

**Report: National Conference of Diocesan Commissions
for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations
30th October 2009 – 1st November 2009**

The Theme of the Conference was Speak...Listen...Build a civilization of Love.

The Conference commenced with a welcome address by Bishop Michael Putney at St. Leo's College, University of Queensland. He gave some of the foundational history of these National Conferences and said the aim was to provide formation for those involved in ecumenism. He went on to say that some say ecumenism has 'run out of steam' or speak of the 'winter of ecumenism'. He suggested that perhaps it is more that we needed a winter in order to have spring. There also seems a renewed interest in ecumenism as a result of the need for inter-religious dialogue.

This was followed by a Public Lecture presented by Msgr Juan Usma Gomez from the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity [PCPCU]. The topic of his address was *Pentecostal and Evangelical Dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church: the current situation and hopes for the future.*

Msgr Gomez asked us some challenging questions. Eg; 'Who is your favourite Church to work with?' 'How can I say I love one member of my family more than another?' The Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches are the youngest of our brothers and sisters in Christ and have loads of energy and enthusiasm yet there seems to be a great mistrust and even competition between us. We need a clear sighted, thoughtful vision of each other. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves 'are we truly disciples of Jesus Christ?' Do our hearts truly burn within us? Where is our passion?

It should be noted that after the Catholic/Orthodox Churches and the Protestant Churches the Pentecostals are the third largest group. They exist in every country and are attracting our youth. The youth seem to be seeking two things – Spiritual Experience and authentic authority. So it is more pastoral motivation rather than theological issues. He stated that 90% who leave the church are going to Pentecostal Groups. Why?

So what motivates our Pentecostals and Evangelicals? They are interested in restoration and revival of the church. They do not want to form a 'new church'. They see the Spirit restoring the church to its original power with the spiritual gifts of prophecy and healing: *Jesus saves, baptises, sanctifies, heals and will come again.* So is it a question of 'Mission or Maintenance'? Our youth are hungering for an experience of God. This experience is pastoral. There are three elements: *Believing – Behaving and Belonging.* So Pentecostals see themselves as truly Spirit driven Christians and Catholics not necessarily so!

We need to share our common spiritual experience. Pentecostals recognised that Vatican Council II was the Spirit at work and witnessed the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Establishing dialogue between Pentecostals and Catholics is essential for unity and communion with other Christians if we truly believe that the church is the body of Christ.

How to proceed?

- Create right conditions
- Don't use the word 'ecumenism' rather speak of Christian Unity
- Grass roots movement must be open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit.
- Listen carefully to what the Spirit is saying as this is the voice of the church.

Msgr Gomez in closing drew our attention to the Catholic Pentecostal International Dialogue Report. "*On Becoming a Christian: Insights from Scripture and the Patristic Writings*".



Another session was devoted to *Current issues in Inter-religious Dialogue*. The speaker was Bishop Christopher Prowse (PCID/Sale). After mentioning the church's teaching in "*Nostra Aetate*" He made five quick points:

- Healing of Memories - Burden of history eg Crusades; Inter-religious Marriages face enormous challenges. What are the implications?
- Speaking the truth – Regensburg issues. Reciprocity eg Australia v Indonesian experience. He stated that it is worth noting that 25% of the Muslim world community actually live in the Asian Region. Dubai is a different world to our experience here in Australia.
- Cultural Background to our interlocutors eg sons and daughters of the Enlightenment not of the Reformation. Stressed the 'heresy of sameness' – "*We are not a minestrone soup, we are a salad*"!
- Stressed the importance of knowing one's own religion and autobiographical catholic history to enable good dialogue and for the peace of the world.
- Motivation is about peace making. It is about social cohesion and a new way of proclamation.

Respondents were Fr John Dupuche, Sr Trish Madigan and Fr Patrick McInerney.



These are just two highlights. One of the great benefits of this conference was the opportunity it provided for Diocesan Commissions to share stories and learn from one another. It also gives much encouragement to continue with the endeavours for both ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue.

It is hoped that copies of the papers will be placed on the ACBC website: Go to www.catholic.org.au, then Commissions – BCEIR, and at the bottom of that page **Related Documents**.

Mrs. Lorraine Murphy ocds
Chair – Commission for Ecumenism & Interfaith Dialogue
Email: ecumenism@parra.catholic.org.au