



## **News from the November 2007 Plenary Meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference**

### **New Bishops attend meeting**

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference held its Plenary Meeting at Mary Mackillop Place, North Sydney from November 27 to November 30.

A number of appointments have taken effect since the May Plenary meeting. Bishops Peter Elliott and Timothy Costelloe sdb were ordained as Auxiliary Bishops of Melbourne and Bishop Terry Brady was ordained as Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney. Bishop Brady was seconded to the Bishops' Commission for Justice and Service until the next elections, due in May 2009.

Bishop Eugene Hurley, formerly Bishop of Port Pirie, attended the November Plenary Meeting as the newly consecrated Bishop of Darwin and Fr Paul Quirk attended the meeting in his role as Diocesan Administrator of Port Pirie.

Also attending, from Catholic Religious Australia were Fr Mark Raper sj, Sr Christine Burke ivbm and Fr Timothy Brennan msc.

The Bishops noted with pleasure the appointment of Bishop Christopher Prowse as a member of the Pontifical Council for Inter Religious Dialogue.

The Bishops also celebrated Mass for the Repose of the Soul of Archbishop Ambrose De Paoli, the Apostolic Nuncio to Australia, who died in October.

### **Bishops receive WYD briefing and hail the power of the Cross and Icon in their dioceses**

With Sydney's World Youth Day just seven months away, the WYD team, led by Bishop Anthony Fisher and Mr Danny Casey gave an extended briefing to the Bishops on the progress towards the big event.

The briefing focused on venues, logistics, pilgrim issues, catechesis and the role of the Bishops in the week-long event, among other things

During the discussion the Bishops also heard a moving testimony of the impact of the Journey of the Cross and Icon from Chantelle Ogilvie, who accompanied the Cross and Icon through the centre of Australia.

Chantelle spoke movingly of her time with the Cross and Icon at Woomera Detention Centre.

“For about 5 years I worked with asylum-seekers and refugees, and so I knew this place would be powerful – I was nervous about it. We climbed the hill and planted the cross, and we observed a minute silence. Then we planted a tree, a small one, I guess as a symbol of hope in a pretty harsh land,” she told the Bishops.

“In my work with Parramatta YCS I knew students who were in Woomera for 4 years as children. Their names are Ali, Kaseem and Yusef. They are perhaps 14, 17 years old now. It was such a powerful experience, just to look at that place. For young people of my generation, that detention centre came to represent all that was wrong with Australia at the time. And so it was so powerful, to look at it head on, to not look away, but then to raise that cross and say ‘This is what we believe in. This is love and courage and freedom.’

“Later on I think it was Fr Chris who said that this is our demilitarised zone. He was referring to the time last year when young people carried the Cross into the space between north and South Korea, and prayed there for peace. For us, as Australians, Woomera was where the rubber hit the road of our Christian commitment. It was where we were most called to front up to the hard things of our world, and then to see in the cross a God that understands that suffering – and who dares us to hope, to dream and live differently.

“This Cross and this icon, wherever they are, hold together so much. In each of our own cities and towns there are Woomeras – there are places of pain – and there are also places of celebration and light. The Cross and the Icon mark the sacredness of these space and say ‘God is here.’

“That’s such a powerful sign for young people, and draws something out of us – our hopes and histories. It touches the space within, gives us hope in solidarity, and moves us forward in love.”

Following Chantelle’s presentation, a number of Bishops shared their testimony to the power of the Cross and Icon in their dioceses, relating moving stories of its impact on prisoners, indigenous people and many people from both within and outside the Church community.



*Bishop Kevin Manning, Bishop Don Sproxtton, and Bishop Justin Bianchini chat to Chantelle Ogilvie over morning tea.*

## **Bishops back way forward for National ICT committee**

The Bishops gave their backing to a framework for taking forward the work of the National Church ICT Committee which aims to take a Whole-of-Church approach to using technology at the service of the mission of the Church.

The Chair of the National Church ICT Committee, Mr Greg Whitby addressed the Plenary Meeting to present the committee's report and seek the endorsement of the Bishops for their framework for the future.

Mr Whitby said that the report "Growing Church in the Knowledge Age – A Framework for the Future" was the result of three think tank workshops which the Committee hosted with more than 50 experts from each of the Church sectors and agencies.

The purpose of the meetings was to identify:

- The key challenges faced by the education, health, aged-care and welfare sectors, dioceses and other Church agencies;
- Current challenges to promoting the Church's mission;
- Knowledge management needs of the Church;
- Communication needs of the Church;
- Possible systems and technology required to meet these challenges.

The input from the think-tanks formed the basis of the report delivered to the Bishops which identifies three key ICT initiatives to assist in addressing the key challenges faced by the Church.

Proclaiming the Gospel initiative

1. To further engage people in the mission of the Church, build a whole of Church online community of faith with services tailored to the needs of each member and improved communication and collaboration tools.
2. To share exemplary practice and resources; developing common data and content management standards that can extend to all Church agency systems.
3. Develop common online systems for all agencies in a sector to use.

The Bishops voted in favour of a motion that the National Church Information and Communications Technology Committee continues to coordinate the development of the following recommended key initiatives over the next two years, reporting regularly to the Bishops Commission for Administration and Information.

## **Women's Forum Australia promoting life-affirming cultural change for women**

Melinda Tankard-Reist, of Women's Forum Australia were invited to address the Bishops on the work the Forum is doing as an independent women's think tank tackling some of the key issues facing society today.

Ms Tankard-Reist said that WFA aims to give voice to a broad coalition of women who will effect life-affirming cultural change for women's well-being and freedom.

"WFA takes a very strong evidence-based approach to the work we do," she said.

The Forum's most recent initiative was the production of a magazine called 'Faking It', which reflects the body of academic research on magazines, mass media, and the sexual objectification of women.

Designed to look like the many glossy magazines on the market, it urges young women to become more critical of the messages they receive in the mass media.

"What we are doing is bringing together all the existing literature on how the images portrayed in the popular media are harming women," Ms Tankard-Reist said.

"Essentially, what they are getting from the mainstream media is making them sick."

WFA aims to provide a voice for an alternative, life-affirming view of what it means to be a young woman in the world today.

"We're doing this with a modern, multi-media style approach and I think we've struck a chord," she said.



*Melinda Tankard-Reist and Erica Schumann from Women's Forum Australia with ACBC President, Archbishop Philip Wilson*

## **Pastoral strategies put forward to reach out to Catholics who have stopped attending Mass**

The research project on Catholics Who Have Stopped Attending Mass reached its conclusion with a final report to the Bishops, outlining four key recommendations for pastoral focus.

The Bishops commissioned the research in 2004 in an effort to explore some of the reasons why people who had been active in Church life are ceasing to attend Mass and engage in parish life.

The qualitative research project, undertaken by the ACBC Pastoral Projects Office, under the direction of Mr Bob Dixon, was based on interviews with 41 people who had stopped attending Mass.

Reasons given for people ceasing to attend Mass included a perceived irrelevance of the Church to modern life, the quality of homilies, inter-personal problems with a parish priest, problems with Church teachings or personal faith, and disillusionment in the wake of sexual scandals. There were also cultural and societal factors which meant that Mass was no longer a priority.

However, half the respondents said they still attend Mass occasionally and almost one third of participants said they might return to weekly Mass attendance in the future.

Following the tabling of the findings of the research in November 2006, the Pastoral Projects Office undertook wide consultation within the Church community on possible pastoral strategies to help people to re-engage with their Parish.

The four primary recommendations put forward in the report and accepted by the Bishops are:

- Building community – that resources for effective parish reviews be developed, distributed and engaged, such that local communities might better know and plan for their people.
- Personal identity – that forums at every level be established for the purpose of greater listening to people, and for pastoral discernment.
- Leadership – that on both diocesan and parish levels there be enhanced formation of lay and ordained people for collaborative leadership, for the sake of mission.
- Mission – that there be renewed effort for the proclamation of the Good News, and for the development of faith formation, particularly using the resources of contemporary technology and the resources being developed by the National Office for Evangelization.

The Bishops voted to endorse these pastoral strategies and to address the broader issue of Catholics who have stopped attending Mass in a pastoral letter.

**ACBC President and General-Secretary to begin annual visit to the Holy See**

The ACBC President, Archbishop Philip Wilson and the General-Secretary, Fr Brian Lucas will visit the Holy See next year.

The Bishops voted that such a visit should take place annually, except in years when an Ad Limina visit of all the Bishops is to take place.

During the visits, the President and the General-Secretary will visit various Dicasteries and Vatican officials as deemed appropriate.

### **Caritas Australia gives snapshot reports to Bishops**

Caritas Australia Chief Executive Officer, Mr Jack de Groot led a delegation which addressed the Bishops and outlined the growth, the focus and the plans for the future for their aid agency.

Caritas Australia is the agency of the ACBC which works with communities around the world and also within indigenous Australia to deliver aid, dignity and justice to those in need.

Mr de Groot said Caritas Australia has grown over the last 10 years, with its programs now worth \$26.8 million, up from \$6.6 million in 1997.

Funding now focuses on development outcomes, and the principle of working with local partners on the ground in various communities means that Caritas staff are now an active presence in helping to build local organisations.

He said Caritas Australia has also developed a greater capacity for humanitarian and rehabilitation response over the last decade.

The priority programs for Caritas Australia are the Pacific, Indigenous Australia, SE Asia (especially Indonesia and Philippines) and Humanitarian Response

In looking to the future, Mr de Groot called for a Whole-of-Church response to the challenges of Development in our region and warned that climate change and other factors would likely lead to an increased number and severity of disasters.

### **Bishops continue pastoral discussion on Handing on the Faith to the Young**

The challenges of handing on the faith to the young formed a key focus for pastoral discussion at the Bishops' Plenary Meeting.

It was the second major pastoral discussion among the Bishops on this topic after they identified it last year as a top priority for their ongoing attention.

The Chairman of the Bishops' Commission for Catholic Education, Bishop Gerard Holohan led the discussion which focused on methods of catechesis in the different settings of the home, the parish and the school.

The Bishops will take their discussions and deliberations on the broader issue forward at the May 2008 Plenary Meeting.

### **Bishops vote to approve ‘Grey Book’ of new Missal**

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference voted to approve the completed draft of the new translation of the Roman Missal.

The translation, completed by the International Commission for English in the Liturgy, has been sent to all English-speaking Bishops Conferences for similar approval.

It is now anticipated that the completed Missal, with Australian adaptations, could be sent to Rome for recognition by the Holy See in 2009.

Australia is also part of an international committee of member conferences of ICEL which is preparing a comprehensive catechetical resource to assist in the implementation of the new translation of the Missal.

The international resource will be tailored to the needs of the Church in Australia and made available to all sectors of the Church.

It is expected to be launched at the beginning of 2009 which would then provide for a one-year period of formation prior to the introduction of the Missal sometime in 2010.

### **Days of prayer for good seasons**

The Catholic Church in Australia is to have a new feature in its liturgical calendar, with the proposed addition of two days of prayer and fasting for good seasons.

The move comes in response to a submission from the Knights of the Southern Cross to the Bishops’ Commission for Liturgy that there be regular prayer for good seasons.

The ACBC accepted the proposal and passed a motion recommending the introduction of two Rogation Days of prayer and fasting, on or about June 21 and September 21 each year – they being the solstices – and that these days be included in the *Ordo*.

These two special days in the liturgical calendar would encourage parishes to pray for the intention of those who are dependent on the land and good seasons.

The Bishops’ Commission for Liturgy will prepare appropriate resources to assist in the observation of the two Days of Rogation.

## **New GIRM to take effect on Pentecost Sunday**

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal which was approved by the ACBC in May 2007 will take effect in parishes on May 11 2008 – Pentecost Sunday.

The Bishops voted to implement the new GIRM on Pentecost Sunday and will prepare people for the new measures with materials prepared by the Bishops' Commission for Liturgy.

In essence, under the new GIRM, Catholics in Australia will be asked to make two changes to the way Mass is celebrated.

The first change relates to posture. At present when the priest invites the people to pray at the Preparation of the Gifts the congregation remains seated until it has responded, "May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands to the praise and glory of His name, for our good, and the good of all His Church". The congregation, up to now, has then stood for the Prayer over the Gifts.

From Pentecost Sunday next year the congregation will be asked to STAND when the priest invites the congregation to pray, "Pray brethren that our sacrifice may be acceptable to God the Almighty Father".

The second change relates to a Gesture. The Australian edition of the GIRM says: "When approaching to receive Holy Communion, the faithful bow in reverence of the Mystery that they are to receive" (GIRM 160).

The communicant might bow just before receiving Holy Communion or perhaps while the person in front of them is receiving Holy Communion. Such a bow can be done simply, without disrupting the flow of the Communion Procession which is a most important ritual act in the celebration of the Mass.

In their draft catechetical material, the Bishops Commission for Liturgy acknowledges that as with any change, it will take some time to become accustomed to the change in posture and the new gesture.

"Some will be quicker than others in making the change, but with a little patience and quiet concentration there should be no confusion or disruption to the flow of the Mass," the material says.

## **Bishops to offer pastoral advice on engaging safely with the Internet**

The Bishops Commission for Mission and Faith Formation is to produce a Pastoral Letter on Internet Safety, aimed at providing practical and spiritual pastoral care for those using the Internet.

While acknowledging the positive aspects of the Internet, this letter will draw attention to the inherent dangers of the Net and seek to empower Catholic people to navigate their way through these dangers in a faith-filled way.



It is hoped that the pastoral letter will be launched on or around World Communications Sunday which will be celebrated in Australia on April 27, 2008.

### **National Catholic Media Audit**

The Bishops have given the green light for a major audit of the Catholic media landscape in Australia.

The Bishops Commission for Mission and Faith Formation proposed the audit which will be carried out by members of the Catholic Media Advisory Council.

It has been many years since any kind of inventory has been taken of the Catholic media landscape in Australia and the Bishops agreed with the proposal that to have such an inventory would be a valuable tool in knowing what is already out there and in planning for the future.

Such an audit would ask people in each diocese, organisation, religious order etc questions including: What is being produced? What is its purpose? Whose use is it for? How can people access what is being produced? It would take in print, radio, television, film, internet and new media.

### **Plans underway for booklet explaining issues surrounding pre-natal testing**

The ACBC is to produce a booklet on frequently asked questions about pre-natal testing.

The booklet is being developed because of increasing pressure on women and their families to undergo pre-natal testing, and the increasing number of abortions due to positive test results.

The Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life, which will have oversight of the project, said it was important because there was a growing need to educate, inform and provide a solid pastoral care document on pre-natal testing, based on the teachings of the Catholic Church.

The booklet will be produced in the same style as the popular question-and-answer booklets on *Marriage in the Catholic Church* and *Divorce and the Catholic Church*.

The ACBC Disability Projects Office will manage the project.

## **Chaplains' report to form basis of national framework for pastoral care of migrants and refugees**

A comprehensive report gathered from the fruits of the landmark 2005 National Migrant Chaplains' Conference is to form the basis of a national framework for the pastoral care of migrants and refugees.

The wisdom, insights and responses which came out of the first National Migrant Chaplains' Conference have been compiled into a report charting a way forward in Australia for the pastoral care of migrants and refugees.

The Bishops endorsed the proposal that the report be adopted as a national framework for such pastoral care.

The Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life will establish a working group to plan and oversee implementation, including the implementation of priority recommendations within the next six months.

## **Appointments**

The Bishops endorsed the following motions regarding ACBC appointments:

Mrs Anne Rhodes, a parent nominee of the Conference on the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) resigned from her position earlier in 2007. The BCCE has considered new nominations and has recommended that, Mrs Melinda Harris, from Western Australia, replace Mrs Rhodes for the remainder of the current term of office, that is until the end of 2008.

Mr Peter Glasson, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Notre Dame Australia (NDA), has been approved by the Chair of the BCCE to replace Professor Jennifer Nicol, who recently retired from the position of Provost, NDA.

That upon the recommendation of BCJS, Conference appoints Mr Trevor Murphy to the Board of Catholic Social Services Australia

That upon the recommendation of BCJS, Conference appoints Mr Michael Reutens to the Board of Catholic Social Services Australia.

That upon the recommendation of BCJS, Conference extends for a period of 12 months the term of current Catholic Social Services Australia Board member Mr Tony Davies.

That Conference acknowledge the substantial contribution made by outgoing Board members Mr Maurie Kennedy and Ms Liz Orupold.

Four vacancies have recently been filled on the ACSJC:

Sr Patty Fawkner SGS

Mrs Kerry Stone of the Diocese of Sandhurst

Mr Peter Hennessy of the Archdiocese of Sydney

Fr Brendan Quirk of the Archdiocese of Sydney