



## Executive Council of Australian Jewry

### **'Annual Conversation' with the Catholic Bishops' Conference**

**By Jeremy Jones**

When, in 1986, Pope John Paul II requested a meeting with the leadership of the Australian Jewish community during his visit to Sydney, there was a fair degree of apprehension and uncertainty.

The Jewish community delegation, led by ECAJ President Leslie Caplan, knew the issues we wished to raise with the head of the Catholic Church, but we did not know what response we would receive.

Meeting in the St Mary's complex meant that the Jewish delegation would be entering into the territory of the Catholic Church, bringing with us a message focusing on historic antisemitism and our view that an enormous chasm would exist between Catholics and Jews until Israel received formal diplomatic recognition from the Vatican.

It was at the Sydney meeting that the Pope first articulated the view that, for all Catholics, anti-Semitism is a sin. Just as importantly, Pope John Paul II treated us with respect and as equal partners in dialogue.'

The tremendous progress that has been made since that first encounter is reflected in the ECAJ's formal dialogue with the Australian Catholic Church.

In 1998 the first of what was to become the "Annual Conversation" of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenism (ACBC) and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) was held. The Annual Conversations have always proven to be constructive in furthering the dialogue in Australia, for providing input into global Catholic-Jewish dialogue and for building a firm friendship grounded in intellectual, personal and theological mutual respect.

The dialogue focuses on philosophical as well as practical matters. Topics have included "Globalisation and Its Implications for Religion", "Bio-Ethical Issues: Gene Technology", "The Meaning of Israel", "Euthanasia", "The 'Passion of Christ'", "Just War" and "The Passover Seder".

The Annual Conversation is jointly chaired by

Bishop Michael Putney of Townsville and Jeremy Jones of the ECAJ.

Delegations: (2005-6)

Executive Council of Australian Jewry

Jeremy Jones (Immediate Past President, ECAJ)      Co-Chair  
Grahame Leonard (President, ECAJ)  
Rabbi John Levi (Deputy President, ECAJ; Union for Progressive Judaism)  
Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence (Great Synagogue, Sydney)  
Ms Peta Pellach (The Shalom Institute, ECAJ Consultant)  
Mr Athol Morris (ACT)

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Bishop Michael Putney (Bishop of Townsville and Chair, Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations) Co-Chair

Bishop Geoffrey Jarrett (Bishop of Lismore and Secretary, Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations)

Bishop Jeremiah Coffey (Bishop of Sale)

Bishop Anthony Fisher op (Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney)

Michael Brown (Executive Secretary, Bishops Committee for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations)