



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

MANDATE

OF THE

BISHOPS COMMISSION

FOR

**CHRISTIAN UNITY AND
INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

NOVEMBER 2019

Preamble

The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* links its teaching on the Catholic Church to an acknowledgement of the saving elements found in other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. It is not a matter of becoming aware of static elements passively present in those Churches and Communities. Insofar as they are elements of the Church of Christ, these are by their nature a force for the re-establishment of unity. Consequently, the quest for Christian unity is not a matter of choice or expediency, but a duty which springs from the very nature of the Christian community. (*Ut unum sint* 1995 n.49)

The Jewish-Christian dialogue can only with reservations be termed ‘interreligious dialogue’ in the true sense of the expression; one could however speak of a kind of ‘intra-religious’ or ‘intra-familial’ dialogue *sui generis*. In his address in the Roman Synagogue on 13 April 1986 Pope St John Paul II expressed this situation in these words: "The Jewish religion is not ‘extrinsic’ to us but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers." (*The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable* 2015 n.20)

“Each Synod of the Eastern Catholic Churches and each Episcopal Conference, in accordance with its own procedures, should establish an Episcopal commission for ecumenism assisted by experts, both men and women, chosen from among the clergy, religious and laity.” *Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism*, 1993 n. 46. The Church urges her sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.

Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Nostra aetate, 1965, n. 2.

1. Membership and Meetings

- 1.1. The Commission shall comprise four (4) members as the Conference by-laws determine, one of whom will belong to an Eastern Catholic Church.
- 1.2. The President of the Conference participates in the meetings of the Commission.
- 1.3. The Commission shall ordinarily meet biannually at a time and place that the members determine.
- 1.4. The Commission shall meet using communications technology when the agenda or circumstances warrant.

2. Areas of Responsibility

The Commission sets priorities in consultation with the Conference, plans and develops strategies at the national level to promote the life and mission of the Catholic Church in Australia in the following specific areas of responsibility.

- 2.1. Matters relating to Christian unity and inter-religious dialogue
- 2.2. Receptive ecumenism
- 2.3. Spiritual ecumenism, including the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- 2.4. Religious relations with Jews
- 2.5. Study and research promoting ecumenical and inter-religious understanding
- 2.6. Ecumenical and inter-religious dialogues
- 2.7. Ecumenical and inter-religious collaboration in work for justice, peace and welfare
- 2.8. The Conference's involvement in the National Council of Churches in Australia and other national ecumenical and inter-religious bodies

3. Particular Functions

In particular, the Commission performs the following functions:

- 3.1. The Commission is attentive to the activity of the Church and its agencies in the following areas:
 - 3.1.1. Implementing norms and instructions issued by the Holy See
 - 3.1.2. Participating in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogues
 - 3.1.3. Encouraging ecumenical and inter-religious activity or engagement by Catholics
 - 3.1.4. Participating in ecumenical and inter-religious endeavours and structures
 - 3.1.5. Promoting cooperation and learning by diocesan ecumenical and inter-religious bodies
 - 3.1.6. Organising the exchange of observers and guests at significant ecumenical and inter-religious events
- 3.2. The Commission develops national policies in the specific areas of its responsibilities as approved or requested by the Conference.
- 3.3. The Commission undertakes public and private initiatives in support of:
 - 3.3.1. Carrying out the mission of the Church in ecumenical and inter-religious relations
 - 3.3.2. Promoting mutual understanding and respect between peoples of various Christian traditions and world religions

3.4. The Commission undertakes such specific projects as the Conference may from time to time approve or request.

4. Advisory Role

The Commission advises the Conference on issues that arise in the areas of its responsibility and, where appropriate, makes recommendations for action that the Conference might undertake at a national level.

5. Advisory Bodies

The Commission establishes, in accordance with the mandates in Schedule 1, the following advisory bodies to assist it in its responsibilities:

5.1. Australian Catholic Council for Christian Unity and Religious Relations with Jews

5.2. Australian Catholic Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue

6. Relations

6.1. The Commission maintains formal relations with:

6.1.1. Council of Australian Jewry

6.1.2. National Council of Churches in Australia

6.2. The Commission maintains informal relations with:

6.2.1. Diocesan Commissions for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations

6.2.2. Equivalent bodies in other Christian churches and ecclesial communions and with appropriate bodies and representatives of other world religions

7. Offices

The Commission does not supervise the work of any office.

8. Secretariat

The General Secretariat assists the Commission in fulfilling its tasks.

Schedule 1: Mandates for Advisory Bodies

Name:	Australian Catholic Council for Christian Unity and Religious Relations with Jews
Area(s) of Responsibility:	<p>The Council advises the Bishops Commission for Christian Unity and Inter-religious Dialogue in the promotion of the life and mission of the Catholic Church in Australia in the area of Christian unity by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advising on potential areas for ecumenical action 2. Raising awareness of ecumenical relations at local, national and inter-national levels 3. Assisting in the development of materials that support the Church in its ecumenical endeavours 4. Representing the Commission at ecumenical activities 5. Advising on and promoting religious relations with Jews
Number of Councillors:	<p>The Council will comprise seven (7) appointed councillors with expertise in the areas of ecumenical dialogue, the teaching of ecumenism and/or relations with Jews.</p> <p>The Executive Secretary will provide support at all meetings of the Council.</p>
Appointment of Councillors:	<p>Following the appointment of members to the Commission at the May Plenary Meeting, the Commission will appoint councillors for the triennial term and will report these appointments to the Conference at the November Plenary Meeting. The Commission may re-appoint councillors for up to two subsequent terms.</p>
Frequency and Place of Meetings:	<p>The Council will meet with the Bishops Commission at least annually at a place of mutual convenience. The Council may meet at other times as required using a variety of communications technology.</p>
Administrative Support:	<p>The General Secretariat will provide administrative support to the Council.</p>

Name:	Australian Catholic Council for Inter-religious Dialogue
Area(s) of Responsibility:	<p>The Council advises the Commission in the promotion of the life and mission of the Catholic Church in Australia in the area of inter-religious dialogue by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advising on potential areas for inter-religious action 2. Raising awareness of inter-religious relations at local, national and inter-national levels 3. Assisting in the development of materials that support the Church in its inter-religious dialogue endeavours 4. Representing the Commission at inter-religious dialogue activities
Number of Councillors:	<p>The Council will comprise seven (7) appointed councillors, the collective of which will have expertise in the areas of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relations with Muslims 2. Relations with Buddhism or Hinduism 3. The teaching of other-religious traditions <p>The Executive Secretary will provide support at all meetings of the Council.</p>
Appointment of Councillors:	<p>Following the appointment of members to the Commission at the May Plenary Meeting, the Commission will appoint councillors for the triennial term and will report these appointments to the Conference at the November Plenary Meeting. The Commission may re-appoint councillors for up to two subsequent terms.</p>
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