



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

SUMMARY OF THE PLENARY MEETING OF THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE 5-9 MAY 2014

The May Plenary of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference took place between 5 - 9 May 2014. The Mass of the Holy Spirit was concelebrated on 6 May 2014 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.

The President welcomed the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, who was warmly greeted. He concelebrated the opening Mass, met Bishops informally, addressed the Plenary Meeting and participated in a general discussion.

The President welcomed the observers from the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (Catholic Religious Australia)

Sr Annette Cunliffe rsc
Fr Graeme Duro sss
Sr Ruth Durick osu

BISHOPS WHO HAVE DIED SINCE THE LAST PLENARY

Bishop Michael Putney 28 March 2014

EPISCOPAL APPOINTMENTS SINCE THE LAST PLENARY

- Cardinal George Pell, Prefect of the Secretariat of the Economy 24 February 2014
- Fr Peter Slater, Diocesan Administrator Sale 20 November 2013
- Bishop Bosco Puthur, Syro-Malabar Eparchy 11 January 2014
- Bishop-elect Michael McCarthy, Diocese of Rockhampton 10 March 2014
- Bishop Peter Comensoli, Apostolic Administrator Sydney 27 February 2014
- Fr Michael Lowcock, Diocesan Administrator Townsville 31 March 2014
- Bishop-elect Columba Macbeth-Green, Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes 12 April 2014

MESSAGE TO THE HOLY FATHER FROM THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Most Holy Father,

As we gather for our plenary meeting in Sydney around the tomb of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, the Bishops of Australia send you greetings of peace in the Lord Jesus as a sign of our communion in Him.

We extend our thanks and best wishes on the recent appointment of our two new bishops in Australia. Both Reverend Michael McCarthy and Reverend Columba Macbeth-Green are warmly welcomed into the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and their respective Dioceses of Rockhampton and Wilcannia-Forbes.

At this time, we are striving to meet the challenges presented by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse and seeking to move to a moment of truth, justice and healing for the victims of abuse and for the whole Church in Australia.

During our meetings together between 4 - 10 May 2014, we are fully conscious of the challenges involved in the governance of the Church in Australia and your support in our efforts to make decisions wisely and to serve our people.

We entrust our meeting to your prayer and seek your Apostolic Blessing upon all that we think, say, do and decide in Sydney.

United with you in the bond of charity, we remain.

A reply from Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State, on behalf of the Holy Father was received.

ELECTIONS

Archbishop of Melbourne Denis Hart was elected President on the first ballot and Archbishop of Adelaide Philip Wilson was elected Vice-President on the first ballot. Archbishop Timothy Costelloe sdb and Bishop Gregory O'Kelly were elected to the Permanent Committee. The continuing members include: Archbishop Mark Coleridge, Archbishop Christopher Prowse, Bishop Eugene Hurley and Bishop Peter Ingham.

MEMBERSHIP OF COMMISSIONS

Archbishop Costelloe (sdb) presented a report proposing the appointment of the following bishops:
Bishop McGuckin to the Bishops Commission for Health and Community Services
Bishop Puthur to the Bishops Commission for Doctrine and Morals
Bishop-elect Macbeth-Green to the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation
Bishop-elect McCarthy to the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry
Archbishop Costelloe as Acting Chair of the Bishops Commission for Doctrine and Morals
Bishop Peter Ingham as Acting Chair of the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation
Bishop Les Tomlinson as Chair of the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry

A number of special sessions took place on the following issues:

ISSUES RELATING TO REFUGEES

Paris Aristotle and Fr Aloysius Mowe sj attended on Tuesday morning and presented to the Conference on matters arising from Government policy on refugees. The bishops discussed the issue at length and decided to draft and publish an all-encompassing statement on the issue highlighting the critical concerns of the Catholic Bishops regarding the treatment of asylum seekers as a result of Australia Government policy.

ISSUES RELATING TO YOUTH CONGRESS

Bishop Fisher, accompanied by the staff from the Conference Youth Council, Malcolm Hart and Gabrielle Sinclair, led a discussion on Wednesday morning on the outcomes of the Australian Catholic Youth Festival, which took place at ACU Melbourne in December 2013. Other matters relating to youth ministry generally were also discussed.

ISSUES RELATING TO THE ROYAL COMMISSION

Leaders of Religious Congregations met with the bishops on Thursday morning to consider the latest report from the Truth Justice and Healing Council on the developments of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse.

PASTORAL DISCUSSION ON THE YEAR OF GRACE

The Conference agreed that Archbishops Wilson, Coleridge, Costelloe sdb, with the support of the General Secretary, form a base committee to commence a pastoral discussion for the purpose of reflecting on the Year of Grace and bringing proposals forward.

PERMANENT COMMITTEE

MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, PATRONESS OF AUSTRALIA

The bishops were encouraged to lead a greater devotion to Mary Help of Christians by implementing appropriate local initiatives.

ENSURING A SAFE CHURCH FOR CHILDREN

The Conference considered a draft paper on future directions for child protection in conjunction with the Special Session on issues relating to child protection. The Conference through Archbishop Wilson and Bishop McGuckin and the NCPS and with others co-opted will develop a paper carrying forward the process of establishing standards setting and compliance audit function.

TRUTH JUSTICE AND HEALING COUNCIL

The bishops noted the death of the Chair of the Truth Justice and Healing Council, the Hon Barry O'Keefe QC and will send a message of condolence to his family.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR ADMINISTRATION AND INFORMATION

PASTORAL RESEARCH OFFICE

The conference *Beliefs and Practices of Australian Catholics: What we know and why it matters* was held from 19-22 February 2014 in Melbourne. Twenty-eight diocesan and over 1,300 parish census profiles have been created and mailed to dioceses and parishes as part of the National Catholic Census Project. All the profiles are now available for free (and unrestricted) download on the PRO website. The Building Stronger Parishes Project Coordinator, Trudy Dantis, gave a keynote address on the early findings of the National Catholic Census Project at the Parish Workshop Day.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

FAITH FORMATION AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

The Commission has asked the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) Faith Formation and Religious Education Standing Committee to map the work currently being undertaken in faith formation in systemic and congregational schools and to organise a framework for faith formation and religious education, which would assist the sharing of resources and development of digital curriculum resources.

CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARENTS AUSTRALIA

A group of school parents, to be known as Catholic School Parents Australia (CSPA), drawing on Catholic school parent representatives from each state and territory and chaired by Mr Tony O'Byrne, has requested formal recognition under Canon Law. Advice is being sought on this matter.

LOCATION OF THE NCEC SECRETARIAT

The permanent location of the NCEC secretariat was canvassed in 2013. It has now been determined that in order to best pursue the new Terms of Reference that the NCEC secretariat will be located in Sydney from July 2014.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR CHURCH MINISTRY

COMMON REQUIREMENTS FOR VISITING CLERGY TO MINISTER

The Australian Confraternity of Catholic Clergy brought to the attention of the Commission the differing requirements that each diocese made for one off ministering in a diocese other than their own. The Conference is looking to have a uniform view on how to ensure this is known to all clergy. Material relating to the law in different States was circulated to all bishops.

POSSIBLE ACCREDITATION OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS

The Conference is considering an accreditation process for Catholics who act as Spiritual Directors.

OFFICE OF CLERGY LIFE AND MINISTRY

In July 2014, a national gathering of Clergy Life and Ministry directors will take as its theme- *Responding to the changing face of ministry today*. A letter has been sent to Archbishop Dew inviting two clergy from New Zealand to attend this gathering.

COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC WOMEN

There has now been an almost full change of council membership. The Council has among its tasks the formation of women leaders in dioceses. The Council has prepared a questionnaire for Parish Councils about the participation of women.

COUNCIL FOR LAY PASTORAL MINISTRY

There is a concern as to how to provide continuing formation and ongoing education for Lay Pastoral Ministers. While many larger urban parishes can afford to pay lay pastoral ministers many in smaller parishes were volunteers. A document on lay pastoral ministry is being prepared in 2014/2015 in two parts, the first giving the theological/ scriptural/ ecclesial underpinning and the second giving practical guidelines.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PRIESTS (NCP)

Five members of the NCP executive met with the Commission. Presently there is a membership of around 1500 throughout Australia. The *Official Directory of the Catholic Church* has been published by NCP for some 16 years. The next biannual conference *Against the Wind* will be held on the Sunshine Coast in August 2014.

REVIEW OF THE *RATIO FUNDAMENTALIS* FOR SEMINARY FORMATION

There is a need for some revision of the *Ratio Fundamentalis* to cover formation on issues connected to child protection. The seminary rectors have met and endorse this revision.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR DOCTRINE AND MORALS

RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

A request was made to consider the circumstances for worthy Reception of Holy Communion. The Commission recommended that a pastoral approach involving the development and implementation of a catechesis of the Eucharist be adopted.

ADVANCE CARE PLANNING

The Commission has approved changes to the CHA – ACBC document, *Advance Care Plan*. This document and the two associated documents, *A Guide for People Considering their Future Health Care* and *A Guide for Health Care Professionals Implementing a Future Health Care Plan* are being promoted through the CHA and the ACBC websites. They will also be distributed electronically to every diocese.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR ECUMENISM AND INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS

CELEBRATION OF 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF *NOSTRA AETATE* IN 2015

A pastoral letter is being drafted for the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*. It is planned that this letter will be available electronically for download.

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

In 2014 the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will be celebrated from 1- 8 June. Each of the diocesan ecumenical contacts has been provided with the link to the resources of the Holy See that have been adapted for use in Australia by the National Council of Churches Faith and Unity Commission.

UNITING CHURCH - ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE

Bishop Brian Finnigan agreed to take on the role of Catholic Co-Chair and Bishop Robert McGuckin has joined the group. A number of members of the Uniting Church group have retired from the dialogue.

BISHOP PUTNEY ANNUAL LECTURE

An annual memorial lecture on Ecumenism entitled the *Bishop Putney Memorial Lecture* will be organised by the Commission in a suitable way.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR HEALTH AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES AUSTRALIA (CSSA)

CSSA joined with Catholic Social Services Victoria to convene a national conference on mission and identity in October of last year. Conference presentations are to be published in a book, *Listening, Learning and Leading: The Impact of Catholic Identity and Mission*, to be released in Canberra at Parliament House by the Minister for Human Services, the Hon. Kevin Andrews on 26 June. The book is edited by Emeritus Professor John Warhurst and Emeritus Professor Gabrielle McMullen with a foreword by the Honorable Tim Fischer, former Australian Ambassador to the Holy See.

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT AGED CARE SECTOR ADVISORY BOARD AND THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT CLINICAL TRIALS ADVISORY GROUP

CEO of Catholic Health Australia, Mr Martin Laverty, has been appointed to the Australian Government Aged Care Sector Advisory Board and the Australian Government Clinical Trials Advisory Group. The latter provides CHA with an opportunity to engage in a conversation focused in part about setting a pricing benchmark associated with the provision of clinical acute mental health care services.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR JUSTICE, ECOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT

The theme for the 2014-2015 Social Justice Statement concerns the importance of sport and is to be titled: *'A Crown for Australia: Striving for the best in our sporting nation'*.

PROPOSAL FOR A MURRAY-DARLING BASIN SYMPOSIUM

A symposium will take place from 27-30 September 2015 with the purpose of enabling the Bishops of the Murray Darling Basin and the Commission to engage with the best available science and theology in relation to the Murray-Darling Basin and to feel at ease advocating a Catholic position.

CATHOLIC EARTHCARE AUSTRALIA (CEA)

The key work for CEA in this period has been the National Energy Efficiency Network (NEEN) Project and progress. The fourth milestone, which marked the end of the pilot phase of the project, was submitted in February and included: 12 case studies, 10 fact sheets, a self audit calculator tool, evaluation surveys and seminar presentations for the launch events. The NEEN Project is now into its implementation phase which includes capital city events, followed by 20 regional events over a 15 month period.

CARITAS AUSTRALIA

The 2014 Project Compassion appeal was launched on 5 March and a target of \$11 million was set. With the increasing number of foreign-born priests, Caritas is seeking to ensure that they are able to convey the significance of this appeal to parishioners.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR LITURGY

FEAST OF ST DOMINIC

The conference proposed to ask the approval of the Holy See for the celebration of the memorial of St Dominic on 3 August. The need to consider the date of the feast of St Dominic has arisen because of the clashes relating to the Feast of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop.

ST JOSEPH THE WORKER OBSERVANCE

The Bishops Commission for Liturgy supported a suggestion from Bishop Peter Elliott that the observance of St Joseph the Worker on 1 May be raised from an optional memorial to an obligatory memorial in the *Ordo*.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR EVANGELISATION

AUSTRALIAN OFFICE FOR FILM AND BROADCASTING

Mass for you at Home is broadcast on Channel 11 on Sundays at 5.30am. It is averaging 90,000 viewers per week, the largest Mass congregation in the country. On 8 August 2014 it will have been on air for 43 years.

WORLD COMMUNICATIONS DAY

World Communications Sunday is celebrated internationally on 5 June. Australia will celebrate World Communications Day on 25 May, so that it does not coincide with Mother's Day or Ascension Sunday. Aoife Connors has been working, since December, on this project and 12 video testimonies have been developed into a Digital Storytelling Project entitled "*Stirring Hearts*". The testimonies are of Catholics from around Australia from a variety of backgrounds. Lay, religious, women, men, young, young at heart. Each has shared their story of "encounter" with Christ through their work and lives. The title of the project comes from the text of the Holy Father's message for the 48th World Communications Day "*Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter*". It will be made available to schools and parishes as a free online resource which will include a website www.stirringhearts.org.au; an educational resource; a parish kit; homily notes; suggested prayers of the faithful and a prayer for World Communications Day.

BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR PASTORAL LIFE

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER AND FASTING FOR MARRIAGE AND FAMILY SYNOD

The October 2014 Synod on 'The pastoral challenges to the family in the context of evangelisation' presents a unique opportunity to strengthen marriage and family. The Bishops decided there would be a national day of prayer and fasting, based on a simple prayer card, supplemented with prayers of intercession. Friday 10 October is recommended as the most suitable day for this in Australia. The Patroness of the Day could be Our Lady Help of Christians.

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC YOUTH FESTIVAL DECEMBER 2013

Over 3,400 people attended the Festival between 5-7 December 2013. Organisers received positive feedback on the event and its ongoing role in the life of the Church in Australia. Bishop Anthony Fisher, with the Director of the Office for Youth, is developing a plan for a way forward for future Youth Festivals.

RESPONSE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA TO THE TREATMENT OF ASYLUM SEEKERS ARRIVING BY BOAT

The Bishops drafted a media statement on the treatment of asylum seekers arriving by boat. It is being distributed to all parishes and through the Catholic media.

Text of Statement by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference on Asylum Seekers 8 May 2014

The Australian Catholic Bishops have been involved in many ways with asylum seekers. Some of us have detention centres close to home, and we have worked hard to ensure that asylum seekers receive proper pastoral care and human assistance. We renew that commitment here.

The Bishops have also intervened with Government in an attempt to make policy more respectful of human dignity and basic human rights, which today are being seriously violated.

We now make this urgent plea for a respect for the rights of asylum seekers, not only in Government circles but in the Australian community more broadly. Federal decision-makers in both major parties have made their decisions and implemented their policies because they think they have the support of the majority of Australians. Therefore, we want to speak to the entire Australian community.

The current policy has about it a cruelty that does no honour to our nation. How can this be when Australians are so generous in so many situations where human beings are in strife? Think of the way the Vietnamese boat people were welcomed in the 1970's and 80's. The question becomes more pointed when we think of the politicians who are making and implementing the decisions. They are not cruel people. Yet they have made decisions and are implementing policies which are cruel. How can this be so?

Island dwellers like Australians often have an acute sense of the "other" or the "outsider" – and that is how asylum seekers are being portrayed. They are the dangerous "other" or "outsider" to be feared and resisted because they are supposedly violating our borders.

Do racist attitudes underlie the current policy? Would the policy be the same if the asylum seekers were fair-skinned Westerners rather than dark-skinned people, most of whom are of "other" religious and cultural backgrounds? Is the current policy perhaps bringing to the surface not only a xenophobia in us but also a latent racism? The White Australia policy was thought to be dead and buried, but perhaps it has mutated and is still alive.

There may also be the selfishness of the rich. Not everyone in Australia is rich but we are a rich nation by any reckoning. The asylum seekers are often portrayed as economic refugees coming to plunder our wealth. But the fact is that most of them are not being "pulled" to Australia by a desire for wealth but are being "pushed" from their homeland and other lands where there is no life worth living. No-one wants them.

The policy can win acceptance only if the asylum seekers are kept faceless and nameless. It depends upon a process of de-humanisation. Such a policy would be widely rejected if the faces and names were known. Bishops have seen the faces; we know the names; we have heard the stories. That is why we say now, Enough of this institutionalised cruelty.

We join with the Catholic Bishops of Papua New Guinea who have voiced their strong opposition to the use of Manus Island for detention. They have urged Australia "to find a more humane solution to people seeking asylum". We do not accept the need for off-shore processing. But even if it continues, it surely does not require such harshness.

The Government and Opposition want to stop the boats and thwart the people-smugglers. But does this require such cruelty? Could not the same goals be achieved by policies, which are less harsh, even humane – policies which respected not only our international obligations but also basic human rights? Can we not achieve a balance between the needs of people in desperate trouble and the electoral pressures faced by politicians? We believe we can, indeed we must.

The Australian Catholic Bishops call on parliamentarians of all parties to turn away from these policies, which shame Australia and to take the path of a realistic compassion that deals with both human need and electoral pressure. We call on the nation as a whole to say no to the dark forces, which make these policies possible. The time has come to examine our conscience and then to act differently.

Bishop of Darwin Eugene Hurley and Bishop of Broome Christopher Saunders are both available for interview on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops.

WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES

The 8th World Meeting of Families, the first to be held in an English-speaking country, is to be held in Philadelphia 22-27 September 2015. Bishops were asked to encourage participation from their dioceses and to support a married couple or family from their diocese to join in the Australian pilgrimage.

WALKING WITH LOVE (WWL) REGIONAL SEMINARS

A Regional Seminar is being planned for the Wagga Wagga Diocese. Further regional seminars will be offered and Bishops are encouraged to nominate their dioceses for further seminars by contacting the Executive Secretary of the Commission on 02 6201 9865 or by email to pastoral.life@catholic.org.au.

OTHER MATTERS

POLITICAL SITUATION IN UKRAINE

Bishop Stasiuk gave an outline of the current situation in Ukraine and the impact on the Church. A paper with additional information was circulated to all bishops.

EXTRAORDINARY SYNOD ON THE PASTORAL CHALLENGES TO THE FAMILY IN THE CONTEXT OF EVANGELISATION

Bishop Kennedy led a discussion on the elements of the Conference submission to the Synod.

SYRO MALABAR EPARCHY

Bishop Bosco Puthur made a presentation and expressed his gratitude for the welcome he had received. He urged the bishops to inform the clergy about the Eparchy. There was discussion of sacramental practice and the relationship between the Syro-Malabar Church and the local Latin rite parishes.

GRATITUDE

Archbishop Wilson acknowledged the Chairmanship of Archbishop Hart.

Archbishop Hart expressed thanks to Father Brian Lucas, the General Secretary, to the staff of the Secretariat at North Sydney and Canberra, to the Acting Communication Director, Aoife Connors, to seminarians Tom Zaranski and Gerard Woo Ling and to Dr Paul Taylor.

Archbishop Hart expressed thanks to the Sisters of St Joseph and all the management and personnel at Anderlody Lodge, Mary MacKillop Place, who contributed to the hospitality and smooth running of the meeting.

Thanks were expressed to the members of the Drafting Committee for their assistance at this meeting.