



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Communications Office

Plenary Meeting 23 – 27 November 2015

Welcome and opening Mass

Archbishop Hart, President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, welcomed the Australian bishops, observers and staff to the Plenary Meeting at Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney from 23 27 November 2015. The Mass of the Holy Spirit was concelebrated on 24 November in the chapel of Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney at 7am. The President of Conference, Archbishop Denis Hart, was the principal celebrant and preached the homily.

Observers

Sr Berniece Loch RSM, Sr Ruth Durick OSU, and Fr Tom McDonagh CP attended the Plenary Meeting as observers representing the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (Catholic Religious Australia).

Visit from the Apostolic Nuncio to Australia

Archbishop Hart welcomed Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana, Apostolic Nuncio to Australia, to the Plenary Meeting. Archbishop Yllana addressed the bishops and concelebrated the opening Mass.

Message to Holy Father

A letter was sent to Pope Francis from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

Catholic Church Insurance (CCI)

The bishops welcomed incoming Chief Executive of CCI, Roberto Scenna, to the meeting and farewelled outgoing Chief Executive, Peter Rush,

Review

In accordance with the Conference by-laws the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference will conduct a ten-year review of organisation and structure of the Conference and its Commissions, Councils and Agencies during the first quarter of 2016. The Bishops Commission for Administration and Information appointed Bishop Brian Finnigan, Bishop Michael McKenna and Bishop Gerard Holohan to a working group to draft the terms of reference for the review and appoint the reviewer. Following the review, an interim report will be presented in May 2016 and a final report will be presented during the Plenary Meeting in November 2016.

Pastoral Research Office

Bob Dixon delivered a presentation to the bishops about upcoming projects for the Pastoral Research Office including; the National Church Life Survey to be conducted in parishes in 2016, the Mass count and the Australian Bureau of Statistics census in 2016.

Presentations

On 25 November, Honduran Cardinal Óscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga delivered an address to the Plenary Meeting covering a range of topics including; the Pope's encyclical, Laudato Si, the recent Synod on the family, reforms in the Vatican, the Council of Cardinals (G9) and Blessed Oscar Romero of El Salvador. Cardinal Maradiaga also conducted an interview with Andrew West on the ABC Radio National, Religion and Ethics Report. [The interview is published online.](#)

On 26 November, Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, delivered a presentation to the Plenary Meeting. Cardinal Aviz spoke about various aspects of religious life including the review of religious sisters in the USA.

Middle East

Archbishop Amel Shamoun Nona, Chaldean Eparchy of Oceania, delivered a presentation about the situation of Christians in the Middle East. This was followed by a brief outline of the issues affecting Christians in Lebanon from Bishop Robert Rabbat, Melkite Eparchy of St Michael's of Sydney.

Royal Commission

The Leaders of Religious Institutes, the bishops and members of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council gathered for a detailed briefing on matters regarding the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Marriage Nullity

Bishop Robert McGuckin, Chair of the Bishops Commission for Canon Law, delivered a presentation on the new procedures for dealing with Nullity of Marriage cases.

Permanent Committee

General Secretary

Following the appointment of Fr Brian Lucas as National Director of Catholic Mission, the bishops appointed Fr Stephen Hackett MSC as General Secretary. Fr Hackett will commence his new role in January 2016.

Bishops Commission for Administration and Information

Church Resources

A video conferencing network has commenced within the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. There are five projects currently being trialled. The Board of

Management of Church Resources will enable all Conference members to use video conferencing upon completion of the project.

Mass on Demand

Mass on Demand has 511 subscribers and growing at a rate of 10 per cent per quarter. In July and August 2015, there were 7,073 views on the CathNews YouTube channel, which hosts Mass on Demand.

Employment Relations

Brian Lawrence, Chairman of the Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations, has published a paper on [The Economics of Laudato Si': no surprises here](#).

The Council is working with the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council on further work on Laudato Si based on a defence of the economics in the encyclical particularly with Catholic Social Teaching and the role of governments. The Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations has prepared a briefing paper about Family Tax Benefit, Part B. The Council has referred to the economic pressure on families arising from inadequate wages and family support payments. The issue is being pursued in collaboration with the Conference Public Policy Office and Catholic Social Services Australia.

Official Directory

The Commission informed the Conference that it has approved that the National Council of Priests will publish the Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia up to the year of publication 1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020.

Bishops Commission for Canon Law

Eastern Catholic Churches

The Conference approved the publication of a booklet about Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia. In consultation with the Eastern Eparchies, the booklet was prepared by Bishop McGuckin and Rev Ian Waters to assist the Latin Catholic Clergy in their parish pastoral ministry. Once published, the booklet will be distributed to every diocese.

Bishops Commission for Catholic Education

Faith Formation and Religious Education

The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) Faith Formation and Religious Education Standing Committee, chaired by NCEC Commissioner Sr Elizabeth Dodds rsc, has consulted extensively on a work plan covering initiatives in both faith formation and religious education. The draft work plan will be considered for endorsement by the November meeting of the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education.

Government Policy

The budget assumptions of the Australian Government beyond 2017 are to index school funding per student at CPI. This represents a significant change to current

funding arrangements. In the last ten years, CPI has been around half the rate used to index school funding.

Pastoral Responses in Catholic Schools

The Commission reported that recent public attention in relation to 'same-sex marriage', children with same-sex parents, transgender students, same-sex attracted young people and related issues have generated significant discussion about religious freedom in Australian society. This has obvious implications for ministries of the Church but particularly Catholic schools. Catholic schools continue to provide a pastoral encounter with the realities facing families, young people and the wider school community on these and other contemporary experiences.

Students with disability

The Commission reported to the bishops that the Education and Employment References Committee of the Senate is currently undertaking an inquiry into the 'Current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system, and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support'.

The National Catholic Education Committee made a submission to the inquiry and appeared before the committee on 18 September 2015. The issue of appropriate support for students with disability in Catholic schools is a very important one. Between 1985 and 2013 the number of students with disability has grown from 1,391 to 32,307.

Bishops Commission for Church Ministry

Permanent Diaconate

The Conference approved redrafted Norms and Guidelines of the Permanent Diaconate for use in the dioceses of Australia. Fr Michael McEntee, Archdiocese of Melbourne, redrafted the document following a request from the Conference.

Commission of Women

Jane Munro, National International Secretary, Catholic Women's League Australia, attended the 59th session of the Commission of Women held at the United Nations in March 2015. The Conference reviewed and acknowledged Jane's report outlining the themes and trends she observed.

Council for Clergy Life and Ministry

The Conference approved the publication of a booklet for all clergy in Australia encouraging their personal accountability in the four areas of *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (Human, Spiritual, Intellectual and Pastoral). The booklets will be distributed through the network of Diocesan Directors of Clergy Life and Ministry.

Office of Clergy Life and Ministry

In January 2016, Fr Brian Moloney completes his term as Executive Secretary to the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry. Fr Greg Bourke, Archdiocese of Melbourne, has been appointed to this role.

Council for Lay Pastoral Ministry

The Council's report, *Exploring Lay Pastoral Ministry in the Catholic Church*, is currently being finalised. The main focus of the Council during 2016 will be on the drafting of National Guidelines for Lay Pastoral Ministry.

As part of a Communication Strategy, a [new website](#) and a bi-monthly newsletter [Lay Pastoral Ministry News](#) were recently launched. The newsletter is striving to be a vehicle to promote and support the work of lay pastoral ministers across Australia and as a source of feedback while the National Guidelines are being drafted.

Office for the Participation of Women

The Conference was informed that the Office for the Participation of Women was invited to attend a round table in August where the Minister for Social Services, Scott Morrison MP, announced \$160,000 budget for a diversity data project that will target Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women, women with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Council for Australian Catholic Women

The Conference heard that the Council received an invitation from Human Rights Commissioner Tim Wilson calling for submissions to a Religious Freedom Roundtable held in November 2015. The Council produced a short submission and were asked by the Australian Human Rights Commission to attend the Roundtable. Donella Johnston, Director, Office for the Participation of Women, attended.

The Council for Australian Catholic Women will host its second colloquium next year at Mary MacKillop Place in North Sydney with the purpose of investigating Pope Francis' observation that "We need to work harder to develop a profound theology of woman" (30 September 2013).

The colloquium theme, *Women as Witnesses to the Joy of the Gospel* will set the scene for deep listening and respectful dialogue in safe spaces on how to "create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church" (Joy of the Gospel 103).

Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations

National Gathering

The Conference was informed that planning is in train for a National Gathering of Diocesan Ecumenical and Interfaith Commissions/Offices, to be held in Melbourne, 28-30 October 2016.

Jewish Leaders

The annual meeting of Jewish Leaders with the Commission members took place on 25 November 2015 at Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney. The major topic of discussion was religious intolerance.

Bishops Commission for Health and Community Services

Leadership Forum

The Commission reported that Catholic Social Services Australia held its annual leadership Forum in Canberra 19-21 October 2015. The program addressed two areas of particular concern for Catholic Social Services Australia member organisations: the challenge of ensuring that agency's governance arrangements ensure mission responsiveness and ready capability to partner with other Catholic agencies, and the challenge to agencies in responding to the shift to a fee-for-service model in terms of mission and business models.

Entrenched Disadvantage

The Conference was informed that the '[Dropping Off The Edge 2015](#)' report into entrenched disadvantage was commissioned jointly by Catholic Social Services Australia and Jesuit Social Services and was launched at the end of July. The authors of the report were Professor Tony Vinson and Associate Professor Margot Rawsthorne, University of Sydney.

The report has met with significant interest across the country from Church, community and business leaders and State, Territory and Federal Government members. Marcelle Mogg, Chief Executive, Catholic Social Services Australia, and Prof Vinson, Co-author of the report, are available to meet with individual bishops and dioceses to provide a more detailed brief as to the findings of this research as they apply to local areas.

Catholic Mission and Identity

The Conference was informed that Catholic Social Services Australia is partnering with Catholic Social Services Victoria to sponsor a Conference from 25-26 February 2016. The theme is '*Review, Reimagine, Renew: Mission that makes a difference in a changing world*'. The conference will mark the 50th anniversary of *Gaudium et Spes* and will use this document as a starting point to reflect on the current challenges the social services sector faces in living its mission.

Humanitarian Crisis

The Conference noted that Marcelle Mogg, Chief Executive, Catholic Social Services Australia, provided a briefing to the Commission on the Australian Government's decision on 9 September 2015 to resettle an additional 12,000 refugees who are fleeing the conflict in Syria and Iraq.

Bishops Commission for Liturgy

National Liturgical Music Board

The Conference was informed that Morning Star Publishing in Melbourne is in the final stages of preparing proofs of the *Catholic Worship Book II* in

collaboration with members of the National Liturgical Music Board. It is anticipated the long awaited liturgical song collection will be published in early 2016 in a hard copy melody and accompaniment edition. The publisher has also sent promotional flyers to parishes around Australia, inviting pre-orders.

Bishops Commission for Evangelisation

Parish Project

The Bishops Commission for Evangelisation is preparing to host a roundtable to develop strategies for parish renewal. The project will be a task of the National Office for Evangelisation. Following the roundtable a project reference group will be established to oversee the project.

Year of Mercy

The [National Office for Evangelisation](#) will host an online central repository of information and resources in terms of diocesan initiatives during the Jubilee of Mercy, which commences on 8 December 2015 until 20 November 2016.

Mission Formation of Catholic Leaders

The Conference was informed about the release of a new book by Catholic Mission entitled, '[The Francis Effect II: Praised be You: On Care for our Common Home](#)'. The book is a response to the Encyclical, 'Laudato Si' and is an attempt to ensure that Catholic leaders are up to date in the understanding of new Catholic teachings.

Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life

People with Disability

The Conference approved a working document, 'Welcoming People with Disability: Guidelines for Conferences and Events', for all Catholic events and conferences. The Conference also approved the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', an easy read version of the document. The [Australian Catholic Disability Council](#) will officially launch the document for International Day of People with Disability on 3 December 2015.

Migrants and Refugees

The Conference heard from the Commission that the Eastern Bishops have founded an association called ECWA: Eastern Church Welfare Association. The aims and practical outreaching of ECWA is very similar to Catholic Social Services Australia. This entity may assist in facilitating further collaboration between dioceses and eparchies, particularly in relation to the intake of 12,000 Syrian refugees.

Resettling Refugees

Catholic Social Services Australia and the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) have identified a range of ways to harness the goodwill and generosity of Catholics who wish to welcome refugees into the community. In the first instance, all dioceses have been urged to liaise with their local ACMRO

Chaplains and Catholic social services agency to identify the support that is likely to be required at the local level.

Bishops Commission for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders

Acknowledgement of Country

The Conference approved a motion from the Commission that the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference adopt the practice of using Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners by the organisation and its agencies where appropriate.

Bishops Commission for Family, Youth and Life

National Safe Schools Coalition

The Conference approved a call from the Commission for a co-ordinated national position across all Catholic dioceses to provide a national alternative response for Catholic schools to the National Safe Schools Coalition.

Sexuality, Gender and Family Formation

The Conference approved a proposal that the Commission will establish a working party with assistance from the Bishops Commission for Catholic Education to address the areas of sexual identity and family formation within Catholic schools.

General Business

The President thanked the observers from Catholic Religious Australia for their presence and participation. Archbishop Hart also thanked the staff at the Secretariat for their ongoing support. Archbishop Coleridge acknowledged the Chairmanship of Archbishop Hart.

Concluding the Plenary Meeting, the President also thanked Fr Brian Lucas for his wisdom, generosity and service throughout the Plenary Meeting and to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference over the past thirteen years as this is his final Plenary Meeting.