



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops' Plenary Meeting, November 2003

National Catholic Family Gathering – Living the Dream

Catholic families from across Australia are being invited to make a pilgrimage to Sydney in April for a weekend of inspiration and celebration at the second National Catholic Family Gathering.

A top-class program of keynote speakers and seminar leaders from Australia and overseas will bring alive the Church's vision for families as "an intimate community of life and love".

Cardinal George Pell will speak at the Gathering, which has been convened by the Bishops' Committee for the Family and for Life, under the patronage of Blessed Mary MacKillop. It will be held at St Joseph's College, Hunter's Hill from April 16-18.

Making a return visit to Australia for the Gathering will be the popular Christopher West, internationally acclaimed US speaker and author on Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body

Also on the program is US speaker on child development, fatherhood and family issues, Dr Wade Horn, as well as Australian speakers including Sydney Bishop Anthony Fisher OP, Glenn and Trish Mowbray, the Rev Tim Costello, Byron and Francine Pirola and Fr Peter McGrath CP.

Workshops will be available on topics including: The Church's vision for families; building healthy families; Parenting and passing on the faith; When relationships fail; Divorce and beyond – healing and growth; The vocation to be single; Education for marriage; Ethical issues for marriage and family; Spirituality and sexuality; and Interdenominational marriages.

The bishops, at their plenary meeting, were asked by the committee to encourage families to make the journey to Sydney as a pilgrimage, not just of the heart, but physically, to sites of special spiritual significance for Australian Catholics.

These sites include the tomb of Blessed Mary MacKillop, St Mary's Cathedral and Parramatta's new St Patrick's Cathedral.

"Family is where we have our deepest experiences of human relationships, our warmest, most intimate moments of love, our deepest hurts and disappointments. It can be a great

source of comfort and strength and also a place where dreams are shattered,” the bishops’ committee said.

“This conference is convened in the confident belief that wherever family members choose to hope, love, persevere, trust, courageously try again, the presence of Jesus is felt and the Spirit is moving, the Gospel is alive!”

For more information, log onto www.familygathering.com.au or call 02 9349 1834.

Bishops’ plans for ad limina visit well underway

Australia’s bishops are preparing, both physically and spiritually, for their ad limina visit to Rome from March 14 to 28.

Bishops are required to undertake an ad limina visit every five years, during which they have a meeting with the Pope and deliver a report on their diocese.

The reports, which are being compiled now, will outline for the Holy Father the various aspects of the life of the diocese and the Church in Australia.

The journey is also a spiritual pilgrimage designed to celebrate and strengthen the Australian bishops’ communion with the universal Church and the Successor of Peter, Pope John Paul II.

The key event for Australia’s bishops will be a visit to the tombs of Sts Peter and Paul, pastors and pillars of the Roman Church.

The visit is also seen as an important part of the Holy Father’s pastoral ministry, as he receives the bishops with whom he exercises pastoral ministry and listens and talks with them about their mission in their diocese.

Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference President Archbishop Francis Carroll of Canberra-Goulburn said he and his fellow bishops would be seeking the prayers of those in their diocesan community as they prepared for the ad limina pilgrimage.

“We have a deep and sincere desire to involve the whole Catholic community in reflection and prayer, as we prepare for this spiritually significant event,” Archbishop Carroll said.

“We wish for all Catholics, through prayer and solidarity, to feel a part of the ad limina visit, which confirms and celebrates that which we profess each week when we express our belief in the ‘one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church’.”

“Our faith was handed down to us from Jesus by the apostles and as bishops we are charged with the enormous responsibility of continuing that tradition. The ad limina visit is an important physical and spiritual milestone in the carrying out of that ministry.”

While in Rome, the bishops will also make a pilgrimage to Assisi and will visit various Vatican organisations.

New booklet sets out Catholic teaching on what it is to be human

Australia's Catholic bishops have issued a concise new booklet setting out the Catholic teaching on the human person which underpins the Church's response to modern ethical questions on such issues as human cloning, reproductive technology, marriage and sexuality.

The bishops approved the booklet during their twice-yearly plenary meeting in Sydney.

Recognising that the Church's position on modern ethical questions is not always well understood by society, the reflection paper was commissioned by the Bishops' Committee for Doctrine and Morals and prepared by Fr Gerald Gleeson of the Catholic Institute of Sydney.

It aims to offer a positive statement of the Catholic understanding of humanity that underpins the Church's ethical teachings by seeking to answer the fundamental question: What is it to be human?

"Competing answers are at work in debates about human cloning, reproductive technologies, care of the environment, marriage and human sexuality, the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, mandatory sentencing policies and approaches to the funding of education and health care," the paper says.

"We have tried to show that Catholic teachings are in accord with fundamental convictions about who and what we are as human beings, and about where we are going, that are worthy of thoughtful inquiry and intelligent examination."

The booklets can be ordered through the Diocese of Broken Bay.

Church working with Muslims at grassroots level – Melkite Eparch

While the Vatican recently released a message of peace to Muslims across the world, the Melkite Eparch, Bishop Issam Darwish, has been busy establishing and maintaining good interfaith relations in his own backyard.

Bishop Darwish gave a short report to the bishops' plenary meeting on the efforts being made in his Sydney community to build a localised culture of peace, as well as his personal efforts to help bring an end to the recent shootings within the Muslim community in south-west Sydney.

Bishop Darwish said the Melkite Church in Sydney had established an Arabic-speaking Christian-Muslim Friendship Society.

The Society aims to develop friendship between the Christian and Muslim communities by working towards strengthening the relationship through discussions and to create cultural and social activities.

It will meet regularly with both Christian and Muslim religious leaders and organizations to build harmony among them and the community at large.

Meanwhile, Bishop Darwish also said that all the Eastern Churches had been invited to prayers for unity at St Mary's Maronite Church, Harris Park on January 23, 2004 at 7pm.

Vibrant new internet gateway to the Catholic Church in Australia

Australia's Catholic bishops have given the thumbs-up to the design of new website which will become the new gateway to the Church in Australia.

The Catholic portal page, to be launched around Christmas, will project a welcoming, active and informative image of the Church in Australia, with links to all key areas of the Church's activities and mission.

It has a faith focus, with the readings for the day featuring prominently. There are also direct links to key Church organisations and services and a daily news component.

The site has been designed to reflect the unique character of the Church in Australia and will be a warm and vibrant entry point for anyone seeking to make contact with the Church or to gain information.

The site will take on the www.catholic.org.au address, which has been used by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference site.

The ACBC site is to be redesigned and will take on a new address.

Local news is good news for the Church

The Bishops' Committee for the Media is to develop a kit for parishes to help them take advantage of opportunities to spread the Church's good news to the local media.

With much of the Church's good news happening at parish level, the kit will help parish members identify a news story, write a concise press release, accompany it with a good, clear photo and place it with the local media outlet.

The committee is also working on a pastoral letter to examine the relationship between the Church and the media, which will concentrate on positive ways to develop this crucial area of the Church's relations with society.

New bishops appointed to committees at first Plenary Meeting

The November Plenary meeting reflected recent changes to the Australian episcopate, with the attendance of three new bishops and a new cardinal in the Archbishop of Sydney, Dr George Pell.

The new bishops were Bishop Julian Porteous and Bishop Anthony Fisher OP, Auxiliary Bishops of Sydney, and Bishop Max Davis, the Military Bishop.

Bishop Porteous was appointed to the Bishops' Committee for Evangelisation and Missions and the Bishops' Committee for Liturgy.

Bishop Fisher was appointed to the Bishops' Committee for Doctrine and Morals and the Bishops' Committee for Family and for Life.

Bishop Davis was appointed to the Bishops' Committee for Laity and the Bishops' Committee for Migrants and Refugees.

The Membership Committee also appointed the Maronite Bishop, Bishop Ad Abikaram to the Bishops' Committee for Education.

The Conference also approved the appointment of Sr Patty Fawkner SGS to the Commission for Australian Catholic Women and Mr Philip McMillan's reappointment as Chairperson of the Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations.