



Interculturation of Clergy in Australia (2020)

Preamble

Like Australian society more broadly, our Church is culturally forming in many new ways. By way of example, in 2009, the largest five groupings of overseas-born clergy were:

- Irish (113)
- New Zealander (109)
- Vietnamese (75)
- Italian (34)
- Solomon Islands (32).

By 2014, the largest five groupings of overseas-born clergy were:

- Indian (150)
- Vietnamese (82)
- Filipino (73)
- Irish (68)
- Nigerian (37).

Based on the high number of visa applications handled by the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office in recent years, it is predicted that the next census will demonstrate further significant change.

As a receiving church, the Australian Church is committed to acculturation as a process whereby members of one cultural group come to understand the customs, habits and behaviours of their new cultural home. This process demands mutual exchange, appreciation and understanding by all—both the newly arrived and those welcoming them.

What is meant by 'interculturality' encompasses all of this, but it is deeply grounded in the Gospel vision of the Kingdom or Reign of God as a new Pentecost, where 'in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power' (Acts 2:11).

In the words of Anthony Gittins:

'Intercultural living demands graciousness, diplomacy, compromise, mutual respect, serious dialogue, and the development of a common and sustaining vision. A vision is something that inspires the common effort of a lifetime and also provides appropriate means to achieve a desired end.'

—Anthony J. Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2015), p. 5

It is hoped that this document can assist such a vision.

Introduction

The Church in Australia has always been a receiving church, dependant on the gifts of clergy from other countries to further its missionary and pastoral activity. The positive contributions of missionary clergy, and the intercultural context of ministry more generally for all clergy, also involve challenges and risks that should be addressed honestly and effectively. The quality of reception and support for missionary priests is the responsibility of the entire Church, including multigenerational Australian Catholics, both lay and ordained. The experience over many years of the Church in Australia highlights the need to engage more effectively with the selection, orientation, induction and ongoing formation of clergy from overseas (for the purposes of this document, 'missionary clergy') so they may be enabled to thrive in their ministry.

Church life and ordained ministry in Australia are now characterised by 'interculturality'. Australian parishes are home to various ethnic communities, so locally formed ministers must adapt to devotional customs different from their own. Parishes are called to welcome missionary clergy into their communities and to help prepare them for life in Australia. The presbyterate in every diocese is enriched by the presence of clergy from different cultures.

The purpose of this paper is to provide recommendations for consideration, with links to suggested resources, in order to facilitate a more consistent approach to the selection, orientation, induction and ongoing formation of missionary clergy.

Many of the recommendations in this paper are drawn in the first place from those found in the *Acculturation of Overseas Priests* documents produced

by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) in [2005](#) and [2008](#). The best-practice indicators are also supported by the [International Priests Project: Summary Report](#) published by the National Centre for Pastoral Research (NCPR) in November 2018.

However, since 2008, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has had a significant impact on formation principles, both initial and ongoing. As a consequence, the observations in this document are also shaped by learnings from the recommendations of the Royal Commission, as reflected in the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards (NCSS) produced by Catholic Professional Standards Limited (CPSL), including the relevant [NCSS Implementation Guides](#).

For our purposes, the relevant CPSL criteria and indicators are:

- **Criterion 5.5**

Robust processes exist for screening candidates before and during seminary and religious formation. Robust processes are implemented for ongoing formation, support and supervision of clergy and religious.

- **Indicator 5.5.3**

The entity promotes as normative the participation of all bishops, leaders of religious institutes, clergy and religious in active ministry, in no less than 6 hours of professional/pastoral supervision per year [refer to 5.4.1]

- **Indicator 5.5.4**

The entity promotes as normative, all clergy and religious in active ministry, for the sake of proper accountability, are offered and access both ongoing professional development and annual performance appraisals [refer to Indicator 5.4.2]

- **Criterion 5.8**

Entities which receive overseas clergy and religious for work in religious or pastoral ministry have targeted programs for the screening, induction, professional supervision and development of individuals.

- **Indicator 5.8.1**

Selection and screening procedures for overseas clergy and religious are targeted, thorough and follow, as far as practicable, the same processes as for Australian personnel. This includes the Australian Church Authority obtaining screening information from the international Church Authority.

- **Indicator 5.8.2**

All overseas clergy and religious participate in a safeguarding induction program, documented by the entity, before work with children begins.

- **Indicator 5.8.3**

Overseas clergy and religious are supported with a suitable mentor for at least the first two years of their time in Australia.

- **Indicator 5.8.4**

The entity promotes as normative the participation of all overseas clergy and religious in active ministry in no less than 6 hours of professional/pastoral supervision per year [refer to Indicators 5.4.1 and 5.5.3].

In summary, six best-practice indicators are proposed in this document, five of which are articulated by CPSL:

1. selection and screening (5.8.1)
2. induction or orientation programs (5.8.2)
3. mentoring (5.8.3)
4. professional or pastoral supervision (5.8.4)
5. ongoing formation (5.5)

The sixth indicator is

6. Parish preparation

Common ground

The standards published by CPSL in 2019 have much in common with the recommendations approved by the ACBC in 2005 and 2008, giving impetus and direction for the six key indicators described above.

Each recommendation will be preceded by some general 'how to' ideas and suggestions, with some insights from research also provided for consideration.

Selection and screening: visitation, communication and preparation at place of origin

Case study 1

An archdiocese found screening and selection to be most effective when the Vicar General and another representative travelled with an Australian psychologist with expertise in Catholic culture to each candidate's diocese of origin and met the local ordinary or provincial, the candidate, their family and formators of clergy. The purpose of these visits was to assess the giftedness, capacity and suitability of the candidates for ministry in Australia. This was done on the basis that in addition to their formation and theological studies, overseas priests must meet the professional-standard requirements for ministry in Australia, including in relation to accent and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) levels. Targeted screening does not imply a mentality of 'pass or fail' but rather is an attempt to discern fairly whether candidates are capable of meeting the demands and intricacies of intercultural ministry in Australia so that they may thrive.

The experience of the archdiocese was that it was beneficial for all concerned when a candidate was recruited from a religious order, as the candidate was supported by the order's community life and charism, with its inbuilt accountability and supervision. The custom of paying the stipend directly to the order and of the order supporting the religious was also found to be beneficial. In addition, the archdiocese had the following understandings in place:

- The development of an ongoing relationship with the sending bishop or provincial is vitally important. In the event that visitation is not possible, this could be managed electronically (via Skype for example).
- Representatives from the receiving diocese visit the sending bishop or provincial as often as possible and keep communicating about the progress of the clergy received.
- The sending bishop or provincial provides a written reference outlining why they are proposing certain clergy.
- The candidate supplies a written account of his understanding and purpose in coming to work with the Australian Church.
- It is made clear that when the bishop or provincial proposes a name, a process of discernment commences, and not necessarily an automatic acceptance of the candidate.
- In the country of origin, a written assessment is undertaken, along with an initial interview (usually conducted by a psychologist) and a further interview conducted by a leader from the receiving diocese, in order to understand the pastoral experience of the priest and his capacity for mission.
- If the receiving bishop writes and accepts a particular candidate, the receiving diocesan representative will visit a second and possibly a third time, to develop plans for the candidate's orientation, before the candidate leaves the place of origin. The sending bishop or provincial is also visited at this time.

- Once the candidate has been endorsed by the receiving bishop, the visitation phase of the process concludes. The visa process begins with the assistance of diocesan staff. The diocesan office communicates regularly with the candidate, establishing a further relationship and commencing the phase of orientation.
- When the missionary priest arrives, he stays in the bishop's house for an extended period. It is during this time that he spends eight weekends visiting and observing parishes and attending liturgies.
- After a suitable period, he is appointed to a parish. In preparation, a team visits the parish and meets with parish groups such as the pastoral council and finance committee, among others, explaining the background and the nuances of intercultural ministry.
- The archdiocese has a relationship with five orders and one diocese. Orders not yet established in the archdiocese are welcomed in order to foster the new charism.
- In this archdiocese, approximately 25 per cent of priests are missionary clergy. This proportion is lower than in other dioceses, but the level of successful orientation and effective ministry has been found to be high.

Other important considerations

In addition, other dioceses found the following to be very important:

- clarity about the proposed contract, including visa requirements and the initial timeframe for work in Australia
- clarity and accuracy about the issuing visa
- a level of English proficiency adequate to the ministry expected (an IELTS level of 6.5–7.0 is considered suitable and desirable)
- freedom from undue expectations from family members, such as pressure (financial or otherwise) from the candidate's family or parish community
- a 'cultural inquisitiveness' on the part of the candidate, which allows the missionary endeavour to be interculturally enriched
- the candidate's engagement in personal ongoing formation and his openness to further formation and supervision
- prior parish experience that prepares the candidate for cultural adaptability.

Case study 2

A rural diocese developed a long-term relationship with an overseas diocese through mutual visitation, and by exchanging the talents and expertise of bishops and other leaders. One of the benefits was that a [carefully detailed preparation plan](#) was developed before each priest's departure from the diocese of origin. This arrangement has continued, with ongoing support and formation from both the sending bishop and the receiving bishop and senior leaders. The process has proven to be effective and amicable, with minimal difficulties.

Case study 3

Another rural diocese, after conducting visitation and interviews in the place of origin, has a 'come and see' period of 1–2 months' duration. The candidate spends this period in the diocese then returns to his place of origin. After discernment by both parties, the bishop may write and formally invite the candidate, in which case an application for a visa commences.

Feedback from overseas priests has linked increased confidence with pre-arrival preparation and structured induction programs.

Best-practice indicator 1

That a consistent process is developed for the selection of missionary clergy. This process should include development of a relationship with the relevant diocese or order; visitation (if possible); and written assessment and narrative interviews to determine attitudinal eligibility, cultural capacity, adaptability and suitability for mission in Australia.



Orientation and induction processes

A well-designed and executed orientation and induction process communicates to the missionary clergy a sincere desire for the flourishing of intercultural ministry. The format needs to be designed by each religious or diocesan entity. While orientation and induction do overlap, the whole process has four focuses:

1. practical
2. ecclesial
3. safeguarding
4. cultural.

1. A practical focus

A warm and welcoming orientation process needs to begin in the targeted selection and screening phase and continue when the missionary arrives. This includes an orientation to place and practical matters but also to a clear understanding of the contract, the expectations of the receiving and sending bishop or provincial, the parameters of the visa, and the criteria and indicators for Catholic professional standards, including expectations in relation to supervision, mentoring, spiritual direction and appraisal.

Some further practical matters to be covered in the orientation include: understanding public transport; opening a bank account; obtaining and using credit cards; connecting with a doctor and

completing a health assessment; meeting computer and IT needs; understanding health insurance; obtaining a tax file number; obtaining relevant state required working with children checks or equivalent qualifications; identifying places for shopping and sourcing preferred food; assessing driving skills; and obtaining an Australian driver licence.

2. An ecclesial focus

Induction covers both immediate and ongoing formation. In the ecclesial sense, for example, it involves participation in a safeguarding induction program, as well as tutored sessions covering the Integrity in Ministry document, the life of the presbyterate, the history of the diocese, the diocese's offices and systems of governance, clarity of priestly roles, the pastoral plan of the diocese, how parishes are merged, lay ministry and more.

3. A safeguarding focus

In its implementation guide, CPSL provides a comprehensive description of its safeguarding induction program.

The guide can be found [here](#).

4. A cultural focus

In the cultural sense, the induction process involves cultural awareness and learnings for intercultural competency, stages of cultural shock, liturgical practices and expectations, the purpose of homilies, power distance and authority, and conflict management.

A model was prepared by the working committee for this document. It is offered—as just one model among many—to help others begin to design and plan their own orientation and induction programs. It can be accessed [here](#).

Best-practice indicator 2

That all dioceses receiving missionary clergy develop a comprehensive orientation and induction program incorporating practical, ecclesial and cultural issues, including compliance with Catholic professional standards.



Mentoring program

According to the NCPMR Summary Report, a relationship with a mentor was a key factor in clergy not only surviving but thriving.

Trust and intimacy were nominated as important characteristics of mentorship, enabling the clergy to ask targeted questions about what he feels needs to be addressed.

Example 1

A priest may feed back to his mentor that when greeting women, some women offer their cheek to be kissed, others offer a handshake, others neither and others kiss the priest's hands and press the priest's hands against their own forehead. He may ask his mentor about what these various responses mean and about how he should engage. A mentor could assist the priest to clarify appropriate behaviour when working with women.

Example 2

A priest may be accustomed to preaching for thirty minutes in his home country, but feedback from parishioners might indicate a preference for five-minute homilies and not sermons. A mentor could discuss the difference between a sermon and a homily, and between instructive teaching and the process of 'breaking open the Word' in people's life experience. A mentor might direct the priest's further formation in homiletics and liturgical practices.

Other opportunities for mentoring

Other opportunities for mentoring may be informed by issues such as:

- the role of the priest in the Australian Church and society
- the role of the laity in the Australian Church
- a 'team' approach to working with parish pastoral staff
- the roles of women and men in Australian society generally, and most particularly the role of women
- the context of the church in the midst of a secular society
- the comparatively high standard of living of clergy in Australia and its implications
- symptoms of cultural shock and stages of transition
- how to live authentically in a permissive society
- how conflict and grievance are handled
- the range of devotional styles in the Australian Church
- the working relationship between priests and the people, and how the role of priest is perceived in relation to governance of schools and parishes
- liturgical customs for funerals, weddings and baptisms.

When feedback, review or appraisal is part of the induction program, the role of the mentor can be highly valuable.

Mentors can be other clergy, or lay people who have a theological background and experience in interculturality. Mentors should be appointed to

the role by the diocese and be accountable to the diocese.

For further information about mentoring, please see the [NCSS Implementation Guide](#) and relevant resources provided by Catholic Education and Catholic Social Services.

Best-practice indicator 3

That all dioceses receiving missionary clergy develop an intentional and accountable mentoring programme providing necessary training and support for mentors for the duration of the visa period.



Professional and pastoral supervision

Professional pastoral supervision assists missionary clergy by providing a regular, protected time for facilitated in-depth reflection on ministry. It can be provided either one-to-one or in a peer group, and could be delivered via Skype or other means. It is a space where the member of clergy, reflects on his ministry in a trusted environment and receives feedback from his supervisor. It is an affirming space where the member of clergy experiences respect for his experience, skills and learning style. Its aim is to build resilience, ethical competency, confidence and creativity in ministry within an intercultural setting.

Supervision is spiritually and theologically rich as it invites the member of clergy to be open to explore his own authentic ministry and pastoral journey. Supervision also encourages appropriate self-care. Supervision empowers the member of clergy, and it challenges him to undertake new opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Further information about supervision can be found at clergy.org.au.

Best-practice indicator 4

That all dioceses receiving missionary clergy pay special attention to newly arrived clergy and implement education and formation sessions to help them understand the various modes of supervision and engage in at least six hours of supervision per year.

In addition, that dioceses include overseas clergy in their local appraisal processes (as recommended by the Catholic professional Standards Limited (CPSL) standards in this area).

The need for developed, ongoing formation has long been recognised, as indicated by the CPSL standards and the NCPR Summary Report, as well as by the focus on annual provincial conferences in the ACBC's 2008 Acculturation of Overseas Priests document. However, only the Victorian Province has held provincial conferences consistently, with the tyranny of distance, and the expense and time involved in organising and conducting conferences all being factors in this outcome.

The challenge is to deliver targeted high quality formation to not only missionary clergy but also to locally formed and ordained clergy who pastor to an ever increasing intercultural Australian Catholic Church.

The Director of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO), according to his job description is well placed to facilitate and advise Clergy Life and Ministry Directors and diocesan

formation teams to design effective and cost effective formation as day seminars, utilizing the agencies of the Bishops' Commission for Evangelisation, Laity and Ministry (BCELM).

Other ACBC entities willing to assist with the provision of formation sessions include the National Liturgical Council, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council, Catholic Social Services, Catholic Mission Australia and the Office for Social Justice of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference.

In addition, rich resources and experience are offered by the English Language for Pastoral Ministry (ELSPM), the Xavier School of Mission, the Columban Mission Centre, the Acculturation Winter Program at St Joseph's Baulkham Hills and local diocesan Catholic Education Offices.

Best-practice indicator 5

That dioceses may approach the Director of Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) to connect diocesan Clergy Life and Ministry Directors and formation teams with the National Centre for Evangelisation and other relevant entities in order to provide formation sessions for the benefit of all missionary and locally formed clergy in dioceses.

Parish preparation

Case study

A diocesan team with missionary clergy intentionally visits the parish receiving missionary clergy. Meetings are facilitated with the pastoral council, the finance council, the school leadership team and education board. The purpose of the facilitated meetings is to hear the 'story' of the incoming priest, as well as that of the people and the parish, promoting a mutual valuing of gifts, talents and capacities.

During these meetings, support structures such as the best-practice indicators are explained and described.

Experience demonstrates that an intentional parish preparation to receive missionary clergy ensures a better transition to a flourishing ministry. An example of a structured and intentional model can be found [here](#).

Catholic Mission Australia has successfully trialled its Intercultural Competency Program that assists both native and non-native born Australians to discover their own cultural profile and the cultural profile of others. More formation strategies and creative resources are needed in this area.

Best-practice indicator 6

That a resource be developed through joint venture by the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) and the National Centre for Evangelisation (NCE). This resource is to provide an excellent model to assist parishes with the preparation for intentional reception of missionary clergy as pastors.

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