



**CANON LAW SOCIETY
OF
AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND**
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MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 7 September 2026

Canon Law Conference tackles modern challenges

Over 100 people gathered for the 59th annual conference of the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand (CLSANZ). The conference held at Rydges North Sydney from 31 August to 3 September 2026, focused on practical solutions to some of the complex canonical and pastoral issues in the Church today.

CLSANZ President, Fr Paul Clark, said he was delighted with the conference and especially with the number of participants including CLSANZ members and guests from Australia, New Zealand, Tonga, Fiji, UK, Canada, USA, Hong Kong, and Guam. "I am overjoyed with the attendance at our conference this year," Fr Clark said. "The Canon Law Society holds a unique place in the Church, especially for the local Churches of Australia, New Zealand, and Pasifika. Our annual conference provides an invaluable opportunity to renew friendships, share our practical experience of the law, and explore how canon law serves the life and mission of the Church today."

Fr Frank Brennan, SJ, AO, opened the conference with his reflections on Sir Gerard Brennan and Sir William Deane, two significant Catholic jurists, and their contribution to public discourse in Australia, especially in regard to the rights of indigenous Australians.

Dr Diane Barr, President of the Canon Law Society of America, and Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, USA, offered her insights on the experience of the bankruptcy provisions employed by a number of diocese and Church entities in the USA. Dr Barr explored how US dioceses have sought to achieve fair legal settlements for claims related to allegations of historical child sexual abuse by clergy and adults acting on behalf of the Church. Dr Barr emphasised the importance of ensuring the pastoral care of the whole community of the Church and the desire for justice when pursuing the civil law options available to the Church.

Fr Brian Lucas examined the the civil liability of Church entities regarding historical child abuse claims following recent key decisions of the High Court of Australia. Dr Patrick Mullins, KSG, explored how diocesan bishops who adopt the ACBC National Response Protocol can comply with both their canonical and civil obligations. Fr Peter Blayney assessed the reception of the 'Briefer Process' for marriage nullity cases introduced into canon law around ten years ago. Other presenters included Fr Joseph Lee, SDB, Fr Adi

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Indra, Mr Lawrence Hallinan, Fr Mateusz Markiewicz, IBP, Fr John Doherty, and Fr Paul Clark.

Those attending the conference celebrated Mass together at St Mary MacKillop Memorial Chapel, which offered everyone the opportunity to reflect on the legacy of Australia's first saint.

The 60th Annual CLSANZ Conference will be held in Brisbane from 30 August - 2 September 2027.

For more information on the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand, visit:

clsanz.catholic.org.au

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Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand

Pope John XXIII's 1959 announcement to hold an Ecumenical Council and revise Canon Law was the inspiration for envisioning a society to receive the teaching of the council and implement the revised Code of Canon Law. On 20 June 1967, The Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand was founded. The membership of the society embraces lay persons, clerics and religious. Presently in excess of 200, the members come from diverse nations and cultures especially across Oceania and South-East Asia. The society holds an annual conference to promote professional development and publishes academic journal, *The Canonist*, twice a year. For more information: clsanz.catholic.org.au