REPORT

NATIONAL MEETING
DIRECTORS OF CLERGY LIFE AND MINISTRY

MacKillop Place, North Sydney, 18th to 22nd June 2007

Conference theme:
“The Changing Face of the Presbyterate”

PRESENT:
Bishop Don Sproxton (Perth), Directors: John Allen (Sale), John Armstrong (Canberra-G), Martin Ashe (Melbourne), Peter Blanchini (Perth), Kevin Corrigan (Maitland-Newcastle), Kerry Crowley (Cairns), John Daly (Rockhampton), Patrick de Silva (Broome), Ian Dempsey (Adelaide), Paul Finucane (Wilcannia-F), John Girdauskas (Hobart), Stuart Hall (rep. Military), John Kelleher (Darwin), Olix Kenez (Ukrarian), Terry Lyons (Townsville), Paul McDonald (Lismore), John McGrath (Wagga), Brian Moloney (Broken Bay), Michael Morrissey (Geraldton), Adrian Noonan (Port Pirie), Ross O’Brien (Armidale), Chris Roberts (rep. Wollongong), Dave O’Connor (Brisbane), Patrick O’Regan (Bathurst), Vince Redden (Sydney), Barry Ryan (Ballarat), Jeff Scully (Toowoomba), and Des Welladsen (Sandhurst). Frank Devoy (Director of the Office for Clergy Life and Ministry) and Paul Simmons (Coordinator of the Permanent Diaconate). Also present as a guest was Father David O’Hearn (Maitland-Newcastle diocese).

APOLOGIES:
Chris De Souza (Parramatta). There was no priest present from Bunbury Diocese.

ORGANISATION:
The National gathering was organised this year by the Directors of the Queensland Province: Frs Dave O’Connor, Jeff Scully, John Daly, Terry Lyons, and Kerry Crowley.

MONDAY EVENING, OPENING LITURGY 18th June (Kerry Crowley, Chair).

The opening liturgy was celebrated in the Conference room on Monday evening at 8 p.m. Kerry Crowley led the welcome and prayers. During the ceremony, each director was invited to bring forward a photograph that reflected some aspect of his Presbyterate. On presenting it he was invited simply to say one or two words which described a salient feature of the presbyterate depicted by photograph.

TUESDAY 19th June (Terry Lyons, Chair).

Session 1: After Morning Prayer led by Ross O’Brien, the Directors listen to a presentation given by Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Canberra. The Archbishop was invited to ‘unpack’ Section 74 of Pastores dabo vobis, on the nature of the Presbyterate.
In his presentation the Archbishop touched on a range of issues expressing, initially, his support for the Directors and the importance of their work at home: those issues touched on morale, declining numbers, increased workload, high stress levels, loss of confidence, and uncertainty concerning identity. He then spoke of priesthood as a personal decisive vocation based on mystery, communion and mission, identifying *communio* as the very heart of Section 74 of *PDV*. He then identified issues drawn from the notion of *communio*, including the nature of hierarchical communion (different but complementary roles), holiness and separateness (recognised in various way--clerical dress but not clericalism), the priest as mediator, the need for contemplative prayer, praying the Office, the value of continued celibacy; the laicisation of clergy and clericalisation of the laity—the prime focus of the laity being 'out to the world'; also the nature of friendships (over familiarity with parishioners); the good pastor/but not good priest etc, and other issues.

The Archbishop concluded his presentation by outlining six challenges:
1. Need to focus on prayer life: days of recollection, sacrament of penance, spiritual direction;
2. Liturgy and preaching: the importance of doing these responsibly;
3. Asceticism, based on some level of renunciation;
4. Living situations of priests: promoting the possibility of priests living with each other;
5. The importance of lifelong formation -- the seminary is only foundational;
6. Sense of the Church as Church; moving beyond congregationalism.

After the Archbishop’s 55 minute presentation, the Directors had a brief buzz session and some questions. This was followed by morning tea.

Session 2: The Archbishop stayed on while the Directors met in discussion groups to reflect on the Archbishop’s presentation. A representative of each group then gave feedback on the group’s appreciation of the Archbishop’s address. These included Pat O'Regan, Dave O'Connor, Chris Roberts, John Girdauskas, and Des Welladsen. At the end of this session, Kevin Corrigan thanked the Archbishop for his address and made a presentation to him.

Session 3: The AFTERNOON session involved three presentations on “Looking at my Diocese, what does para 74 of Pastores dabo vobis say to me?” Brian Moloney took different aspects of Section 74 and applied them to the development of the presbyterate in the relatively new Diocese of Broken Bay. John Allen explained how various crises had strengthened the presbyterate, particularly support for the Bishop; he also spoke of the various mechanisms where by the priests come together; also that the Bishop regularly attends the regional meetings of his priests. Barry Ryan gave detailed run down on the significant changes that had taken place over the years, and continue to take place in Ballarat diocese. He provided statistics indicating that at present there are sixty-one priests, in 5 years time there will be 30, and in 10 years time 20. He explained that there is a good spirit there and good numbers turn up for Conferences.

The LITURGY for Tuesday was celebrated in the Conference room, John McGrath being the principal celebrant of the Eucharist.

**WEDNESDAY 20th June (John Daly, Chair).**

Wednesday LITURGY began the day with Mass celebrated by Pat O'Regan at 8.30 am in the Conference Room.

Session 4: The MORNING sessions were on Clergy Care: “Health and Wellbeing Issues for Catholic Priests.” The two sessions were presented by Cheryle Davies (Clergy Healthcare Coordinator for the Archdiocese of Brisbane) and by Bernadette Mills (Home Support Program for the Melbourne Archdiocese). Both women are Registered Nurses and have done further study in caring for the aged.
Cheryle Davis spoke in detail from a ‘power point display’ on the nature of health and wellbeing; those priests at high risk; stress and burnout, and signs of both; added pressures; making cultural changes; planning strategies; responding to change and planning for the future.

Session 5: Bernadette Mills provided details of the day-to-day work involved in looking after some 80 retired priests in Melbourne. She spoke of practical issues, often overlooked or not attended to well by priests themselves, including data relating to medications; a record of one’s health, medical interventions, and treatments; details of one’s doctor; having an up-to-date will, an executor and power of attorney; aged care assessment teams, local government agencies and other services, community aged care packages, and the like.

Cheryle’s Davies gave list of 10 things she has learned about priests in care:

1. Care for others – Fr X needs you, I don’t.
2. Individuality of each priest; health is very personal and approached differently by each.
3. Independent – priests like their independence.
4. Generosity of spirit – but they are stingy in relation to themselves.
5. Capable and competent, but have a fear of not being in control when in need of care.
6. Private – priests are public figures and protect their privacy; they shouldn’t be too guarded to the point that no one sees their inner goodness.
7. Conscientious.
8. Resourceful, meaning clever at devising plans to get around necessary supervisory health measures.
10. Priests are a very diverse and interesting group of people.

The AFTERNOON was free for Directors to visit the City and enjoy an evening meal.

THURSDAY 21st June (Dave O’Connor, Chair).

Morning Prayer was led by John Girdauskas

Session 6: The first part of the MORNING was set aside for group discussion on the presbyterate; an exchange of information about this by directors in each group; discussion about the photographs presented during the opening liturgy; and a response to the question: what are we taking away from the gathering? A brief presentation was given at the end of the session by Fr David O’Hearn (a guest from Maitland-Newcastle) on his Diocese’s draft proposal for Clergy Care. Morning tea followed.

Session 7: Frank Devoy presented the Director’s update.

1. He extended congratulation and thanks to the Queensland organisers for their detailed and excellent work, to the various directors who made presentations, and to the leaders of the various liturgies. He also thanked each Diocesan Directors for the fine work being done around Australia, and Bishop Don for his continued warm support.

2. Frank detailed the financial arrangements and the two budgets now in place for the Office for Clergy Life and Ministry and the Australian Council for Clergy Life and Ministry, required by the Australian Bishops Conference. There is only one cheque book and one account for the Australian Bishops (including all Commissions and Councils) and they are in Canberra. All cheques in future are to be made out to the ACBC.

3. Membership of the new Council for Clergy Life and Ministry has been finalised by the Bishops Commission for Church Ministry and approved by the ACBC. It includes: Directors Vince Redden, Ian Dempsey, Dave O’Connor, Peter Bianchini and Martin Ashe; lay persons, Mr Kevin Croker (Canberra, nominated by John Armstrong), Mrs Carmel Crawford (Melbourne, nominated by Martin Ashe), Mr Michael Hogan (Coffs Harbour, nominated by Paul McDonald); Sister Susan
Richardson pbvm (Melbourne) and Fr Paul Cashen msc (Adelaide), both nominated by the ACLRI; Rev Anthony Aspinall (Sale, nominated by John Allan). Rev Paul Simmons was appointed to the Council as a non-voting participant on being appointed recently by the ACBC as the new Coordinator of the Permanent Diaconate for Australia.

4. Frank then explained in detail the cost of the meeting at North Sydney and asked Directors to discuss whether they were prepared pay more in order to return to MacKillop Place next year. This year each director paid $395, this was subsidised by the Office for CLM’s budget with a further $200; the travel cost on equalisation amounted to $328; and should Council Members be present in 2008, it would cost each director a further $150 or more. The total cost, about $1100.

5. Since World Youth Day was set for July 2008, Frank asked the Directors if they would give careful consideration to the date for next year’s National Meeting (perhaps to have it earlier or later than usual).

**Session 8:** The gathering broke up into Regional groups to discuss: the cost of National Meeting and whether to include members of the ACCCLM in 2008, the date for National Meeting for 2008 and where they would like it held, and dates and places for Regional Meetings in 2008. The plenary gathering resumed at 12.30. The Directors agreed to have the ACCCLM members present in 2008, and the following dates and places were decided:


**Session 9:** The CLOSING session took pace at 4pm. Feed back was given in response to the question, “what are we taking away from the gathering” by Paul Finucane, Michael Morrissey, Ian Dempsey, Jeff Scully, and Kerry Crowley, representing each of the discussion groups.

This session was followed by Mass celebrated by Bishop Sproxton in the Mary MacKillop Chapel. The Formal Dinner took place at 6.30pm during which Fr Mark Freeman (retired Chairman of the former Commission and former Director for Hobart) was thanked by Dave O’Connor. Congratulations were extended to Paul McDonald, celebrating his 25th anniversary of priesthood, to Frank Devoy, celebrating his 40th, and to Don Sproxton, celebrating his 30th. The Directors left after breakfast Friday morning.

*Frank Devoy,  
Director,  
Office for Clergy Life and Ministry*