



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

MANDATE

OF THE

BISHOPS COMMISSION

FOR

**LIFE, FAMILY AND PUBLIC
ENGAGEMENT**

NOVEMBER 2020

Preamble

The Commission promotes the effective engagement of the Church in Australian society, with a focus on matters concerning the natural family, beginning and end of life issues, and Government policy. The Commission cultivates the flourishing of faith in families and covenantal life of various expressions, and with this the public engagement of the People of God in Australia. The call of public life is a vocational one, and the Church encourages Parliamentarians and their advisors to embrace their work so that human dignity is respected and the common good is a priority in all areas of public policy.

Mindful of the call of Pope Francis to be witnesses to the joy of the Gospel, the Commission fosters the Church's dialogue with sound advice and voices of wisdom from across different political perspectives with practical objectives that promote the mission of the Church in Australia. As the Holy Father has said:

“Despite the tide of secularism which has swept our societies, in many countries – even those where Christians are a minority – the Catholic Church is considered a credible institution by public opinion, and trusted for her solidarity and concern for those in greatest need. Again and again, the Church has acted as a mediator in finding solutions to problems affecting peace, social harmony, the land, the defence of life, human and civil rights, and so forth. And how much good has been done by Catholic schools and universities around the world! This is a good thing. Yet, we find it difficult to make people see that when we raise other questions less palatable to public opinion, we are doing so out of fidelity to precisely the same convictions about human dignity and the common good.” (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #65).

The Church works tirelessly through the Commission and partners to find solutions built on its convictions in the truth of the Gospel and in the goodwill of Australian society.

1. Membership and Meetings

- 1.1. The Commission shall comprise four (4) members as determined by the Conference by-laws.
- 1.2. The Commission shall ordinarily meet biannually at a time and place that the members determine.
- 1.3. 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. Marriage Preparation, Family and Marriage Support
- 2.2. Fertility Education and Pregnancy Support Services
- 2.3. Life and related issues
- 2.4. Public affairs of particular interest to the Catholic Church, including religious freedom, which at times may involves cooperation with other Commissions.

3. Particular Functions

In particular, the Commission performs the following functions:

- 3.1. In accordance with Conference policy the Commission undertakes public and private advocacy in support of religious freedom and public engagement.
- 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 such specific projects as the Conference may from time to time approve or request.
- 3.4. The Commission will designate a bishop to act as its delegate in the following areas:
 - 3.4.1. Euthanasia
 - 3.4.2. Life and related issues
 - 3.4.3. Marriage and family life
 - 3.4.4. Public engagement and religious freedom

4. Advisory Role

The Commission advises the Conference and its members 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.

The Commission establishes working groups to advise the Conference and its members on issues within its specific areas of responsibility.

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 Public Engagement

5.2. Australian Catholic Life, Marriage and Family Council

6. Relations

6.1. The Commission maintains relations with:

6.1.1. Public Policy Office and Communications Office

6.1.2. Fertility Education Australia

6.1.3. Diocesan Life, Marriage and Family Offices

6.1.4. Various pro-life and family groups as the Commission considers beneficial

6.1.5. Various expert individuals and groups in the areas of church life, education, politics, law, media and healthcare.

6.2. The Commission may approve the establishment of relations with other organisations.

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 Public Engagement
Area(s) of Responsibility:	<p>The Council advises the Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement in the promotion of the life and mission of the Catholic Church in Australia in the area of public affairs of particular interest to the Catholic Church, including religious freedom, euthanasia and other relevant matters, which are not covered by another Commission by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthening engagement with key stakeholders in the political, legal, media, healthcare, pastoral, intellectual and education areas 2. Raising awareness and educating people on the Church's teachings, especially in the area of public policy and legislative matters 3. Providing timely advice on a range of relevant matters 4. Developing strategies to engage with legislative proposals.
Number of Councillors:	<p>The Council will comprise five (5) appointed councillors, with a collective expertise in the areas of academia, law, media and politics.</p> <p>A Bishop Delegate will represent the Commission at all meetings of the Council and will liaise as required with the Council Chair in between meetings.</p> <p>The Executive Secretary will provide support at all meetings of the Council and will liaise as required with the Council Chair in between meetings.</p> <p>The Council Chair will ordinarily include the Bishop Delegate and the Executive Secretary in discussions and consult them as part of the process of developing advice to the Commission.</p>
Appointment of Councillors:	<p>Following the appointment of members to the Commissions 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>
Appointment of the Chair:	<p>The Commission, on recommendation from the Council, will appoint the Chair for a triennial term from the membership of the Council.</p>
Frequency and Place of Meetings:	<p>The Council will meet 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:	The Executive Secretary of the Commission will provide administrative support to the Council.
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Name:	Australian Catholic Life, Marriage and Family Council
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 areas of life, marriage and family by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthening engagement with key stakeholders in the Catholic and wider communities on life, marriage and family related matters. 2. Raising awareness and educating people on the Church's teachings on human life issues, marriage and family. 3. Providing timely advice and advocacy on a full range of life and related issues, including those with a disability. 4. Promoting alternatives and pastoral responses to life and marriage related issues. 5. Promoting sacramental marriage and its effective preparation and formation. 6. Listening and responding to the spiritual, religious and pastoral needs of Catholic families. 7. Encouraging the family in its evangelising role as the first educators of their children. 8. Evaluating and reporting to the Commission on trends in Church and society in relation to life, marriage and family.
Number of Councillors:	<p>The Council will comprise eight (8) appointed councillors.</p> <p>A Bishop Delegate(s) will represent the Commission at all meetings of the Council and will liaise as required with the Council Chair in between meetings.</p> <p>The Executive Secretary will provide support at all meetings of the Council and will liaise as required with the Council Chair in between meetings.</p> <p>The Council Chair will ordinarily include the Bishop Delegate(s) and the Executive Secretary in discussions and consult them as part of the process of developing advice to the Commission.</p>
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