



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Plenary wrap-up – May, 2011

The following is a record of proceedings and discussions which took place at the Plenary Meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference between May 6-12, 2011.

The Mass of the Holy Spirit was concelebrated on Friday 6 May in the chapel of Mary MacKillop Place, North Sydney at 7am. The President of Conference, Archbishop Philip Wilson, was the principal celebrant and preached the homily. The President welcomed the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Guiseppe Lazzarotto who was warmly greeted. As is customary for each Plenary, religious leaders from CRA (Catholic Religious Australia) were present as observers for all of the sessions. These leaders were Sr. Anne Derwin rsj (Sister of St Joseph); Fr Timothy Norton svd (Divine Word Missionary); and Sr Marie Duffy rsm (Sister of Mercy).

In a particular moment, the Bishops remembered fondly but with deep sadness their brother Bishop Joseph Angelo Grech, who died suddenly late last year (28 December) of a blood disorder. His contribution to the life of the Australian Church was recognised, and the Bishops reflected on the difficulty of losing such a talented individual on many of their commissions.

The following changes to Commissions were approved:

Bishop Peter Elliott retire from the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life due to commitments to the Personal Ordinariate; **Bishop Julian Porteous** be seconded to the Bishops Commission for Mission and Faith Formation; **Bishop Christopher Prowse** be seconded to the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life; **Bishop Christopher Prowse** take over as chairman of the Bishops Commission for Relations with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, due to the withdrawal of **Archbishop Barry Hickey**; **Bishop Brian Heenan** take over as chairman of the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry due to the retirement of **Bishop Michael Malone**; **Bishop-Elect William Wright** be seconded to the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life; **Bishop-Elect Peter Comensoli** be seconded to the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry; There will be an ad hoc Bishops Commission for the Personal Ordinariate comprising **Archbishop Hart** (chairman) and **Bishops Peter Elliott**, **Geoffrey Jarrett** and **Brian Finnigan** with **Fr Brian Lucas** to serve as executive secretary; **Archbishop Philip Wilson** will take over as the co-chair of the National Committee for Professional Standards until May 2012.

The Permanent Committee

Eight Bishops serve on the Permanent Committee and during the meeting four new members were elected. They are: **Archbishop Mark Coleridge**; **Bishop Michael Putney**; **Bishop Eugene Hurley**; **Bishop Peter Ingham**. The current members are **Archbishop Philip**

Wilson (President); Archbishop Denis Hart (Vice President); Cardinal George Pell; and Bishop Gerard Holohan.

The New Evangelisation

Last year Pope Benedict XVI announced the formation of the new Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization and that the next Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will be held in October 2012 dedicated to the theme "*The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*". Two Australian Bishops will attend: **Bishop Timothy Costelloe sdb** and **Bishop Christopher Prowse**

Retirement of Bishop William Morris

The Bishops discussed at length the retirement of Bishop William Morris of Toowoomba and the implications for the Australian Church. They resolved to issue the following pastoral letter addressed to Bishop Brian Finnigan, who has been appointed as an Apostolic Administrator to the Diocese.

Dear Bishop Brian

On behalf of the Australian Bishops, I write to you – and through you especially to the priests, religious and faithful of the Diocese of Toowoomba – to express our sadness at the retirement of Bishop Bill Morris. The decision came at the end of a complex process which began thirteen years ago and which ended in deadlock. It was then that the Holy Father found it necessary to exercise his Petrine care for the whole Church. This has been difficult and distressing for all concerned, and it is not surprising that the decision has caused varied and intense reactions.

Much of our time at the recent meeting of the Australian Bishops was given to discussion of what has happened – a discussion which at one point included hearing the concerns of forty leaders of Religious Congregations, many of whom have members working in the Diocese of Toowoomba. We sought to understand the events and agree on the best way to respond. We reflected on our responsibility as Bishops and on what it means for us to serve the communion of the Church and to exercise our ministry collegially as pastors of Christ's flock, as teachers of the apostolic faith and as moderators of the sacred liturgy.

We also reflected upon the unique role of the Pope as head of the College of Bishops. It is his task to guard and promote the communion of the Church and the integrity of the Church's faith. We reaffirm our faith in this mission which the Successor of Peter has received from Christ himself, and we gratefully acknowledge Pope Benedict's faithfulness to the Petrine ministry, even when it involves very difficult decisions. We commit ourselves anew to teaching faithfully what Christ taught as the Church has handed it down.

Discussion of the process and the decision which it produced will continue during our Ad Limina visit to Rome later this year. There we will have the opportunity to share with the Holy Father and members of the Roman Curia the fruits of our discussion and to share our questions and concerns with an eye to the future. We will also have the opportunity to pray at the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, to whose intercession we will entrust our own ministry, the Diocese of Toowoomba and the Church in Australia.

We appreciate that Bishop Morris' human qualities were never in question; nor is there any doubt about the contribution he has made to the life of the Church in Toowoomba and beyond. The Pope's decision was not a denial of the personal and pastoral gifts that Bishop Morris has brought to the episcopal ministry. Rather, it was judged that there were problems

of doctrine and discipline, and we regret that these could not be resolved. We are hopeful that Bishop Morris will continue to serve the Church in other ways in the years ahead. Our prayers are very much with you as Apostolic Administrator, with Bishop Morris and with the priests, religious and faithful of the Diocese of Toowoomba at this difficult time. We especially encourage the priests to reassure their people and to strengthen them in faith. The Diocese of Toowoomba has a great history of faith, and that faith has never failed in the face of many hardships. It will surely not fail now as the Diocese looks to the future. We express our support for you personally as you assume the challenging task of Apostolic Administrator, and we are confident that you will help to bring peace and unity to the Diocese. May the prayers of Mary of the Southern Cross and of St Mary MacKillop guide us all safely on the journey that lies before us.

Yours fraternally in Christ,

*Archbishop Philip Wilson
President
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference*

Visit from the President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Persons

One of the highlights of the Plenary Meeting for many of the Bishops was the celebration of a multicultural mass at St Mary's Cathedral to mark the visit of the President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Persons, Archbishop Antonio Vegliò. Archbishop Vegliò addressed the congregation at the end of the mass, exhorting the communities to continue to make welcome those who come to Australia, no matter how they arrive. He addressed the Bishops the following day about the phenomenon of migration and the Church's response.

Walking With Love – Pastoral responses to abortion

The Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life presented led a discussion on issues facing women in connection with abortion. Marcia Riordan (Melbourne) and Ray Campbell (Brisbane) presented to the Plenary and answered questions on Tuesday 10 May 2011 on how they have incorporated the approach into parish pastoral care. A *National Symposium and Workshop* is being planned for 2011 for appropriate diocesan and CEO staff.

A “Year of Grace”

Over the last three Plenary meetings of the Australian Bishops, a proposal to hold “Year of Grace” was discussed – an opportunity to Catholics to come together with a renewed sense of “grace” and joy in their experience of the Church. Archbishop Coleridge on behalf of the working party presented an outline of a proposed “year of grace”. Fr Peter Brock, the project officer, attended to explain the proposal and answer questions. Dioceses will appoint a person to coordinate the “Year of Grace” Initiative and assist in further development of the proposal.

Problem Gambling

There was discussion of the issue of problem gambling and some initiatives proposed

by the Australian Government. An inter-church gambling taskforce has been established and Archbishop Hart will participate.

Anniversary of Rerum Novarum

In celebration of Pope Leo XIII's great social Encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the Australian Catholic Bishops have today released a statement which reflects on the 120 years since its writing. The statement from the Bishops recognises that while the Encyclical was firmly placed in its context 120 years ago, that it has surprising relevance to today.

The statement ends with an exhortation to the future, with hope that *Rerum Novarum's* words might continue to ring true in the area of industrial relations today.

We hope for outcomes that are truly consistent with the great vision of *Rerum Novarum*, a vision born of the Gospel and no less relevant to the situations we face now than it was to the situation addressed by Pope Leo XIII at the end of the nineteenth century.

Commission for Canon Law advisory Council

With only a very small number of canonists among the Conference, the Commission proposes that an advisory council be established to assist the Bishops Commission for Canon Law. The following members have been appointed: **Rev Paul Clark; Sr Elizabeth Delaney sgs ex officio; Rev Adrian Farrelly; Sr Moya Hanlen olsh; Fr Anthony Kerin; Br Brian Sweeney fms; Rev Ian Waters.**

National Catholic Education Commission

The importance of NCEC nationally for the Church, and the issues involved, make it such that the views of the Conference were sought on the following:

The Commonwealth review of funding for schooling

The NCEC has put in a submission to the Commonwealth Review reflecting extensive consultation with State and Territory Catholic Education Commissions, and includes detailed research provided by these authorities and also by outside agencies.

Together at One Table

NCEC is in the process of finalising a series of web-based teaching and learning resources collectively called *Together at One Table*. The resource is being developed by Fraynetwork, and will have a virtual launch in the week before Pentecost. This is to assist schools with the implementation of the New Roman Missal.

Acculturation of Overseas Priests

The Australian Catholic Council for Clergy Life and Ministry (ACCCLM) continues to recognise the importance of effective programs for all who are welcoming overseas priests to their areas. The approved document *Graced by Migration* outlines a clear process to follow. Provincial gatherings will ensure an effective program is being delivered for overseas priests arriving in Australia.

Professional standards issues

Workshops were run in Sydney and Adelaide in 2010 by Dr. Monica Applewhite and were well received both by Catholic Church personnel and by those from other denominations. She is returning to Australia in 2011 for further workshops in July and to present at the ecumenical *Safe as Churches Conference*. She will present in Melbourne on 6 July on “Creating Safe Environments”. In Melbourne on 7 July she will be running an “Extension Workshop” for those who have attended the earlier session and for practitioners. These workshops will be repeated in Brisbane on 11, 12 July. In Sydney there will be a day specifically for priests and male religious on 19 July. The Extension Workshop in Sydney will be on 20 July.

Event to Mark 25 years since Assisi Prayer for Peace

Pope Benedict XVI will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Assisi Prayer for Peace on 27th October. The Commission recognises the significance of this event and encourages dioceses to recognise it. Material will be sent to every diocese to support their engagement in this event.

Bishops Commission for Health and Community Services

The Commission noted Mr Frank Quinlan’s departure from Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) on 8 April 2011 to take up the role of Chief Executive Officer at the Mental Health Council of Australia. The Commission approved the appointment of Mr Paul O’Callaghan as the Executive Director of CSSA for six months commencing 19 April 2011.

Catholic Health Australia

The Bishops Conference sanctioned the creation of a working group to develop a ‘Guide for Governance’ of Catholic health and aged care organisations. The Guide has now been released as a consultation draft, which has been provided separately to Bishops.

Catholic Health Australia (CHA) was invited by the Aged Care Minister to attend the press conference releasing the report of the Productivity Commission outlining recommendations for the future funding of aged care. The report details options to provide universal access to care, a focus on the needs of financially disadvantaged older people, and economic sustainability for not-for-profit providers. CHA appeared before the Commission on 5 April and endorsed the Commission’s proposed reforms.

Federal Government proposals for reform of aged care will have an impact on smaller services, particularly approved providers who operate services of less than 40 beds. CHA is working with 18 religious owned aged care providers likely to be impacted, and CHA is available to aid any aged care service under the governance of a Bishop.

Catholic Earthcare Australia

Catholic Earthcare has completed its pilot phase of the Sustainability Initiative for the Catholic Church in Australia (ASSISI) This program is being offered as an accredited masters level course through the Broken Bay Institute and Newcastle University. Catholic Earthcare is designing an intensive immersion program ‘*Creation and Reconciliation*’ for leaders of Catholic organizations which is scheduled for 13th-21st April, 2012. Catholic

Earthcare is also considering the feasibility of hosting a National event in 2012 to celebrate 10 years of Catholic Earthcare Australia.

Implementation of the New Missal

Across many Dioceses the process for implementation of the new translation of the Roman Missal is now well underway. The decision to introduce the new musical settings of the Ordinary of the Mass has been well received and many parishes have already introduced the new settings into their repertoire. Formation of clergy and people is taking place at various levels and extensive use is being made of the interactive DVD *'Become One Body, One Spirit, in Christ'* and other resources. The National Liturgical Council has constructed a website through the Conference portal that provides resources to assist clergy in parishes. That website can be located either through the homepage of the Conference website or www.romanmissalaustralia.org.au. The National Liturgical Music Board has continued the process of refining the provisional approved list of hymns and songs for liturgical use in Australia. The committee will ultimately determine a collection of between 250 -400 hymns/songs for inclusion in a resource.

Bishop Commission for Mission and Faith Formation

The Commission proposed that Bishop Julian Porteous, Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney, become an interim member of the BCMFF. Additionally, since Bishop Grech was the delegate responsible for Catholic Mission, that Bishop Porteous would take on responsibility for Catholic Mission and become a member of the Home Mission Fund panel.

The New Evangelisation Conference

The Bishops Commission for Mission and Faith Formation through the National Office for Evangelisation is proposing that an evangelisation Conference be held in August 2012, aimed at those working in parishes and dioceses, as well as groups and movements and religious institutions involved directly in evangelisation.

Australian Catholic Media Congress

The second Australian Catholic Media Congress will take place from 30 April – 2 May 2012 at the Menzies Hotel, Sydney. This will happen immediately prior to the Plenary with the hope that as many of the Bishops who would like may attend. Monsignor Paul Tighe of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications has agreed to be our keynote speaker for 2012 Media Congress.

Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life

A mark of Bishop Joe Grech's influence was his responsibility for two of the busiest and most important works of the Commission: migrants and refugees, and youth. Bishop Gerard Hanna has accepted responsibility for migrant and refugee matters and Bishop Christopher Prowse, whilst not a member of the Commission, has graciously agreed to look after youth matters until after the Madrid WYD in August.

Seventh World Meeting of Families

This will be held in Milan, 29 May to 3 June 2012 and the theme is “*The Family: Work and Celebration*”. An invitation has been received from Cardinal Dionigi Tettamanzi of Milan to send a delegation to the World Meeting of Families in Milan next year. Membership of the Australian Catholic Marriage and Family Council, that advises the Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life, has been drawn largely from previous pilgrim couples. The Commission will sponsor one family and bishops are asked to nominate such families from their Dioceses.

Natural Fertility Australia

Negotiations are continuing with the Federal Government for funding for this program following the recent tender process. Federal funding for the Bishops program has been reduced to about 25% of previous funding and the Billings group, which submitted a separate tender, is expected to receive about the same amount. Overall funding will be cut by about 50%.

Statement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday

The Commission has written a Statement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday, (first Sunday in July). This statement will be available on the Conference website and will be sent by email to every diocese and parish.