

# The January 2012 Plenary meeting of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference

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*Prepared by the Office for Media and Communication*

The January Plenary meeting took place at St John Vianney Seminary in Pretoria from 24 to 31 January 2012. In attendance were 28 Bishops, 2 Apostolic Administrators and 1 Vicar General. During the Plenary, the Auxilliary Bishop of Juba in the Republic of South Sudan was present as was the Secretary General of the Bishops of South Sudan, accompanied by Mr John Ashworth, Sudan Advisor. A delegation from the Zimbabwe Bishops' conference also spent a day with the SACBC

## **24 January 2012.**

As is custom, the January plenary opened with the Mass of the Holy Spirit, celebrated by Archbishop Tlhagale. The homilist, Bishop Risi, reminded the Bishops to be 'of the mind and heart of Christ' as the foundation of all their work, and their lives.

After Mass, the Justice and Peace Department Land desk presented a theological reflection on Land and land reform. This contentious issue in Southern Africa requires more than lip service – it cannot be left to haphazard implementation. Archbishop Tlhagale, Minister Dereck Hanekom and Professor Shadrack Gutto engaged with the text in a public presentation.

While the Church has made both important practical and theological steps in dealing with Land issues, much more needed to be done.

**HYPELINK**

## **25 January 2012**

At the official opening of the working sessions, Archbishop Tlhagale paid tribute to Bishop Michael Coleman of Port Elizabeth, who had died after a short illness. He remembered his contribution in finance, seminaries and Professional conduct.

Bishop Mogale Nkhumishe, who had resigned as Bishop of Polokwane (Pietersburg) was also remembered for his extensive contribution to the Conference as Bishop of Witbank and then of Polokwane. The Bishops wished him well.

The *Charge d'Affaires* of the Holy See, Msgr Eloi Santiago de Santiago spoke of the Holy See's desire to have a Nuncio appointed by April 2012.

In his Opening address, Archbishop Tlhagale spoke of the Post Synodal exhortation *Africae Munus* issued by Pope Benedict XVI after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Assembly of the Synod for Africa. In his address he mentioned 13 points that needed consideration by the Conference if the Church was to continue

shaping the world, while preserving and developing a Catholic Identity. He proposed the document as a guideline for mission in Africa and particularly in Southern Africa

What had been responded to:

- Forming Consciences
- Opening the world to Africa's religious sense
- Being a sentinel when the temptation was to mortgage the future for the present.
- Formation and defence of family,
- Engaging the Youth
- Protecting the Catholic vision of Life
- Respect and stewardship of creation
- Good Governance and transparency
- Education
- Healthcare
- Information technology – with its pros and cons.

What needed a deeper, more considered response:

- More work on African Traditional reconciliation ceremonies which might open all to a deeper sense of Christ as reconciliation.
- More work on Inculturation so as to gain a better understanding of how the Blood of Christ makes us whole and a community freed from division.
- We need to seriously work on our respect for the elderly within our communities – for without their anchor in history and tradition, we are a society that forgets esteem, support and love.
- Where are the Men and what are we doing to ensure the men in our church communities have a place? What is their role? Do we give them mission and responsibility in being the leaders of the household – first leaders to God?
- Our women are the backbone of the Church, a huge unmobilised army. We need more effective engagement.
- Our Department of Evangelization needs a complete revamp to serve the needs of our community.
- We need greater commitment to our Children – to their safety, their place in the Church, their education and their lives as gift to humanity. We cannot tolerate anything that goes against their protection.

In this way, we begin to forge a new Africa, a new Dawn as a church that is the sign and safeguard of the human person's transcendence. The reason for our hope is within us.

### **The Secretary General's report.**

This was Fr Vincent Brennan's last report as Secretary General. He will retire at the end of February. In his report he spoke of the new 'Safeguarding our Children' proposals that the Conference needed to adopt. He also mentioned the Pan African Congress of the Catholic Laity due to take place in

Yaounde in Sept 2012. Evangelization was also a major theme, with the Year of Faith and the Synod on the New Evangelization needing serious study. Ongoing Formation requires a serious push in the conference territory as does Vocation work.

### **Supporting Priests and Vocations to the Priesthood.**

The Conference cannot continue the work of the Gospel without Priests. Over the last 3 years, a research programme has been conducted into the life of priests. The generally positive initial findings were presented to the Bishops who have asked for departments to study the impact of the study on areas such as formation of candidates for the Priesthood.

The SACBC Conference Vocations director, Fr Mosebetsi Mokoena, asked the Bishops not appoint newly ordained priests to the work of discerning and encouraging vocations as this work required stability and prudence.

### **Catechesis**

The Bishops discussed a revised Statement on Catechesis and approved its promulgation. A consultation was planned to bring together all those involved in Catechesis in Formation work and Diocese to broaden discussion on the situation of Catechesis in the Conference. This group will also be asked to nominate a committee for the evaluation of Catechetical material currently in use in the Dioceses. A Catechetical Centre for the Conference was also suggested.

### **Liturgy**

The Liturgy department reported on the reception and implementation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Roman Missal in English. Generally, the reception had gone well.

The department will continue discussion on a new structure for English music in the conference and its role and scope of work.

The character, suitability, training and role of exorcists was discussed as an ongoing work of the Department.

## **Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> February.**

### **The Seminaries**

The Bishops congratulated Fr Molewe Machingoane on his appointment as Rector of St John Vianney Seminary. Both he and Fr David Rowan SJ of St Francis Xavier Seminary in Cape Town presented a few highlights including the fact that students were reading more and that St John Vianney will reach capacity in 2012. Sadly, the conference had to increase tuition fees to R42 000 per student per year. The Bishops also warmly welcomed the decision of the Bishop of Kimberley to send his students to the Conference seminary.

### **Finance:**

The Conference remained in a difficult financial position, but the efforts at provisioning the SACBC Foundation had yielded a R7million investment for 2011. It was agreed that Dioceses that had not taken up a once-off collection for this sustainability fund In August 2012.

## **A Global Ethical Campaign**

Mr Michael Hippler of Misereor in Germany presented the possibility of a 'Global ethical Campaign' for 2015. The Bishops Conference strongly endorsed this effort to re-found International interaction on a common concern for the human person and the Environment.

## **Youth Office:**

Fr Sammy Mabusela and Sr Victoria Sibisi presented bold and innovated plans for the Conference Youth Office, including skill training and the use of vacant land for the sustainability of families. After extensive discussion of the many plans, the Bishops asked for three priority areas to be identified where pilot programmes could be run.

## **Friday 27<sup>th</sup> January**

### **Catholic Healthcare Association (CATHCA)**

Mrs Yvonne Morgan led the bishops in a discussion on the place and role of Catholic Healthcare in Southern Africa. The consensus reached was that while such initiatives as the National Health Insurance (NHI) were very positive, these would take a significant amount of time and energy to implement. During the transition phase, there was a very real danger of basic or primary healthcare floundering. The Parish nurse and Health desk programmes were strongly recommended as the Church's continued response to Healthcare needs.

### **Relations with other Churches, Ecclesial Communities and other faiths.**

The Right Rev. Joe Seoka, Anglican Bishop of Pretoria and President of the Southern African Council of Churches, together with his SACC Council paid a courtesy visit to the Bishops. The SACC's direction and leadership were frankly discussed as was the financial position. It was agreed that stronger leadership be provided on all levels of the Council.

## **Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> January**

### **The Synod on the New Evangelization.**

The morning started with an extensive presentation on the Synod for the New Evangelization and the response that the Southern African Bishops will make. Much of the document has been submitted to Rome and as such will only be available as it is processed and redacted by the Synod Committee. Cardinal Napier and Archbishop William Slattery were appointed the official delegates to the Synod.

### **The Pastoral Consultation.**

Strongly tied to both the Year of Faith and the Synod on the New Evangelization is the proposed Pastoral Consultation. Fr Barney McAleer presented on Phase 2 of the programme, which had a much wider reach and response than phase 1. The programme is still on the go and a simple questionnaire to assess the response was provided.

In the afternoon, the Bishops received reports on:

Swaziland – nothing has changed. The situation is very difficult but the church remains committed to a win-win situation for all involved

Botswana – this tiny nation was punching well above its weight in so many areas- from the number of vocations to the quality of its athletes. HIV & AIDS remains a concern, but universal access to ART for citizens was helping the situation

### **Sudan and South Sudan.**

6 months after independence, the situation in South Sudan was precarious because of the attitude of the much diminished Sudan. Oil shipments had been stopped due to the extortion of the Republic of Sudan. Tribal clashes between nomads and pastoralists were flaring up and probably being fuelled by groupings that benefit from ongoing war and instability.

The Auxiliary Bishop of Juba thanked the SACBC and DHPI for their ongoing concern and engagement in South Sudan.

### **Zimbabwe**

The delegation from the Zimbabwe Bishops' Conference told the Bishops of the SACBC that the situation in Zimbabwe is not improving. There are signs of militia being mobilised as well as increasing violence. One question was asked about disaster preparedness if Zimbabwe should once again have failed elections. This requires engagement on a number of levels by both conferences.

## **Sunday 29 January was a free day for the Bishops.**

### **Monday 30 January**

#### **HIV & AIDS**

Sr Alison Munro OP presented on the continuing work of the HIV & AIDS response of the Catholic Church in Southern Africa. Funding remains a concern as does good governance, but with strict accounting principles and frequent audits in place, the level of loss is low.

Of concern is the transition of the PEPFAR grants to the State. Some areas work well and some areas are a battleground. This will require ongoing attention and engagement.

The Office will scale back over time as sites and management of drugs are moved to the State.

#### **Catholic Institute of Education.**

Mr Mark Potterton addressed the Bishops on the viability, safety and compliance of Catholic Boarding Schools. A document detailing research undertaken by the CIE into many schools was presented.

The difficulty in interpreting and getting compliance by the state with contracts for Public schools on Private Property was also discussed. This problem impacts on the relationship between schools (often Public Schools on Private property) and boarding establishments.

## Child Protection

Fr Vincent Brennan presented a detailed Child protection policy proposal to the Conference. Entitled 'Safeguarding our children', the document draws heavily on the Child Protection Policies of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

The Conference accepted the Policy in principle and asked that it be worked on before the May 2012 Administrative Board meeting.

## The Theological Advisory Committee.

The TAC advised the Bishops on the validity of the Baptisms of other Churches. This is a very sticky process as getting clear information from other Churches is not easy. The Trinitarian formula for baptism, with the intention to do what the Church intends remains the only measure of a valid baptism.

A number of other issues were presented as part of the Committee's report, including an ongoing scope of work.

## Other Highlights of the January 2012 Plenary Session of the Bishops' Conference.

- The Bishops of the eastern Cape assisted by the CIE asked for a Statement to be issued on the Chaotic situation of Education in the Eastern Cape Province.
- The Bishops will have a 2 and a half day Study session in early May on
  - *Africae Munus* led by the Justice and Peace Department
  - *The Care of the Priest* led by the Ongoing Formation Committee
  - *The Year of Faith 50 years after the Second Vatican Council.*
- Awestruck, a Catholic Social Media Platform was launched with a very dynamic presentation by the Awestruck.co.za team. This platform seeks to engage Catholics to be proud of their faith and to become more supportive of their Church.
- The Bishops welcomed the granting of both a frequency and broadcast Licence to Radio Veritas. A Launch in the first quarter of 2012 was eagerly anticipated.
- The Bishops designated May and October 2012 as 'counting months' for the conference. As the State Census data no longer includes Faith affiliation, this will be a good way to assess how many people are attending Churches in the Conference territory.