



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

PLENARY MEETING

November 25-29, 2019

On Monday 25 November, the Catholic Bishops of Australia gathered for the biannual Plenary Meeting at the Catholic Leadership Centre, East Melbourne. The eight Commissions of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference held meetings on the first day of the gathering, followed by the Plenary Meeting over the four subsequent days.

Opening Mass

The Mass of the Holy Spirit was concelebrated on Tuesday 26 November in St John the Evangelist Church. Conference president Archbishop Mark Coleridge was the principal celebrant and preached the homily.

Welcome

Archbishop Coleridge welcomed his fellow bishops and the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana. Archbishop Yllana concelebrated Mass, met bishops informally and addressed the Plenary Meeting.

Archbishop Coleridge also welcomed the secretaries to the Apostolic Nunciature, Monsignor Emmanuel Fadeyi and Monsignor Giuseppe Quirighetti, as well as the observers from Catholic Religious Australia: president Br Peter Carroll FMS and vice-president Sr Patty Fawcner SGS.

Episcopal Appointments since the last Plenary Meeting

Appointment of Bishops

Bishop Shane Mackinlay of Sandhurst: appointed 23 July 2019, ordained 16 October 2019.

Bishop Anthony Randazzo of Broken Bay: appointed 7 October 2019, installed 4 November 2019.

Monsignor Carl Reid, Ordinary of Our Lady of the Southern Cross: appointed 26 March 2019, installed 27 August 2019.

Resignation of Bishops

Bishop Leslie Tomlinson, Bishop Emeritus of Sandhurst: resigned 23 July 2019.

Message from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to the Holy Father

The Bishops of Australia sent a message to Pope Francis, as is customary at Plenary Meetings. The message assured the Holy Father of the Bishops' prayers and thanked him for his welcome and inspiration during the recent visit *Ad Limina Apostolorum*.

Reflecting on the Church in Australia, the message outlined progress towards the Fifth Plenary Council, the first general assembly of which will be held in October 2020 in Adelaide. It also mentioned work to establish and maintain practices to safeguard children and other vulnerable people, as well as the implementation of policies for responding to allegations of abuse that are survivor-focused and aimed towards providing healing and justice.

The message concluded by looking forward to the 2019 Australian Catholic Youth Festival in Perth, to be held from 8-10 December, and commented on the importance of the Pope's Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit (Christ is Alive)* for the Church's engagement with young people.

Membership and elections

Bishop Michael McCarthy was appointed to the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education to complete the three-year term of Bishop James Foley, which commenced in May 2018.

Bishop Mackinlay was appointed to the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry to complete the three-year term of Bishop McCarthy, which commenced in May 2018.

Monsignor Reid was appointed to the Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement.

Review of Conference financing

In November 2018, the Bishops Conference agreed to establish a committee to review its finances and provide recommendations on the funding of the Conference through diocesan levies. An interim report was provided at the May 2019 Plenary Meeting, with the final report tabled in November 2019.

The Conference adopted all 25 recommendations of the Financing Review Committee, including recommendations on a cap on Conference funding from diocesan levies, the development of three-year priority planning, the establishment of a new role of chief operating officer within the Conference and greater responsibilities for the Conference's Finance Council, enabling it to operate in a similar way to a diocesan finance council.

The adoption of the 25 recommendations, as well as the acceptance of mandates for Bishops Commissions (excepting two Commissions that will continue for another year with interim mandates) and the acceptance of the 2020-22 budget, led to a number of changes to the Conference's structures, personnel and councils. Those changes are as follows:

Within the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry:

- The National Centre for Evangelisation will take on the functions formerly undertaken by the Office for Lay Pastoral Ministry, the Office for the Participation of Women and the Office for Youth, all of which cease.
- The Council for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry is established to advise the Bishops Commission. The Australian Catholic Council for Clergy Life and Ministry, the Australian Catholic Council for Lay Pastoral Ministry, the Australian Catholic Youth Council and the Council for Australian Catholic Women cease.
- The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office is transferred from the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service to the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry.
 - The director of the ACMRO will take on, in a part-time capacity, the essential functions formerly exercised by the director of the Office for Clergy Life and Ministry.
 - A vacant migration agent position will not be filled using diocesan levy funding.

- The projects officer will support the broader work of the National Centre for Evangelisation.
- All existing positions in the National Centre for Evangelisation, the Office for Lay Pastoral Ministry, the Office for the Participation of Women and the Office for Youth have been declared redundant as at 31 December 2019.
 - Three new positions have been created to replace these positions:
 - Director, National Centre for Evangelisation (Formation, Youth & Lay Participation)
 - Officer (two positions), National Centre for Evangelisation (Formation, Youth & Lay Participation).

Within the Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement:

- The Australian Catholic Life Council and the Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council cease and will be replaced by the Australian Catholic Life, Marriage and Family Council.

Within the Bishops Commission for Liturgy:

- The part-time administrative assistant role will cease, with administrative support provided by the general secretariat's executive support officers.

Within the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service:

- The Australian Catholic Prisoners Pastoral Care Council and the Australian Catholic Disability Council cease.
- The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office is transferred from the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service to the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry.
- The Permanent Committee is awaiting advice from the Finance Council before deciding on the future of the Disability Projects Office and its officer.
- The vacant, part-time research and project officer role within the Office for Social Justice will cease.
- Limited-term funding for 2019-2021 for the Apostleship of the Sea, a pontifical entity operating in liaison with the Bishops Conference, has been reduced by 25 per cent.
- The Conference has discontinued its grant to Catholic Social Services Australia.

Within the General Secretariat:

- A new role – chief operating officer – will be established.
- The position of business manager will cease.
- Two of the four executive support officer positions will cease.
- The Permanent Committee is awaiting advice from the Finance Council before deciding on the future of the role of strategic advisor – policy.
- The position of senior journalist will cease.

Finance Office

An independent review of the Finance Office has been undertaken, towards restructuring in 2020.

Australian Lay Missionary Gratuity and Loan Fund

The administrator of the Fund will retire at the end of the year. The functions will be transferred to the Finance Office.

The Fifth Plenary Council of Australia

The Bishops held two special sessions to consider the themes for the Plenary Council, to identify possible *periti* (expert advisers) and to begin work on developing the agenda of the Council.

The Bishops reviewed the six national themes for discernment, which emerged from the Listening and Dialogue phase of the Council, and reflected on the foundational focus of the Council: being a Christ-centred Church.

Other contributions to developing the agenda included: the voice and concerns of young people in Australia; the inclusion of women in Church leadership roles, with particular focus on nurturing a spirituality and theological pathway for growth and leadership in young women; and leading the Church in ways that draw on the gifts and talents of all of the People of God, recognising that, by their Baptism, women and men of all ages and all vocations are co-responsible for the Church's mission.

The bishops also recognised the ongoing importance of healing and reconciliation for survivors of sexual abuse, especially in light of the Church's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Other outcomes related to the Plenary Council included:

- Agreement to celebrate the second general assembly of the Plenary Council from 28 June to 3 July 2021; it had initially been indicated for May 2021. The second general assembly will be held in Sydney.
- The aspiration that the Plenary Council should include participation from leaders of other Christian denominations as well as other faiths, attending in the capacity of observers.
- Approval of the Statutes and Regulatory Norms for the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia, which are to be submitted to the Holy See.

Report of Professional Standards and Safeguarding Steering Committee

Sr Clare Condon SGS, Br David Leary OFM, Ms Susan Pascoe and Bishop Les Tomlinson of the Safeguarding Steering Committee addressed the Conference and members of the Catholic Religious Australia Council on the project to develop a model for safeguarding and professional standards for the Church in Australia.

The goal is for a model that is responsive to needs, specific to Catholic entities and communities, free of duplication both within the Church and with civic structures, and suited to appropriate delivery at local, provincial or state/territory and national levels.

It is expected that the Steering Committee, which is receiving research assistance from the Institute of Child Protection Studies at Australian Catholic University, will deliver its report to the Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia in April 2020.

Ratio Nationalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis

Bishops Randazzo and Mackinlay offered an update on preparing the new *Ratio Nationalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, a program for initial and ongoing priestly formation. Dr Maeve Heaney, who is working with the bishops in coordinating this project, was unable to attend the Plenary Meeting due to other commitments.

The new national document will flow from the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis, The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, and will include: the stages of initial formation and of seminarians being called to each stage; the flexibility provided for those in formation in the program; the respective formative roles of the seminary and the wider Church community; the program of intellectual formation; and the importance of inculcating a culture of lifelong formation among priests.

The Bishops gave particular attention to the importance of priestly formation building upon the discipleship that is the foundational baptismal vocation of every Christian.

Australian Catholic Youth Festival 2021

The Bishops agreed that the next Australian Catholic Youth Festival would be held in December 2021. The venue will be confirmed in 2020, but the Bishops expressed a desire to host the Festival in a regional diocese for the first time.

Launch of *Still Listening to the Spirit*

Dr Sandie Cornish of the Conference's Office for Social Justice and Ms Andrea Dean of the Office for the Participation of Women, together with invited guests, were welcomed for the launch of *Still Listening to the Spirit: Woman and Man 20 Years Later*.

Dr Cornish and Ms Dean outlined the collaboration between their respective offices in the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service and the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry that had enabled development of the publication, highlighting the significant research project that had resulted in the 1999 report, *Woman and Man: One in Christ Jesus*.

Bishop Vincent Long and Archbishop Christopher Prowse, who chair the respective Bishops Commissions, launched the book. The release of the book for sale will be accompanied by the digital publication of stories by women.

Inaugural National Men's Gathering

The Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry drew to the attention of the Bishops the National Men's Gathering to be held in Sydney on 25 July 2020 and asked that the gathering be promoted in the dioceses. The gathering is an initiative of that Commission and the Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement. The event was proposed by a group of Catholic men, but the triennial Catholic Women's Colloquium provided a useful model for the event's hosting.

Marriage preparation

The Bishops considered advice from the Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council on marriage preparation. The Council has recommended that engaged couples be prepared for marriage by married couples from their parish rather than by Church agency personnel.

This approach is consistent with the accompaniment approach that has been encouraged by Pope Francis and with his teaching in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.

The Bishops discussed the importance of offering engaged couples formation for married life that fosters stronger marriages. They noted the dramatic decline in the number of couples choosing to marry in the Catholic Church and the need for pastoral strategies to rebuild a culture of marriage within the Church, as well as in wider Australian society. The discussion concluded with the Bishops deciding to have a pastoral discussion about marriage at a future Plenary Meeting of the Conference.

Order of Baptism of Children

The Conference approved the revised English translation of the *Order of Baptism of Children*, with the inclusion of an *Appendix for the Order of Baptism of Children during Mass*.

Commemoration of the Sunday of the Word of God

The Bishops Commission for Liturgy is considering how the Church in Australia will mark the celebration of the Sunday of the Word of God, established by Pope Francis in his letter *Aperuit Illis* and scheduled to occur on the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time.

In Rome, the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time falls during Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which is celebrated much later in the year in Australia. It also falls during the summer holiday period in Australia. The Commission proposed that another date be established for the Sunday of the Word of God in Australia. The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference has sought a common date with Australia for celebration of the same commemoration there.

The Commission will provide recommendations to the Conference in May 2020.

Ministry in Indigenous communities

The Bishops discussed ordained ministry in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, noting that while there has been a tradition of Aboriginal deacons, almost all those men are now deceased.