



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops' Plenary Meeting, May 2005 – News Briefs

Science and religion meet on issue of climate change

Science and religion came face to face at the Bishops' Plenary Meeting, with two scientists from the Australian National University addressing the bishops on the topic of global warming.

Dr Janette Lindesay, lecturer and Dr Brendan Mackey, reader at the School of Resources, Environment and Society at the Australian National University were the guest speakers at a pastoral discussion facilitated by Catholic Earthcare.

Also present was Fr Michael McKenzie, Vicar General of the Diocese of Tarawa and Nauru, Kiribati, who made a heartfelt plea for help and understanding of the plight of his people who are living with the effects of global warming.

In their presentation, Dr Lindesay and Dr Mackey told the Bishops that climate change was now recognised as a real and measurable global phenomenon by the international scientific community.

They said climate change was a social justice issue with rich countries the main polluters and poorer countries (such as Kiribati) suffering the most.

It is very difficult to predict exactly what the consequences of climate change will be in specific geographies, but it is very clear that the global average temperatures are rising.

The ice caps are melting. This and the fact that the warmer liquid gets the more it expands means that sea levels are indisputably rising and will continue to rise in the coming years.

Pollution caused primarily by the burning of fossil fuels has altered the chemical make-up of the Earth's atmosphere. This chemical change is what leads to global warming, as heat from the Sun is 'trapped' within the atmosphere.

Fr McKenzie told the Bishops that Kiribati is made up of 33 coral islands, about three metres above sea level and is home to about 100,000 people, known as the I-Kiribati. Christianity predominates and about half of our population is Catholic.

"Since the 1970s the average temperature in Kiribati has been increasing steadily," he said. On average it has risen by 0.6 degrees centigrade in the last 30 years.

"Climate change has affected the daily life of I-Kiribati. We small islanders see Global Warming and Climate Change as an indirect way of killing our people."

Fr McKenzie said the main consequences of climate change are rising tides and coastal erosion; falling numbers of fish stock and coral bleaching; water shortages; drought and salinity problems; decreasing soil quality and deterioration of crops; extreme weather conditions; and increasing occurrence of diseases such as conjunctivitis and diarrhoea.

He said developed countries, including Australia, had a vital role to play in helping vulnerable areas of the world, primarily in the developing countries to adapt to the consequences of global warming.

“Kiribati and other small nations in the Pacific are looking for a Good Samaritan. At this point in history, we are asking ‘Who will be a Good Samaritan for us?’”.

The Bishops Committee for Justice, Development, Ecology and Peace is to hold a conference on climate change in Canberra from November 18-20.



Pictured from left to right, Dr Brendan Mackey and Dr Janette Lindesay from the ANU, Colin Brown of Catholic Earthcare Australia and Fr Michael McKenzie from Kiribati.



Pictured from left to right, during the presentation to the Bishops' Plenary Meeting, Colin Brown, Bishop Chris Toohey, Fr Michael McKenzie, Dr Janette Lindsay and Dr Brendan Mackey.

Bishops discuss Sacrament of Penance

Australia's Bishops have resolved to pursue a more detailed pastoral discussion of the Sacrament of Penance following a presentation on the topic at their Plenary Meeting.

The Bishops received a presentation on the sacrament from Fr Tony Ireland whose studies have focused on the practice of penance in Australia.

They then had a pastoral discussion on the topic, touching on aspects including the catechesis surrounding the sacrament of penance, the different rites of penance, the sense of sin in Australian society today and issues surrounding priestly formation.

The rich and broad-ranging discussion touched on issues fundamental to Christian living, such as conversion, repentance and holiness.

The Bishops voted to move their discussion forward in a more formal way by seeking material on the topic from relevant committees of the Bishops' Conference, such as the Canon Law Committee and the Committees for Laity, Liturgy, and Doctrine and Morals.

New research on abortion

New research showing that majority support for abortion on demand is significantly softer than previously thought showed that the abortion discussion in Australia was still very much alive, a leading bio-ethicist priest has told the Bishops.

Fr John Fleming presented the report Give Women Choice: Australia Speaks on Abortion which resulted from research undertaken by the Southern Cross Bioethics Institute.

Fr Fleming said the report looked beyond the question of legal access for abortion and measured how Australians really feel about abortion and how the issue has been managed.

“The survey shows that beneath in-principle support for abortion on demand there is significant disquiet about its use,” the report says.

“The vast majority of Australians endorse an approach which provides women with increased support and opportunity to choose to continue their pregnancies.”

Chairman of the Bishops’ Committee for the Family and for Life, Bishop Eugene Hurley thanked Fr Fleming for the research, saying it would be a valuable tool for the Bishops’ Taskforce on Pastoral Responses to Abortion, giving a focus to their efforts to recast the debate and provide women with alternatives to abortion.

Bishops’ meeting infused with the spirit of Mary Mackillop

The spirit of Blessed Mother Mary Mackillop infused the Bishops’ Plenary session, with the meeting taking place at a venue attached to Mary Mackillop Place at North Sydney.

The Bishops started their daily meetings gathered for Mass in the chapel adjacent to the tomb of the woman destined to become Australia’s first saint.

Many of them also took the opportunity throughout the 10 day meeting to spend individual time in prayer before her tomb.

During their meeting, the Bishops reaffirmed their support for her canonisation and resolved to convey this support to Pope Benedict XVI in a letter to be sent around the time of Mary Mackillop’s feast day in August.

Up to 2,000 Australian pilgrims for World Youth Day in Cologne.

Up to 2,000 young Australians are expected to make the pilgrimage to take part in World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany in August.

A report from the Bishops' Committee for Laity said registrations currently stood at 1,550, with that number expected to rise to 2,000 by August.

A number of Bishops will lead the pilgrimages from their dioceses and the ACBC delegates will be Sarah Taylor of Adelaide and Nathan Galea of Sydney. Sarah and Nathan have also been nominated for a special role in the major WYD liturgies.

Meanwhile, preparations are progressing for the bid to conduct a World Youth Day in Sydney.

Bishops receive Caritas update on Tsunami response

Caritas Australia has received almost \$20 million for its Asia Tsunami Appeal and has already disbursed more than \$4 million of that to its overseas partners in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, India and Thailand.

Presenting the Caritas report on the appeal to the Bishops' Plenary Meeting, Archbishop Adrian Doyle said it was by far the biggest amount raised by Caritas for any appeal and reflected the extraordinary generosity of the community, particularly Catholic parishes around Australia.

The report said that Caritas Australia, an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, was responding within 24 hours of the Boxing Day disaster.

“And in the days that have followed, Caritas Australia, as part of the International Caritas network, has taken a lead in supporting our partners on the ground in the relief, rehabilitation and recovery efforts,” it said.

Indonesia and Sri Lanka are the Caritas priority areas.

Action group on Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care reports

Australia's Bishops have endorsed a series of recommendations set out in the first report of the Action Group they established to respond to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care.

The action group was established at the November 2004 Plenary Meeting to analyse the recommendations of the Senate inquiry, with particular reference to how they apply to the Catholic Church.

The group consists of Dr Kristen Johnston, Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes; Fr Brian Lucas, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference; Br Kevin Ryan, Christian Brothers; Mr Paul Linossier, Catholic Welfare Australia; and Ms Myolene Carrick, Catholic Welfare Australia.

The recommendations in the report must also be presented to the Leaders of Religious Institutes, at their meeting in June.

“The Action Group recognises the profound harm and justice issues that are documented by the Senate Inquiry Report and recommends that, in spite of methodological limitations of the Inquiry that were identified, the church continue and strengthen its pastoral approach to the needs of care leavers,” the group’s report said.

Among the recommendations endorsed by the bishops was one for Catholic Welfare to undertake a scoping study of agencies that may have a role in the ongoing response of the Church. This would be followed by state-based workshops with those agencies. A report on progress will be provided to Bishops and Leaders in 12-18 months.

The bishops also endorsed a recommendation that the Action Group be maintained as a reference group, to report to the ACBC Plenary Meeting in November 2006 and May 2007 before presenting a final report and winding up.

Cardinal Hamao to address Sydney conference

Cardinal Fumio Hamao, President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People will visit Australia in November, to attend a national conference hosted by the Bishops’ Committee for Migrants and Refugees.

Entitled, *One in Christ Jesus: Pastoral Care in a Culturally Diverse Australia*, the conference will be held at Sydney’s Randwick Racecourse function centre from November 16-18.

The conference will be preceded by a day for Migrant Chaplains and members of the Bishops’ Conferences of Oceania have been invited to attend as observers.

Cardinal Hamao will address the migrant chaplains and the general conference on the *Pastoral Care of People on the Move: Challenges for the Church today*.

ACBC Appointments:

- Bishop Hilton Deakin was elected to fill the vacancy in the Bishops Committee for Migrants and Refugees until the end of the term vacated upon the retirement of Bishop David Cremin.
- The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference appointed as members of the National Commission for Clergy Life and Ministry Monsignor Ian Dempsey of Adelaide and Sr Caroline Ryan rsm of ACLRI for a three year term to commence from April 2005.
- Mrs Joan Hendriks was reappointed to the Commission for Australian Catholic Women for a second term.
- Ms Zara Tai was appointed to fill the vacancy on the Commission for Australian Catholic Women occasioned by the resignation of Mrs Teresa Lynch.