



CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

ENGLAND AND WALES

Spring 2011 Plenary Resolutions

9-12 MAY 2011, HINSLEY HALL, LEEDS

The National Commemoration of the Papal Visit

To commemorate the first anniversary of the visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the United Kingdom and the Beatification of Blessed John Henry Newman, the Bishops' of England and Wales will celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving on Sunday 18 September (venue to be confirmed). Afterwards the Bishops will convene to recall their historic meeting with the Holy Father at St Mary's College, Oscott.

Bishops' Conference Structures and Framework for the prioritisation of future work

The Bishops' Conference reviewed their aims and objectives for the next three to five years. The source of these aims and objectives are the vision and priorities found in the teaching which His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI set forth during his visit to the United Kingdom in 2010. They are also rooted in the requirement of the core work of Episcopal Conferences set out by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church.

In their strategic thinking, the Bishops are taking account of the opportunities and challenges which arise from the contemporary cultural and social context within England and Wales and the need for the 'New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith' which will be the theme of the 2012 Synod of Bishops in Rome.

The Bishops ask the General Secretary to progress the development of their strategic framework for further consideration at the next meeting of the Standing Committee.

International Eucharistic Congress, Dublin 2012

The Bishops' Conference encourage the participation of the Church in England and Wales at the 50th International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin, 10-17 June 2012. The Bishops will appoint a diocesan co-ordinator/delegate (priest or lay person) in their dioceses to co-ordinate this participation through the Bishops' National Delegate and in collaboration with the Irish Episcopal Conference. The task of the diocesan coordinator/delegate will be to raise awareness of the Eucharistic Congress in their diocese and to assist those who would like to attend.

Consultation on Synod of Bishops' 2012 Lineamenta: "The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith"

The Bishops' Conference asks the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis to co-ordinate the process of consultation on the Synod of Bishops' 2012 Lineamenta and to supervise the production of a response on behalf of the Conference.

Catholic Witness - Friday Penance

By the practice of penance every Catholic identifies with Christ in his death on the cross. We do so in prayer, through uniting the sufferings and sacrifices in our lives with those of Christ's passion; in fasting, by dying to self in order to be close to Christ; in almsgiving, by demonstrating our solidarity with the sufferings of Christ in those in need. All three forms of penance form a vital part of Christian living. When this is visible in the public arena, then it is also an important act of witness.

Every Friday is set aside by the Church as a special day of penance, for it is the day of the death of our Lord. The law of the Church requires Catholics to abstain from meat on Fridays, or some other form of food, or to observe some other form of penance laid down by the Bishops' Conference.

The Bishops wish to re-establish the practice of Friday penance in the lives of the faithful as a clear and distinctive mark of their own Catholic identity. They recognise that the best habits are those which are acquired as part of a common resolve and common witness. It is important that all the faithful be united in a common celebration of Friday penance.

Respectful of this, and in accordance with the mind of the whole Church, the Bishops' Conference wishes to remind all Catholics in England and Wales of the obligation of Friday Penance. The Bishops have decided to re-establish the practice that this should be fulfilled by abstaining from meat. Those who cannot or choose not to eat meat as part of their normal diet should abstain from some other food of which they regularly partake. This is to come into effect from Friday 16 September 2011 when we will mark the anniversary of the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United Kingdom.

Many may wish to go beyond this simple act of common witness and mark each Friday with a time of prayer and further self-sacrifice. In all these ways we unite our sacrifices to the sacrifice of Christ, who gave up his very life for our salvation.

English Baccalaureate

This statement applies to schools in England only.

All children and young people deserve an excellent broad and balanced education that will help them grow to their full human potential and contribute to the common good of society. This means that the curriculum must likewise be broad and balanced so that all have the opportunity to make real progress in a variety of subjects.

We are therefore hopeful that the "English Baccalaureate" (E-Bac) measure will help to further the learning of children and young people in a variety of subjects. English and Maths are clearly

indispensable elements of any curriculum in England, and we strongly support any efforts to raise standards in Science. Similarly, we would hope all students will have the opportunity to study a Foreign Language and important humanities subjects like History and Geography.

We have very serious reservations about what is omitted from the E-Bac, namely Religious Education (RE). We recognise that RE is, and will continue to be, a compulsory subject in all schools, not least Catholic schools. However, lessening the incentive for schools to offer RE as a subject examined at GCSE will inevitably have implications for the quality and availability of RE offered.

Any subject studied in our schools should be taught to the highest standard, and the best quality RE opens up the mind to be receptive to other subjects and gives them context, not only in the present but in the future. It is a vitally important subject because it allows young people to explore critically and make sense not only of their own faith but of the questions concerning faith, truth and meaning in the society in which they live. At a time of increasing religious and cultural illiteracy, effectively to downgrade RE seems unwise to say the least. We therefore urge the government to reconsider its decision and include RE in the E-Bac.