



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

PLENARY MEETING

November 26-30, 2018

On Monday, November 26, the Catholic bishops of Australia gathered for the biannual plenary meeting at Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney. The eight commissions of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference held meetings on the first day of the gathering, followed by the Plenary Meeting over the four subsequent days.

Opening Mass

The Mass of the Holy Spirit was concelebrated on Tuesday, November 27 in the Mary MacKillop Memorial Chapel. Conference president Archbishop Mark Coleridge was the principal celebrant and [preached the homily](#).

Welcome

Archbishop Coleridge welcomed his fellow bishops and the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana. Archbishop Yllana concelebrated Mass, met bishops informally and addressed the Plenary Meeting.

Archbishop Coleridge also welcomed the Secretary to the Apostolic Nunciature, Monsignor Sebastiano Sanna, as well as the observers from Catholic Religious Australia: Sr Monica Cavanagh RSJ and Fr Tom McDonough CP.

Episcopal Appointments since the last Plenary Meeting

Appointment of Bishops

Bishop Charles Gauci of Darwin, appointed June 27, 2018; ordained September 26, 2018.

Resignation of Bishops

Bishop Eugene Hurley of Darwin, resignation June 27, 2018.

Archbishop Denis Hart of Melbourne, resignation June 29, 2018.

Archbishop Philip Wilson of Adelaide, resignation July 30, 2018.

Bishop Peter Elliott, Auxiliary of Melbourne, resignation November 3, 2018.

Message from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to the Holy Father

As is customary, the Bishops sent a message to the Holy Father. The message outlined significant progress for the Plenary Council 2020, with thousands of people having participated in the process that is considering the question “What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?” It also touched upon the conclusion of the Year of Youth in Australia – a period when the voice of young Catholic was heard locally and internationally, especially at the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment.

The message discussed the Catholic Church’s response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, including imminent entry into the National Redress Scheme to support survivors and the ongoing work responding to other recommendations from the Royal Commission.

The message also provided updates on the completion of the decennial review of the Conference, which has led to the establishment of a number of new Bishops Commissions and Episcopal Panels, which began their work at the November Plenary.

Membership and elections

Following the resignation of several bishops and the appointment of Bishop Gauci, Conference approved the appointment of Bishop Saunders to the Episcopal Panel for Canon Law and Bishop Gauci to the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Following the resignation of Bishop Hurley in June, the bishops elected Bishop O’Kelly to complete Bishop Hurley’s term on the Permanent Committee, which concludes in May 2019.

Report on the Synod of Bishops on Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment

The four Australian representatives – Archbishop Fisher, Archbishop Comensoli, Bishop Edwards and Mr Sebastian Duhau (Auditor) – addressed the bishops about their participation in and reflections on the recent XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, held in Rome in October.

Bishop Edwards provided an overview of the synod process, including the composition of the assembly, which was constituted by bishops, young adult auditors, experts, and members of religious institutes; the weekly structure of plenary sessions, small group discussion, writing of proposals, interventions and small group reporting to the assembly; and the preparation of the final document issued by the Synod.

Archbishop Fisher spoke of the diversity of the Church that was represented in the Synod assembly; the quality of dialogue and important place of prayer in the course of the interventions; the genuine pastoral solicitude of the bishops for young people; and of the experience of the synodal functioning of the Church.

Mr Duhau expressed his gratitude for having participated in the Synod as an auditor. He reflected upon the experience of being listened to and heard, and valued for his contribution to the Synod process. He spoke of the honesty and openness he encountered, even where significant differences existed, and of his appreciation for the spirit of community, collegiality and camaraderie that characterised the assembly.

Archbishop Comensoli remarked how the Synod might contribute to the forthcoming Plenary Council for the Church in Australia. He reflected upon different understandings of synodality, in particular the difference between synodality as expressed in participative processes and synodality as expressed in approaches to governance.

Conclusion of the Year of Youth

On November 29, a representative group of Catholic young adults participated in a workshop to mark the conclusion of the Year of Youth. They joined the bishops for Mass and dinner, where the President welcomed the group. He congratulated the Director of the Office for Youth Mr Malcolm Hart on his appointment as a Consultor of the Dicastery of Laity, Family and Life (announced October 6, 2018).

Ms Adeline Bock from the Archdiocese of Perth addressed the bishops on behalf of the group. She highlighted the blessings of the Year of Youth and thanked those who had prepared and coordinated its events and initiatives. She invited all present to the next Australian Catholic Youth Festival, which is to be held in Perth in December 2019.

Child protection, safeguarding and professional standards

As has been the case at recent meetings, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference dedicated significant time to the issues of child protection, safeguarding and the Church's ongoing response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse during the plenary meeting.

- **Annual report to the National Office for Child Safety:** The bishops reviewed the draft report to the National Office for Child Safety, which the Church has agreed to submit in line with Recommendation 17.3 of the Royal Commission. The joint report, from the Conference and Catholic Religious Australia, will be published around December 14.
- **Implementation Advisory Group:** IAG chairman Mr Jack de Groot explained that the IAG, established to monitor the Church's response to the Royal Commission, has commenced work preparing for the recommended review of diocesan and parish governance, as well as on the formation of clergy, both initial and ongoing. He stated that promoting and supporting healing for victims and survivors is an important 'lens' for the operation of the Group.
- **Catholic Professional Standards Ltd:** The bishops acknowledged the significant work done to refine the draft National Catholic Safeguarding Standards. Chair Justice Geoffrey Giudice and CEO Ms Sheree Limbrick explained that CPSL would work to foster child-safe cultures within the Church in all of its communities and apostolic works. It will strive to avoid duplicating auditing processes that are already in place for some entities.

Funding for Catholic schools

The bishops reflected on the significant developments with regard to funding for all Australian schools, and especially Catholic schools, in recent months. The bishops acknowledged with gratitude the efforts of representatives of Catholic education who have worked diligently to achieve that outcome.

They observed that the more than 765,000 students in Catholic schools would benefit from the recent announcement of additional funding, but it was less clear how funding over the medium to long term might support Catholic schools in all parts of the country.

Fit for Sacred Use

The bishops approved the document *Fit for Sacred Use: Stewardship and Renewal of Places of Worship*, which has been developed by the National Liturgical Art and Architecture Council (NLAAC). The volume focuses on the cultural heritage of places of worship and is a companion to the earlier document *And when Churches are to be Built: Preparation, Planning and Construction of Places of Worship*.

Fit for Sacred Use will be launched at the NLAAC Symposium in February 2019

Plenary Council 2020

Plenary Council facilitator Ms Lana Turvey-Collins updated the bishops on progress on the Plenary Council, including the significant responses that have been received – on behalf of more than 20,000 people at the end of October.

Ms Turvey-Collins explained that with the current Listening and Dialogue Process due to conclude in March 2019, the focus will shift to "Dialogue and Discernment" from June 2019

and “Formation and Ongoing Dialogue” during 2020, in the lead-up to the Council sessions in 2020 and 2021.

The bishops shared their hopes for the Plenary Council and their concerns about the Plenary Council process. They noted that some people already have a public voice and have been proactive in communicating their views, while others still need to be drawn into the preparatory process of listening, dialogue and discernment.

It was emphasised that the Plenary Council is for Catholics who are happy and content with the Church and their participation in its life and mission, as well as for those who feel excluded or have become disaffected.

Testimonial of Holy Matrimony

The Bishops Commission for Liturgy, as requested in May 2018, undertook consultation to prepare a Certificate of Holy Matrimony to document the solemnising of marriage according to the Church’s *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*.

It was noted that the Catholic Church of the West and the Catholic Churches of the East might require distinct wording to reflect their distinct traditions. Once that wording is finalised and approved, the certificates will be made available in digital and hard copy formats.

Dialogue with other Christian communities

The Bishops Commission for Christian Unity and Inter-religious Dialogue advised that all dialogue arrangements between the Commission and other Christian churches is under review. In some instances, other churches have for the time being been unable to nominate interlocutors to participate in dialogue.

International Eucharistic Congress

Bishop Umbers provided a report on preparations for the next International Eucharistic Congress, to be held in Hungary in September 2020. He noted the theme of the Congress, “All my springs are in thee”, derived from Psalm 87. He advised that Harvest Journeys will offer a pilgrimage from Australia.

Indigenous suicide prevention

After it was highlighted as a significant focus area at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council’s national assembly in October, the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples affirmed it will work with NATSICC to consider during 2019 the unacceptably high rates of suicide among young Indigenous people.

Detention of refugees and asylum-seekers

The bishops discussed the plight of refugees and asylum-seekers on Nauru and Manus Island and consideration was given to how the Conference might respond. It was agreed that a statement should be issued in the name of the Conference that underlines the human dignity of all people and the need for humane treatment of people in detention.

Modern slavery

Following the Australian Parliament’s passage of the Modern Slavery Act 2018 on November 29, the bishops asked that a statement be prepared acknowledging efforts to eliminate modern slavery. The statement was issued as a media release and commended Catholic organisations for their work advocating for the legislation.

Provision of Catholic Healthcare Ethics Services

The bishops agreed that there is important work needed to support the provision of ethical guidance and advice to those working in Catholic health services. Work is under way to assess the current and future needs in this area.

Acknowledgments of service

On separate occasions, the bishops thanked two long-time contributors to the Church's mission.

Fr Peter Malone MSC was honoured for 50 years' service as a film reviewer for the Church. In addition to his work for the Australian Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting, Fr Malone served as president of SIGNIS, the World Catholic Association for Communications, and as a consultant of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications.

Brian Lawrence, who had until relatively recently chaired the Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations, was also recognised. The president thanked Mr Lawrence for his generous and distinguished service, and especially for preparing the national minimum wage case submission made annually by the Council. Bishop Holohan spoke in tribute of Mr Lawrence, highlighting his life-long contribution to the social mission of the Church.

Future pastoral discussions

The bishops agreed that pastoral discussions on social media, the Sacrament of Penance and Catholic schools and Catholic education should be held at the next Plenary Meeting in May 2019.