise the event which will be held on Wednesday, 16th July at a venue in Sydney.

A committee was set up to identify the problems Eastern Catholic children in Roman Catholic schools in Australia. Fr. Alex Kenez has been elected chair of this committee. He is to report to the next meeting.

Bishop Peter was elected chairman for another year. The next meeting will be held in March 2009 at the offices of the new Chaldean Bishop in Sydney.

For more information contact Bishop Peter Stasiuk on 03 9320 2560.