



## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

### **News from the May 2008 Plenary meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference**

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference held its Plenary Meeting at Mary Mackillop Place, North Sydney from May 2 to May 8, 2008.

During the meeting, elections were held for the positions of ACBC President and Vice-President.

Archbishop Philip Wilson was re-elected as President and Archbishop Barry Hickey was re-elected Vice-President. The two year term will be the second term for both prelates.

Archbishop Wilson thanked the Bishops for the confidence they had shown in him.

“I am honoured and humbled to have been re-elected as President of the ACBC and am very much looking forward to continuing to serve the Church in Australia in this capacity,” he said.

Also at the meeting, elections were held for two vacant positions on the Permanent Committee. The vacancies were brought about by the expiration of the terms of Cardinal George Pell and Archbishop Denis Hart. Both Cardinal Pell and Archbishop Hart were re-elected to the positions.

Bishop Gregory O’Kelly sj was elected to the Bishops Commission for Education following the resignation from that commission of Bishop Christopher Toohey. Bishop O’Kelly had previously been seconded to the Education Commission following his Episcopal ordination.

The Bishops noted with sadness the death of Archbishop Frank Little since their last meeting. They also noted the retirement of Bishop Jeremiah Coffey and they welcomed to the meeting, Fr Peter Slater, the Diocesan Administrator of Sale Diocese.

The Catholic Religious Australia observers at the meeting were Fr Mark Raper sj, Fr Tim Brennan msc, and Sr Mary Franzmann pbvm.

## **Bishops endorse WYD preparations**

The Bishops received an extended final briefing from the World Youth Day organisers during their Plenary Meeting and gave a resounding endorsement to the plans and preparations for the forthcoming celebrations.

ACBC President, Archbishop Philip Wilson said the Bishops were delighted by the engagement of the Church throughout Australia, especially young people, as well as the wider community, in the pastoral preparations for World Youth Day.

"The Journey of the World Youth Day Cross, Icon and Indigenous Message Stick have drawn extraordinary crowds and been a very moving experience for those who have attended them," he said.

"The progress of the World Youth Day Cross around our country has been a premonition of the extraordinary grace that is to come this July when the youth of the world and the Holy Father, gather with the Australian Church and community for the celebrations in Sydney.

"The briefings we received this week confirmed our confidence that the work of the World Youth Day team - in collaboration with all levels of Church, government and business - will yield much fruit in the lives of the young pilgrims and in the renewal of our Church and community."

"The Bishops of Australia look forward to welcoming the Holy Father and the young people of the world in July. We call on all Australian youth to register now as pilgrims so they can take part in this wonderful celebration. We also invite people to share in the joy of this occasion by becoming World Youth Day volunteers, offering hospitality through the HomeStay programme, and attending the public events such as the Final Mass."

## **Pastoral Discussions**

The former ACBC President, Archbishop Francis Carroll made a return to the speaker's podium at the Plenary Meeting when he was invited to address the Bishops on his visit to the Holy Land last year.

Archbishop Carroll, who now lives in retirement, visited the Holy Land as the ACBC representative for a National Council of Churches Australia (NCCA) delegation of church leaders.

He said the trip, which was primarily aimed at showing solidarity with the Christians of the Holy Land, involved an intensive program that was often deeply moving and distressing.

“Some of the situations experienced and the stories heard will long remain in my memory,” Archbishop Carroll said.

“Over 30 years ago I visited the Holy Land and remember the visit as a deeply spiritual event that had the historical Jesus as its centre. This time was also a faith experience but more a meeting with the suffering Body of Christ in the people and groups that we met.”

Archbishop Carroll said the role of Christian leaders in bringing Jewish and Muslim leaders in the Holy Land together in dialogue was crucial.

“This is seen as a hopeful sign especially if it can bring some influence to bear on the efforts to resolve tensions and further the cause of peace,” he said.

All Christian leaders were deeply concerned about the large scale emigration of Christians from Jerusalem and other parts of the Holy Land and they called on Christians from around the world to continue showing solidarity through prayer and by making pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

Following his presentation, Archbishop Carroll took questions from the Bishops and they engaged in a pastoral discussion.

The Bishops also received a presentation from Professor John Warhurst, of the Australian National University, on the issue of public advocacy. Professor Warhurst presented some key principles to assist the Church in engaging at various levels in public policy debates. This was also followed by questions and a pastoral discussion among the Bishops.

Bishop Christopher Toohey, accompanied by Fr Joe Caddy and Mr Frank Quinlan, led a pastoral discussion on Catholic Social Services aimed at ensuring that the Church continues to have the best structures in place to deliver social services to people in need.

And Archbishop Jibrail Kassab, the Chaldean Bishop, addressed the bishops on the plight of Catholics in Iraq.

### **New pastoral strategy approved to reach out to non-practicing Catholics**

The ACBC approved a major new pastoral strategy to reach out to Catholics who no longer practice their faith and to those Catholics who never really connected with the Church.

The strategy will include a pastoral letter to parishes, urging them to become places of welcome, as well as a six-week program entitled ‘Reconnect’ to help equip parishes and individuals to reach out and invite people back to the practice of their faith.

There is also a similar program aimed at young people who may be seeking to connect with parish life in the wake of World Youth Day.

A national advertising campaign from the Bishops, inviting Catholics to reconnect with the Church community will also form an important part of the strategy

### **Welcoming, Enabling, and Integrating Overseas Priests**

A new resource will be available for dioceses to provide a framework for the reception of overseas priests into the local community.

Entitled, “Welcoming, Enabling, and Integrating Overseas Priests”, the document was received by the Bishops to be used as a template for each Province to implement.

It begins with a statement acknowledging the “giftedness that overseas priests are able to bring to the Church in Australia”.

The document provides a template under which priests arriving from overseas would undergo an initial six month period of welcome and transition, during which the priest experiences the Australian culture, church life, the diocese and its structures and receives mentoring. After this period, provinces would conduct a four to five day live-in Conference once or twice a year to assist more formally those overseas priests who have been in Australia for at least six months.

Under the template, “each diocese accepts responsibility for a dignified process of welcome, acceptance, and orientation of priests from overseas, who have much to offer the Australian Church”.

Dioceses within each Province would share resources in the preparation of a welcoming, enabling and integrating program of mutual benefit to all.

### **Bishops to examine affluence and poverty in 2008 Social Justice Sunday Statement**

The Bishops approved the Social Justice Sunday Statement for 2008, on the theme: “A Rich Young Nation: The challenge of affluence and poverty in Australia”.

In their the statement, the Bishops reflect on the fact that Australia is a rich country in so many ways, but there are many who live in spiritual poverty and many who have been bypassed by the economic growth and prosperity and who live in material poverty.

“The challenge that Jesus presented to the rich young man (Mark 10:17-22) is the same we face in Australia today: will we use our great wealth for the benefit of all and particularly for those who have been denied the benefits of prosperity?”, the statement asks.

### **Work towards new Missal proceeds**

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference voted to approve the completed drafts the texts for the Roman Missal entitled: *Masses and Prayers for Various Needs and Intentions* (January 2008) *Ritual Masses* (January 2008) and *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children* (January 2008.)

This follows the approval at the November 2007 Plenary Meeting of the completed draft of the new translation of the Roman Missal.

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

The Missal Implementation Team for Australia continues its work on making preparations for the new translation of the Missal.

A comprehensive multi-media resource is in the early stages of preparation. It is hoped that there will be an international resource able to be adapted for the needs of Australia.

### **Working party to look at Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest**

An ACBC working party has been established to engage with issues that are emerging from the practice of Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest.

The working party will engage in wide consultation on the issue, with particular reference to those communities where the practice exists.

The working party of Bishops will have a membership drawn from the Bishops Commissions for Liturgy, Pastoral Life, Church Ministry and Doctrine and Morals. The working party will be implemented by the Permanent Committee.

### **Bishops to enlist new Youth Ministry project officer for Post WYD2008**

The Bishops approved funding for a Youth Leaders Gathering in November 2008 for current and emerging youth leaders to help charter the way forward for the pastoral care of young people in Australia after WYD2008.

The Bishops also approved the appointment of a Youth Ministry Co-ordinator Project Officer whose focus will be on helping Youth Ministers and others to tap into the enthusiasm engendered by World Youth Day.

The appointment will be for a three year term from 2009 to 2011 and the successful applicant will work with the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life.

### **ACBC to sponsor delegates to World Meeting of Families in Mexico City**

The ACBC will sponsor a married couple to attend the World Meeting of Families in Mexico City in January 2009.

The Bishops approved the funding for one couple to attend the Meeting or for two couples to attend, with the cost being shared by the originating Diocese.

The Conference also resolved that Dioceses should select married couples from their diocesan and parish family pastoral activities to join a pilgrimage of Australian Catholic families to the 2009 World Meeting.

### **Appointments/elections**

Mrs Therese Temby was appointed to the position of Chair of the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC). See media release at:

<http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/bishops/confpres/200805091837.htm>.

Bishop Peter Ingham and Bishop Peter Connors were nominated and accepted positions on the Management Board of the Trust established by the Archdiocese of Sydney to assist poorer dioceses.

The Commission for Justice and Service advised the bishops of the appointment of the new Director of Catholic Earthcare Australia, Mrs Jacqui Remond.

The ACBC General-Secretary, Fr Brian Lucas, was appointed as a media spokesman for certain matters, working with the Conference Communications Officer, Debra Vermeer.

Mrs Kerry Bourke was accepted as the OMR&RCA Limited Nominee on the Board of the Natural Family Planning Program from 1 July 2008 following the retirement of Mr Patrick Kennealy.