



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

PLenary MEETING

21-25 November 2016

On Monday 21 November, the Catholic bishops of Australia gathered for their biannual Plenary Meeting at Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney. The thirteen Commissions of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference held meetings on the first day of the gathering followed by the Plenary Meeting for four days.

Opening Mass

The Mass of the Holy Spirit was concelebrated on Tuesday 22 November in the Mary MacKillop Memorial Chapel, North Sydney at 7 am. The President of Conference, Archbishop Denis Hart, was the principal celebrant and preached the homily.

Welcome

The President of Conference, Archbishop Denis Hart, opened the Plenary Meeting welcoming the bishops and the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana. The Nuncio addressed the bishops and responded to questions. The President also welcomed the observers from Catholic Religious Australia: Sr Ruth Durick OSU, Sr Monica Cavanagh RSJ and Fr Tom McDonough CP.

Episcopal Appointments since the last Plenary

Bishop Anthony Randazzo, Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney, 24 August 2016

Bishop Richard Umbers, Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney, 24 August 2016

Resignation of Bishops since the last Plenary

Bishop Gerard Hanna, Bishop of Wagga Wagga, 12 September 2016

Message to the Holy Father

A letter was sent to Pope Francis from the Catholic Bishops of Australia, informing the Holy Father about events in the Church including, the implementation of Amoris Laetitia across the dioceses, the establishment of Catholic Professional Standards and the 30th anniversary commemorations of Pope St John Paul II's address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Alice Springs on 29 November 1986.

Elections

Bishop Peter Ingham withdrew from the Bishops Commission for Liturgy. Bishop Anthony Randazzo was appointed to the Bishops Commissions for Canon Law and Church Ministry. Bishop Richard Umbers was appointed to the Bishops Commission for Liturgy.

Review of Conference

A report on the statutory Review of Conference by Mr Steve Sedgwick AO was provided to the bishops in early November. During the Plenary Meeting, Mr Sedgwick facilitated a session with the bishops to consider the report and proposed recommendations. A series of working groups were established to implement the approved review recommendations, which seek to enhance the practical functioning of conference and communication between its various agencies.

Plenary Council 2020

While awaiting approval from the Holy Father, the bishops began work to prepare governance, advisory and support structures for the Council.

Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable People

Ms Kathleen McCormack, a Member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, delivered an address to the Plenary Meeting providing an overview of the work of the Commission.

Mr Sean Tynan, Manager of Zimmerman Services, and Ms Maureen O'Hearn, Coordinator Healing and Support at Zimmerman Services addressed the bishops. Zimmerman Services is the specialist services offered across the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle for survivors of abuse. The services offered to victims include counselling, support during criminal trials, accompaniment through the healing process and specialised support groups.

Truth, Justice and Healing Council

The bishops received a briefing from the Hon Neville Owen and Mr Francis Sullivan about the Catholic Church Final Hearing of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, scheduled to take place for three weeks from 6 February 2017. Mr Sullivan acknowledged the establishment of Catholic Professional Standards Limited to set and audit professional standards nationally. The new company was officially unveiled during the Plenary Meeting on Tuesday, 22 November 2016.

Pope Francis' Worldwide Prayer Network

Fr Frédéric Fornos SJ, International Director of the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, Apostleship of Prayer and Eucharistic Youth Movement, outlined the vision of the Holy Father Pope Francis for renewing the Worldwide Prayer Network and Eucharistic Youth Movement. He explained that in addition to the Holy Father's monthly prayer intentions, the Prayer Network fosters a spirituality that springs from devotion to the Sacred Heart. He appealed to the bishops to support the Prayer Network and Youth Movement

Refugees

Bishop Vincent Long initiated a pastoral discussion about the plight and treatment of refugees in Australian detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru. The discussion that followed among the bishops included mention of the recent arrival in Australia of Syrian refugee families, shifting political and cultural attitudes towards refugees, and the current reshaping of community attitudes towards refugees. The bishops noted that the Church needs to be concerned, not only for refugees but also about the influence of migration in shaping social attitudes.

Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania

Bishop McGuckin presented a tentative program for the next plenary assembly of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania (FCBCO). The plenary assembly will be held in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, from Wednesday 11 - 17 April 2018.

Bishops Commission for Catholic Education

Formation

The Conference endorsed a document produced by the Faith Formation and Religious Education Standing Committee of the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) called, 'A Framework for Formation for Mission in Catholic Education'. It is intended as a resource for school principals, leadership teams, and governance bodies.

Gender Identity

Bishops have been responding to this area of pastoral concern for some time. The Bishops Commission for Catholic Education and the Bishops Commission for Family, Youth and Life have been preparing guidelines for Church responses to new questions about gender identity.

Bishops Commission for Church Ministry

National Vocations Directors Initiative

The Conference heard that Diocesan Vocation Directors met from 7 – 9 November 2016 in Sydney, with a view to formalising greater collaboration, mutual support, and sharing of vocations ministry resources. They hope to establish a National Diocesan Vocation Directors Conference in Australia, so as to more comprehensively present the vocation of the ministerial priesthood in Catholic communities, particularly to young adult Catholic men.

Spiritual Accompaniment

A Spiritual Accompaniment course will be offered by Bishop Emeritus David Walker as an online course through the Broken Bay Institute. It is designed to up-skill priests in their ministry as listeners and discerners of people's hearts in their daily lives. The course will teach priests the art of spiritual accompaniment. It will be promoted through the Office for Clergy, Life and Ministry.

Bishops Commission for Doctrine and Morals

Celebrating the Sacramental Life from Birth to Death

The Conference was advised that the Commission has reviewed and endorsed the document, *Celebrating the Sacramental Life from Birth to Death*, from the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life.

Bishops Commission for Health and Community Services

The Commission informed the Conference about the Ministry Leadership Program, an initiative between Catholic Social Services Australia and Catholic Health Australia to introduce a program in Catholic formation for senior leaders in Australia. The program was developed by the Ministry Leadership Centre in the United States.

Catholic Social Services Australia

The Conference was informed that Catholic Social Services Australia is currently involved in the development of Catholic Social Teaching Resources, developing a series of five workshops on Catholic Social Teaching for frontline staff and managers.

Catholic Health Australia

The Conference heard that Catholic Health Australia's Pathways Taskforce has drafted a resource booklet titled Evaluate the Impact of Formation. This resource is a companion to two previous Catholic Health Australia publications, 'Formation for Mission' and 'Strengthening Catholic Identity'.

Bishops Commission for Justice, Ecology and Development

The Conference agreed to establish a Working Group to draft a recommendation on ethical investment by the Conference in light of *Laudato Si'*.

Bishops Commission for Liturgy

A Ritual for Lay Persons

The Conference recommended that the publication, 'A Ritual for Lay Persons' (Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1993, 2013) be used by members of the lay faithful who minister communion to the sick and dying. This resource has already been approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops – Committee on Divine Worship for the Catholic Church in the USA.

Bishops Commission for Evangelisation

The Chairman noted that the 'Parish Revitalisation Project' will be subsumed into the Plenary Council 2020 initiative.

Proclaim

The Conference approved that future Proclaim conferences be hosted by a diocese but remain the work of the National Centre for Evangelisation.

Mission Conference

The bishops were encouraged to attend the event, "*Mission: One Heart Many Voices*". The Conference will be hosted by Catholic Mission in Sydney from 15-17 May 2017. The bishops were also asked to support some of their senior people in attending, as it will be a good opportunity to enhance formation in mission.

Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life

The Conference received a report and recommendations following a review of the Apostleship of the Sea, Australia undertaken in September 2016. The Conference noted the recommendations.

Disability

The Conference agreed to adopt and implement a document developed by the Australian Catholic Disability Council, 'Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with People with Disability'.

Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

The Commission Chairman, Bishop Hurley, asked that there be an Acknowledgment of Traditional Owners at the beginning of Plenary Meetings. He also noted the willingness of the Commission to assist the dioceses in formulating diocesan Reconciliation Plans.

Anniversary of Pope St John Paul II's Visit to Australia

The Commission has been promoting the commemoration of the 30th Anniversary of the meeting of Pope St John Paul with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Alice Springs on 29 November 1986. On that occasion, St John Paul II gave a historic address that continues to resonate in the lives of Indigenous Catholics.

The Holy Father Pope Francis sent a message to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to mark the 30th Anniversary of his sainted predecessor's meeting with them.

Bishops Commission for Family, Youth and Life

Year of Youth 2018

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
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Inspired by the words of the Holy Father Pope Francis during the World Youth Day 2016 Vigil celebration in Krakow and in light of the focus for the XV General Assembly of the Ordinary Synod of Bishops in October 2018, the Conference approved the theme, "*Open new horizons for spreading joy: Young people, faith and vocational discernment*", for the 2018 Year of Youth in Australia.

The Conference agreed to issue a pastoral announcement inviting the Catholic community in Australia to participate in the Year of Youth. The President of Conference will issue the invitation on Wednesday, 7 December 2016.

Review of World Youth Day

The bishops reviewed World Youth Day 2016 in Krakow. They remarked upon the spiritual richness of their own experiences during the pilgrimage to and celebration of World Youth Day, as well as that of the young pilgrims they accompanied. For some pilgrims, the smaller Days in the Diocese program had the deeper personal impact; for others, the gathering in Krakow of Catholics from around the world was encouraging and inspiring.

Gratitude

The Conference acknowledged with gratitude the significant contributions of: Dr Robert Dixon as inaugural Director of the Pastoral Research Office, Mr Ross Fox as Executive Director of the National Catholic Education Commission, Ms Donella Johnston as Director of the Office for the Participation of Women and Ms Marcelle Mogg as Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Social Services Australia. All have left or will soon leave their positions in service of the Conference.

The President thanked the observers from Catholic Religious Australia for their presence and participation.

Future Plenary Meeting Dates

4 May - 11 May 2017

27 November – 1 December 2017

The Plenary meeting concluded with a Mass for the deceased bishops of Australia.

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