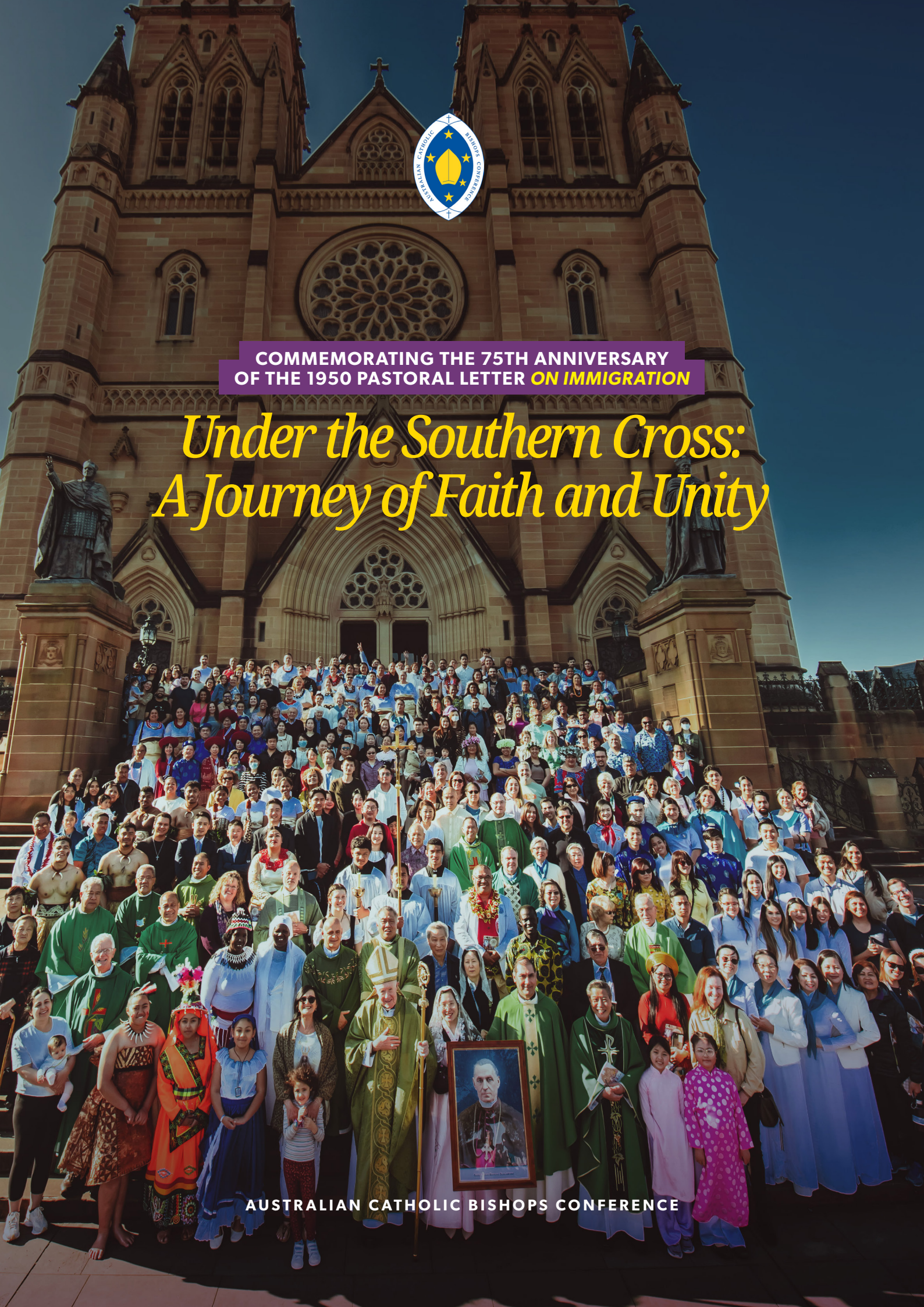


COMMEMORATING THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE 1950 PASTORAL LETTER *ON IMMIGRATION*

Under the Southern Cross: A Journey of Faith and Unity

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Under the Southern Cross: A Journey of Faith and Unity is published by the Bishops Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry, a commission of the **Australian Catholic Bishops Conference**.

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PREFACE

Immigration has long been a cornerstone of Australia's growth, diversity, and resilience.

As a nation built on migration, we have welcomed people from every corner of the globe—each bringing unique gifts, cultures, and faith traditions that have enriched our communities.

The Catholic Church has long stood in solidarity with migrants and refugees, advocating for their dignity and inclusion.

Many of our parishes, schools, and charities have been shaped by the contributions of immigrant families who have helped build the social and spiritual fabric of this country.

In the Gospel, we are reminded to welcome the stranger and care for those in need. Immigration is not merely an economic or political issue—it is a moral one. It speaks to our values of compassion, justice, and hospitality. Over the decades, migrants have revitalised our cities, sustained our rural communities and strengthened our Church.

As we look to the future, let us continue to embrace those who seek refuge and opportunity here, recognising in them the face of Christ. Their stories are now part of our shared story, and their hopes are woven into the promise of Australia.

Archbishop Christopher Prowse
CHAIR, BISHOPS COMMISSION FOR EVANGELISATION, LAITY AND MINISTRY

COMMEMORATING THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1950 PASTORAL LETTER *ON IMMIGRATION*

Under the Southern Cross: A Journey of Faith and Unity

"In the inscrutable ways of Divine Providence, Australia becomes today, a sanctuary, a shelter, a home for thousands of the homeless, stateless, persecuted peoples of the old world." [1]

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the release of *On Immigration*, the Pastoral Letter issued by the Australian Archbishops and Bishops in 1950, offering a timely opportunity for us today to reflect on our attitudes towards those seeking a new home in our country.

In response to the unprecedented influx of migrants from southern and Eastern Europe which occurred in the period between 1945 and 1965—resulting in two million migrants arriving on Australian shores in that time—the Australian Archbishops and Bishops urged Catholics to embrace their responsibility to welcome and support these new settlers, as an opportunity to "spread the Kingdom of Christ within this Continent that was once called the land of the Holy Ghost".

The bishops called for "great generosity" and "true unselfishness" to be the "guiding lights" for Catholics as they assisted the new settlers to build a home "beneath the Southern Cross".

The letter, issued in January 1950, with the instruction that it "be read in all Churches on the First Sunday of February" called on Australian Catholics to exercise their moral duty to extend kindness, practical assistance, and hospitality to new arrivals, especially those who had been displaced by war and persecution. The bishops highlighted the importance of treating immigrants as fellow Australians, and urged Australians to help them overcome language barriers, understand their customs, and integrate them into parish and community life:

"To the thousands of new Catholics, seeking home and shelter in our Land, the welcoming hand of their fellow-Catholics and brothers in Christ must be readily extended. Patience, kindliness, sympathy and practical help must be rendered to all unfailingly and in God's name." [2]

And never forgetting that "the future of the Church is in Her children", every endeavour was to be made "to give our thousands of new children that Christian education in our own Catholic schools that is at once the strength and the glory of the Australian church". [3]

Their words remain just as applicable to us today. Once again, our nation serves as a sanctuary and refuge for thousands seeking a new life—whether fleeing hardships in their homelands or pursuing the opportunities, freedom, and prosperity that Australia offers, and we are called again to extend the hand of welcome to migrants; "patience, kindliness, sympathy and practical help must be rendered to all unfailingly and in God's Name".



Today, around a third of our population—8.2 million people— have been born in a country outside Australia. The origins of migrants have expanded to include countries from around the globe, such as China, the Philippines, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Myanmar, among many others.

Unfortunately, the lived experience of migrants in Australia has not always been a positive one. Despite significant progress in fostering a multicultural society, racism still persists among some of us who view others as being 'different' or 'other' within our nation. And in today's political climate, as conflicts from abroad spill into our own nation, we are witnessing growing tensions, division, and unrest, which are threatening the harmony of our communities.

And yet the bishops' message from 1950 continues to echo across the decades, reminding us once again of the eternal call to welcome Jesus in welcoming the stranger. "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40)

As Saint John Paul II exclaimed:

"How can the baptised claim to welcome Christ if they close the door to the foreigner who comes knocking? 'If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?'" (1 Jn 3: 17) [4]

In Australia in 2025, just as Catholics were called in 1950, we are called to welcome, support, and embrace those who arrive from other lands. We must "regard it as a solemn duty to help in the placing and absorbing of immigrants into our community and in making them feel at home amongst us". [5] As St Paul reminds us, we should "not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2)

Migrants have made an immeasurable contribution to our nation, shaping and enriching our society in profound ways. We are the beneficiaries of their diverse cultural traditions, stories, and deep wisdom, as well as the resilience and lived experiences they bring. Their presence has not only strengthened the fabric of our communities but has also deepened our understanding of what it means to be human. Through their contributions, Australia has become a more welcoming, vibrant, and flourishing society.

This timeless call to hospitality and generosity remains as vital today as it was seventy-five years ago. In Pope Leo's words, this call today is for us to become a living witness to hope and to build a community that recognise migrants and refugees as brother and sister, part of a family which they can express their talents and participate fully in their new community life. [6]

REFERENCES

[1] Australian Archbishops and Bishops. *Pastoral Letter On Immigration*, January 1950.

[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid

[4] John Paul II. Message for World Migration Day, 2000.

[5] Australian Archbishops and Bishops. *Pastoral Letter On Immigration*, January 1950.

[6] Leo XIV. Message for the 111th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2025.

ISSUED JANUARY 1950

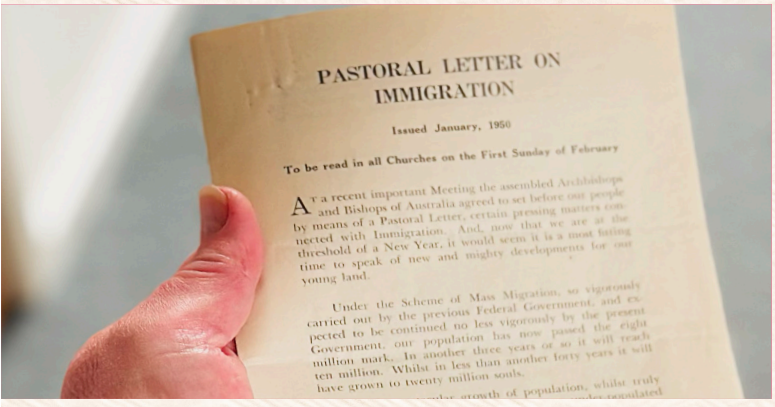
1950 Pastoral Letter on Immigration

Read in all Churches on the First Sunday of February 1950.

At a recent important Meeting the assembled Archbishops and Bishops of Australia agreed to set before our people by means of a Pastoral Letter, certain pressing matters connected with Immigration. And, now that we are at the threshold of a New Year, it would seem it is a most fitting time to speak of new and mighty developments for our young land.

Under the Scheme of Mass Migration, so vigorously carried out by the previous Federal Government, and expected to be continued no less vigorously by the present Government, our population has now passed the eight million mark. In another three years or so it will reach ten million. Whilst in less than another forty years it will have grown to twenty million souls.

Such a spectacular growth of population, whilst truly necessary and most beneficial for our under-populated country, carries with it great responsibilities for all, and, for our Catholic people, added burdens as well.


PASTORAL LETTER ON IMMIGRATION

Issued January, 1950

To be read in all Churches on the First Sunday of February

At a recent important Meeting the assembled Archbishops and Bishops of Australia agreed to set before our people by means of a Pastoral Letter, certain pressing matters connected with Immigration. And, now that we are at the threshold of a New Year, it would seem it is a most fitting time to speak of new and mighty developments for our young land.

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Since the future of the Church is in Her children, therefore must every endeavour be made to give our thousands of new children that Christian education in our own Catholic schools that is at once the strength and the glory of the Australian Church.

Schools, Churches, Orphanages, Hospitals and every kind of Catholic Institution will have demands made upon them and these demands will have to be met by the enlargement of present buildings and the erection of many new ones.

All this will take heavier toll of our energy and our means. But what a God-given opportunity is thus presented us in our time to spread the Kingdom of Christ within this Continent that was once called "the land of the Holy Ghost."

Demand will be made also, and especially, upon our youth and upon their spirit of renunciation and self-sacrifice. Priests, Brothers and Nuns will have a wider field than hitherto for their unquestioning and untiring labour in the vineyard of the Lord.

In the inscrutable ways of Divine Providence, Australia becomes today, a sanctuary, a shelter, a home for thousands of the homeless, stateless, persecuted peoples of the old world.

History repeats itself to show again the divine character of God's Church. For when She is attacked, suffers and is driven from one land, she sets forth for new lands, and, with perennial life, gains in the New what She lost in the Old.

To the thousands of new Catholics, seeking home and shelter in our Land, the welcoming

hand of their fellow Catholics and brothers in Christ must readily be extended. Patience, kindliness, sympathy and practical help must be rendered to all unfailingly and in God's Name.

Our Holy Father, the Pope, speaks of this as a call for Christian charity, the response to which, shall inspire hope in His heart - the sorrowing heart of the Common Father.

Great generosity and true unselfishness, then, must be the guiding lights to our people in their unremitting aid to our New Settlers, who would build a home beneath the Southern Cross.

By genuine friendliness, helpful advice and warm endeavours towards happy social intermingling shall they make more easy and happy the assimilation of our New Settlers into a way of life that is Catholic and Australian.

Though accommodation may be desperately short everywhere, yet it is here too, and, especially, that there is given a wide field for the practice of true, indeed, heroic unselfishness.

Let our Catholic people vie with each other in helping those who come amongst us, and of whom, many suffered much for the cause of Faith and Freedom. At long last the dream of reunited family-life seems possible of realization for these stricken, harassed ones. Help them that they may know again in this life the joy of reunion and the comfort and warmth of home.

Others there are who, coming from the lands of the ancestors of most of us, would start a new life here and give to their children the prospect of prosperity, just as our ancestors gave us the possibility of growing and prospering this rich young land.

For the want of a nominator many such prospective New Australians are delayed in coming here. Like those from Europe they have much to give us, and we need them. Let us, each and every one, see what we can do to nominate New Settlers. Let us, in each locality, investigate the avenues of employment so that openings shall be found for the many splendid young people who ·will be brought here under the Government's scheme of unnominated group migration.

To the young and the not so young of the Mother Countries, to all of all lands who seek the security and freedom that Australia offers, let us be generous. And once they are here let us seek to make them feel at home. We shall kneel beside them in the Church and approach with them to the Altar rails. Let this Holy Bond unite us with them not only in the common participation of the sacred privileges of our mutual Faith, but again outside the Church door, at our parish functions, in their homes, and in ours. Let us greet them, welcome them, share with them and bear with them.

To sum up - let every Catholic regard it as a solemn duty to help in the placing and absorbing of immigrants into our community and in making them feel at home amongst us.

In particular:

- Have sympathy towards them: do not think or speak of them as foreigners; they are now true Australians who are prepared to love Australia as their new Country and Australians as their new fellow-citizens.
- Remember that their language difficulty may be a handicap but should not be a barrier between them and us. Help them to overcome their difficulties and have patience with them in their efforts to learn.
- Be tolerant of their customs which differ from our own. In time they will learn our ways and adopt them. Help them to understand our customs.
- As some of them move from place to place



Sister Margherita at the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau, Sydney, speaking with South American girls. (PHOTO by JOHN A. MULLIGAN)

or come to the Parish before the Pastor may know, introduce them to the Parish Priest as soon as possible.

- Be on the alert for strangers coming to the Parish Church and make it your business to speak to them and make them feel welcome.
- Inform your Parish Priest or local immigration committee of openings for employment and/or of accommodation available.

The future of Australia, the plight of Europe's homeless peoples, the needs and aspirations of our kinsmen abroad, all are a challenge to our patriotism, our charity, our Catholicity.

Let us give of our best. We shall be enriched for our hospitality. We shall show gratitude to God for His wondrous gifts to us, of Faith, of Freedom, of Unconquered Homeland.

Authorised by the Archbishops and Bishops of Australia whose names are appended:

- NORMAN THOMAS CARDINAL GILROY, Archbishop of Sydney.
- JAMES DUHIG, Archbishop of Brisbane.
- DANIEL MANNIX, Archbishop of Melbourne.
- REDMOND PRENDIVILLE, Archbishop of Perth.

- JUSTIN SIMONDS, Coadjutor Archbishop of Melbourne.
- MATTHEW BEOVICH, Archbishop of Adelaide.
- ERNEST TWEEDY, Archbishop of Hobart.
- TERENCE McGUIRE, Archbishop ·of Canberra and Goulburn.
- PATRICK O'DONNELL, Coadjutor Archbishop of Brisbane.
- JOHN McCARTHY, Bishop of Sandhurst.
- RICHARD RYAN, C.M., Bishop of Sale.
- JOHN NORTON, Bishop of Bathurst,
- EDMUND GLEESON, C.SS.R., Bishop of Maitland.
- JAMES O'COLLINS, Bishop of Ballarat.
- PATRICK FARRELLY, Bishop of Lismore.
- THOMAS FOX, Bishop of Wilcannia-Forbes.
- OTTO RAIBLE, P.S.M., Vicar Apostolic of Kemberley.
- FRANCIS HENSCHKE, Bishop of Wagga Wagga.
- HUGH RYAN, Bishop of Townsville.
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- THOMAS McCABE, Bishop of Port Augusta.
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- ANDREW TYNAN, Bishop of Rockhampton.
- BERNARD STEWART, Coadjutor Bishop of Sandhurst.
- ERIS O'BRIEN, Auxiliary Bishop to His Eminence the Cardinal.
- JOHN TOOHEY, Coadjutor Bishop of Maitland.
- EDWARD DOODY, Bishop of Armidale.
- GUILFORD YOUNG, Auxiliary Bishop to Archbishop McGuire.
- THOMAS CAHILL, Bishop of Cairns.
- JOHN O'LOUGHLIN, M.S.C., Bishop of Darwin.
- ANSELM CATALAN, O.S.B., Abbot Nullius of New Norcia.

Karibu *Huānyíng*



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