



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

PLENARY MEETING

7-14 May 2015

Welcome and visit from new Apostolic Nuncio to Australia

The President, Archbishop Denis Hart, warmly welcomed the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana. He concelebrated the opening Mass, met Bishops informally, addressed the Plenary Meeting, attended the meeting with Leaders of Religious Institutes and participated in a general discussion.

Observers

Archbishop Hart welcomed the observers from the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (Catholic Religious Australia). The observers were; Sr Berneice Loch RSM, Sr Ruth Durick OSU and Fr Tom McDonough CP.

Episcopal appointments since the last plenary

- 12 December 2014 - Installed Bishop Peter Comensoli as Bishop of Broken Bay
- 17 December 2014 - Ordained Bishop Terence Curtin as Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne
- 17 December 2014 - Ordained Bishop Mark Edwards, OMI as Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne
- 17 February 2015 - Appointed Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana as Apostolic Nuncio to Australia
- 26 February 2015 - Ordained Bishop Patrick O'Regan as Bishop of Sale
- 7 March 2015 – Installed Archbishop Amel Nona as Bishop of Saint Thomas the Apostle of Sydney (Chaldean)
- 6 May 2015 - Appointed Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP as a member of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

Retired Bishops

15 January 2015 - Archbishop Djibrail Kassab, Bishop of Saint Thomas the Apostle of Sydney (Chaldean)

Membership Panel

The following Bishops were nominated to the Membership Panel for the next Triennium: Bishop Leslie Tomlinson, Bishop Michael McKenna and Bishop William Wright.

The Conference noted the need for some flexibility with respect to membership of the Bishops Commissions. It affirmed the rule that no bishop should serve more than three consecutive terms nor serve on more than two Commissions.

The bishops carried the following motion, 'After the conclusion of the election of Commissions and Commission Chairmen the Membership Panel shall review the results and, if it considers it necessary, taking into account "the strength and balance of each Commission and the consequent good of the whole Conference" (by-law 4.8.3), it may propose to the Plenary Meeting/Permanent Committee, that a particular bishop(s) be seconded to a Commission(s). Such secondment will be periodically reviewed in the light of circumstances from time to time.'

Elections to the Permanent Committee

Archbishop Mark Coleridge (*Acting Vice-President while Archbishop Wilson is on leave*)
Archbishop Christopher Prowse
Archbishop Anthony Fisher OP
Bishop Eugene Hurley

51st International Eucharistic Congress

Bishop Michael Kennedy, the Conference delegate for the Eucharistic Congress, provided an outline of current planning arrangements, encouraged participation and provided some written material for the bishops to assist them in planning for the Congress.

Preparation for the 2015 Synod of Bishops

Archbishop Mark Coleridge gave a presentation on the scriptural texts relating to marriage and divorce. This was followed by questions and discussion on matters that might be brought to the Synod and outcomes that may be expected.

Pastoral discussion about parish life

Bishop Terry Brady led a discussion on parish life. Fr Paul Monkerud and Dr Trudy Dantis gave presentations and discussed the results of the project 'Building Stronger Parishes' commissioned by the ACBC Pastoral Research Office. Information is available on the website: <http://www.buildingstrongerparishes.catholic.org.au>

Pastoral discussion on Friday Penance

The Bishops considered the question of Friday abstinence taking into account the Apostolic Exhortation *Paenitemini* and the practice established by the Bishops Conference of England and Wales.

It was agreed to establish a task force to prepare some proposals for consideration during the November plenary meeting. The following bishops were elected to the taskforce: Archbishops Coleridge, Archbishop Costelloe SDB, Archbishop Fisher OP and Bishop Wright.

Pastoral Discussion on the Extraordinary Jubilee on Mercy

Archbishop Prowse led a pastoral discussion on the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy *Misericordiae Vultus*. He noted the requirement in every Cathedral in the world that there be a door of Mercy constructed or used for the duration of the Jubilee Year.

The Conference asked the Bishops Commission for Liturgy to make some practical suggestions about how this is to be implemented. This was followed by questions and discussion.

Meeting with Religious Leaders

Sr Maria Casey presented a summary of the requirements for setting up a new religious institute. There were contributions from a number of Vicars for Religious in the dioceses.

Sr Moya Hanlen highlighted the three important elements for a religious order:

- A solid spirituality
- A meaningful ministry
- A sense of being part of our Church with others

Situation in the Middle East

Bishop Robert Rabbat and Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay OLM gave presentations on the situation of the Church in the Middle East and on the pastoral visit to Lebanon and Iraq at the end of 2014. Archbishop Christopher Prowse and Archbishop Julian Porteous, who had participated in the pastoral visit, provided some supplementary comments.

The Conference endorsed the proposal of the Eparch's that there be a joint committee established consisting of members of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference with members from the Conference of the Bishops and Representatives of the Middle Eastern Churches. The participants in the pastoral visit would form the foundational group. It would have the following tasks:

- Liaising with the Australian Government and where necessary the State Governments
- Assisting media in maintaining a consistent and accurate reporting of the events in the region
- Acting as a provider of general information and resources regarding the situation in the Middle East and North Africa

Permanent Committee

Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life divided

The bishops voted to divide the capacity of the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life due to the substantial workload associated with one commission. The new commission established is called the Bishops Commission for Family, Youth and Life. The Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life will continue with a modified mandate to exclude those responsibilities of the new commission. Both commissions took effect from the May 2015 plenary meeting. Four bishops were appointed to each of the new Commissions. The Executive Secretary for both commissions is Ms Alison Burt.

Bishops Commission for Administration and Information

Employment Relations

During the bishops' plenary meeting, the Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations launched a new publication - *Good Works: the Catholic Church as an employer in Australia*. Councillor, Dr Terence Wilson, edited the publication. The book will be distributed to all Catholic employers.

Media and Communications

World Communications Day 2015

Each year, the Holy Father writes a message for World Communications Day, which the Church celebrates internationally. In January 2015, Ms Elisabeth Doherty returned to the Conference after a period of leave and wrote a book about social media for the Catholic Church in Australia. The book, *Tweet others as you wish to be tweeted*, was launched at the Australian Catholic Communications Congress to coincide with the 49th World Communications Day on Sunday 17 May 2015. The ACBC Communications Office has created a parish kit and prayer card as a resource for schools and parishes.

The Commission is pleased to report that following twelve months of acting in the position of Communications Director during Elisabeth Doherty's absence, Miss Aoife Connors took up the permanent appointment of Media and Communications Director. The Commission acknowledged the six years of contribution by Elisabeth Doherty who will take up a new appointment with the Society of Jesus in June 2015.

Formation and Accreditation Programmes

The Conference voted to seek to provide Trustees and Boards of Catholic entities with opportunities to participate in formation and accreditation programmes designed to better equip them for their roles in Catholic organisations, through their own resources and resources that the Commission will provide.

Bishops Commission for Catholic Education

National Catholic Education Commission Strategic Plan

The NCEC held a strategic planning day in January and identified the following priority areas for 2015-2017:

1. Catholic Mission and Identity
2. Excellent and Equitable Catholic Schooling
3. Australian Government funding and regulation
4. Outstanding service delivery to stakeholders

In February NCEC began producing a weekly email to update federal political leaders, policy advocates and, leaders in Catholic education including diocesan directors and school leaders. All Bishops have also been included on the distribution list. The weekly email provides an update on contemporary issues for Catholic education.

Bishops Commission for Church Ministry

Appointment

Bishop Tomlinson advised that the current Director of Clergy Life and Ministry, Fr Brian Moloney, will return to his diocese at the end of his current term. The Conference appointed Fr Greg Bourke from the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

Lay Pastoral Ministry

A project management team was established to oversee the research project into Lay Pastoral Ministry. When this project is complete, it will contain analysis and recommendations that will form the basis of the Council's drafting the *National Guidelines of Lay Pastoral Ministries*. These guidelines aim to be complete for approval by Conference in May 2016.

Catholic Religious Australia

The Annual Assembly of CRA will be held in Brisbane 22-25 June 2015. Discussion took place as to how to make the most of the annual gathering of Bishops and CRA.

International Clergy

In late 2014, the US Bishop's Conference [USCCB] approved a new publication about accommodating/safeguarding in regards to International Clergy. The document raises the question of how to promote similar best practice in Australia.

The link to that document which is on their website was distributed to Church Authorities in Australia. <http://ccc.usccb.org/flipbooks/cclv-guidelines>.

Statistics suggest this issue will have more impact on the future Australian Church and all our seminaries and their formation programs.

Pontifical Council for the Protection of Minors

Mrs Kathleen McCormack was appointed to this body on 17 December 2014. She met with the NCPS at the March 2015 meeting and briefed the Committee following the Vatican meeting of early February.

Green Paper on Restoring Trust Together

The Truth Justice Healing Council has presented a draft report on a consultation relating to future structures of the management of child protection issues. The Supervisory Group of the Truth Justice Healing Council will consider the paper, together with observations from the Truth, Justice and Healing Council.

Bishops Commission for Doctrine and Morals

Same-Sex Marriage Pastoral Letter

The bishops voted to circulate a pastoral letter to dioceses and parishes describing the Church's position on same-sex marriage.

Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations

National Council of Churches in Australia

The Conference nominated Dr Gerard Kelly to the National Council of Churches of Australia Executive, to replace Dr Elizabeth Delaney SGS.

Uniting Church Dialogue

Bishop Robert McGuckin was appointed Catholic Co-Chair of National Dialogue, the Roman Catholic–Uniting Church Australia, replacing Bishop Brian Finnigan.

National Gathering of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interfaith Commissions

Planning is in train for a National Gathering of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interfaith Commissions/Offices, possibly to be held in Melbourne towards the end of 2016. The previous gathering of this nature was held in Adelaide in 2011.

Ecumenical Dialogues

The Roman Catholic – Lutheran dialogue is celebrating its fortieth anniversary. The current topic of attention is the Papacy.

Possibilities are being explored as to how the Catholic Church in Australia might acknowledge the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017.

Bishops Commission for Health and Community Services

Catholic Social Services Australia

The 2014 CSSA Leadership Forum identified the issue of housing, homelessness and housing affordability as a high priority area of focus for CSSA. For policy development and advocacy purposes, CSSA has prepared a discussion paper underpinning the importance of a safe, permanent and affordable home to ensure stability for an individual or family, and to enable meaningful participation in their community.

Catholic Mission and Identity

CSSA is leading a discussion with a core group of member agencies on how agencies can better identify and articulate the ways in which they give rise to their Catholic identity.

CSSA is collaborating with Catholic Social Services Victoria to sponsor a Conference in 2016, *Review, Reimagine, Renew: Mission that makes a difference in a changing world*. The conference will take place from 25 to 26 February 2016.

Board Appointments

The Conference voted to appoint Mr Jack de Groot, Mr Paul Vane-Tempest, Mrs Barbara Hingston and Sr Margaret Mary Flynn ibvm to the Catholic Social Services Australia Board.

Catholic Health Australia

This year's National Catholic Governance Program will take place in partnership with the Broken Bay Institute on 30-31 October 2015.

Bishops Commission for Justice, Ecology and Development

Clergy Induction Program

Caritas Australia has explored options to enhance understanding by overseas-born priests of the role of Caritas and its principal fund-raising appeal each year, Project Compassion. Most overseas-born priests have little familiarity with Project Compassion and some have actively promoted other overseas causes to their parishioners instead.

Caritas Response to Nepal Earthquake

As part of the international response, the Caritas global network has provided substantial support to affected communities. This includes \$A5 million in cash and about \$A4 million in-kind. It has directly supported over 31,000 people with shelter kits and 2,100 families with food.

Catholic Earthcare Australia

In preparation for the Papal Encyclical that is due in June/July 2015, Catholic Earthcare Australia has undertaken a variety of initiatives in partnership with Church agencies and others.

National Energy Efficiency Network

The Government-funded phase of the NEEN Project will be completed on 30 June 2015. It is on track to achieve its milestones, including the establishment of a learning community in every Catholic Diocese in Australia.

Living Water Symposium

The Commission is offering the Australian Catholic Bishops the opportunity to participate in the 'Living Water Symposium' from 29 September to 2 October 2015 at St Clement's, Galong, NSW. This Symposium has been prioritised following the Bishops' Statement 'The Gift of Water'. The draft programme is available on Catholic Earthcare Australia's website.

Bishops Commission for Liturgy

NATSICC Sunday 5 July 2015

The Commission recommends that the suggested rituals entitled "A Rite of Smoking" and "A Rite of Water Blessing" in the draft NATSICC Liturgy Resources for 2015 could be appropriate on NATSICC Sunday in Australia. The rituals could be part of the Introductory Rites (entrance procession) and Rite of Sprinkling, particularly in parishes with significant representation by indigenous Australians.

Bread for Celebration of the Eucharist

The Commission recommended that increased importance be attached to the local production of altar breads (by religious orders and others) for Celebrations of the Eucharist in Australia.

Bishops Commission for Evangelisation

The bishops voted that Conference request the chairmen of the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation and Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life to convene a working party to devise strategies for parish renewal to be presented to the November Plenary Meeting.

Catholic Enquiry Centre

The Catholic Enquiry Centre is exploring new ways to engage non-believers in the Catholic faith. The Centre will host a booth at the Mind Body Spirit (MBS) Festival at the Sydney Showground in Homebush 28 to 31 May 2015.

The Catholic Enquiry Centre will be the lead partner with the Mount Carmel Retreat Centre, Varroville and the Catholic Renewal Evangelisation Diocesan Office of the Archdiocese of Sydney (CREDO) in conducting the Catholic Spirituality booth. In 2014, 17,000 people visited the MBS Festival. The primary task of the Catholic Enquiry Centre at the MBS Festival is to distribute bookmarks and flyers and to respond to requests for a copy of *Call and Response: An Introduction to the Catholic Faith*.

Australian Catholic Communications Congress

The theme of the 2015 Congress was “What is our Voice? ‘Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks’”. (Mt 12: 34). It was conducted from 4 to 6 May 2015 at the Rydges Hotel in North Sydney. The Congress was self-funded from registration fees, sponsorship and donations. Due to the generosity of donors and sponsors, the cost of registration for delegates was kept to a minimum.

Catholic Mission

Catholic Mission will collaborate with Catholic Religious Australia to deliver the “Mission: One Heart, Many Voices Conference” in Sydney from May 18 to 20, 2015.

The book “*The Francis Effect: Living the Joy of the Gospel*” was the largest selling new Australian Catholic book of 2014.

Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life

Same-Sex Marriage

The Conference approved the document “Don’t Mess With Marriage”. This pastoral message from the Catholic Bishops of Australia to all Australians, on the topic ‘Same-sex Marriage’, will be distributed to all parishes and schools over the coming weeks.

What is Marriage? E-Brochure

The previously agreed and planned rollout of this resource has been issued to Catholic schools, using a web-based ‘flip book’ format. Catholic Education offices and Life and Family Offices were also advised of the distribution. It is also available on the ACBC website on the [BCPL page](#).

Additionally, the Walking with Love Priests Resource document will be distributed to all priests, both Diocesan and Religious, as well as seminarians and pastoral associates.

Australian Catholic Youth Council

Two key areas to be addressed at the next Australian Catholic Youth Council meeting are the challenges of youth ministry in rural dioceses and the nature of ecclesial movements in the context of the Parish.

Synod on the Family 2015

The Conference's submission on the Synod was reviewed by the Permanent Committee and was sent to the Vatican in time for the due date of 15 April 2015.

Bishops Commission for Relations with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders

In 2015, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday will be the first Sunday in July, which will be the fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. A statement will be distributed to all dioceses and parishes to mark the day.

The Statement will have a social justice theme built around:

- Government policy of 'normalisation'
- Cut-backs in services to remote communities
- Delivery of health services
- Unemployment

NATSICC National Assembly 2015

The NATSICC will hold its Assembly at Kormilda College in Darwin from 2 to 6 July 2015. The theme of the Assembly is, '*The heart of Jesus beats within us all: New signs, new symbols for spiritual healing*'.

Secretariat

The Commission recorded its appreciation and gratitude for the service Mr Bruce Ryan gave to the Commission as Executive Secretary over the interim period between appointments. The Commission welcomed Mrs Patricia Mowbray OAM as its new Executive Secretary.