



## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

### Bishops prepare for plenary meeting under COVID-19 restrictions

Media Release

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The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference will enter uncharted territory this week as it holds its biannual plenary meeting, using video technology to allow its work to continue during the COVID-19 crisis.

Conference president Archbishop Mark Coleridge said the bishops are having to adapt to the current realities just like all Australians.

“This is the first time one of our twice-yearly gatherings hasn’t happened in person since the Conference was formed in 1966, but we are living in an era of ‘firsts’,” Archbishop Coleridge said.

“The Conference has important matters to consider, as always, so we have found ways to adjust our practices and protocols to do what needs to be done over the coming days.”

The May meeting runs from May 7 to 14, with the bishops free on Sunday.

Archbishop Coleridge said the COVID-19 pandemic will be high on the bishops’ agenda.

“There is a great desire in all parts of the Church to resume public worship, and we will consider how and when that might happen – always with due consideration of the health implications,” he explained.

“But COVID-19 has crippled many individuals, families and communities not only economically, but in other ways as well. How can the Church best support those people through our educational, social service and pastoral care networks? Much of that work has commenced, but the recovery will be long.”

Archbishop Coleridge said the bishops have begun discussions with leaders of religious institutes and other Catholic ministries about a more collaborative approach to safeguarding and the handling of complaints of sexual abuse and other misconduct.

“We’ve made good progress in devising even more robust structures and practices to respond to allegations and to create and maintain Church environments that are safe for children and vulnerable adults,” he said.

“This is a whole-of-Church approach, and it’s one that has been developed with input from a wide range of people, including survivors and their supporters.”

The bishops will also consider the final report of a national review of the governance of dioceses and parishes.

Archbishop Coleridge said that while the tyranny of distance and the vagaries of technology will be a challenge, the bond of faith and mission that unites the bishops will remain strong, especially through the Church’s liturgical life.

“The rhythm of daily Mass and prayer several times each day – albeit in our own locations – will continue, and that will keep the focus on the Risen Jesus in our midst,” he said.

“Bishops have been provided with resources to support our normal prayer life during the plenary meeting, with one bishop providing a reflection on each day’s Scripture readings, as would happen if we were together in person. So we will listen together to the Word of God before we speak our own.”

A summary of the meeting will be posted online as soon as possible after its completion.