



The DIOCESE OF SYDNEY & AFFILIATED REGIONS

THE OFFICE OF THE PAPAL REPRESENTATIVE HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN TADROS

Sunday 22nd November 2020

A RESPONSE TO ISSUES RAISED ON THE DRAFT CONSTITUTION

Many thanks to the clergy, the parish councils and the beloved parishioners of the Diocese for their overwhelming support of the proposed amendments to Diocese Constitution and Property Act. We would like to address some of the comments raised and rectify any miscommunications or rumours.

Please Note: This document has been amended since first publication at the request of HE Metropolitan Tadros.

Has His Holiness Pope Tawadros II and His Eminence Metropolitan Tadros been involved in the process of amending the Diocese Constitution and Property Act?

His Holiness Pope Tawadros II has been kept informed of your valuable feedback, as well as our beloved papal representative for the Diocese, His Eminence Metropolitan Tadros. His Eminence and His Holiness have authorised the release of the revised Constitution, incorporating many of your valuable feedback and proposals.

Why do we need to change?

The structure of sole trustee has been a contentious issue within the Diocese for more than a decade.

What events have led us to this point?

In November 2019, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II sent a delegation of 3 Senior Bishops to Sydney and as a result of their report, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II appointed an Interim Board tasked with reforming the Constitution and Property Trust Act.

Was there a Papal Decree?

His Holiness issued a Papal Decree appointing an Interim Board chaired by His Eminence Metropolitan Tadros and two community leaders being, Dr Medhat Guirgis and Mr Nick Kaldas APM as Trustees of the Diocese.

What are the main changes to the Constitution?

His Holiness has tasked the interim board with reforming the constitution and the NSW Property Trust Act by removing the sole trustee structure and replacing it with a Board of Trustees.

In accordance with the request of His Holiness and His Eminence, and with their blessings, the second revision of the Diocese Constitution has now been published in both the Arabic and English languages. The Diocese Constitution has been drafted in the spirit of the canons and traditions of our Coptic Orthodox Church.

Has His Grace and others been consulted during this process?

Yes. There has been extensive consultation with His Grace Bishop Daniel, with the priests of the Diocese, with the Parish councils, with the former committee members of the various Diocese administration committees, as well as with individual parishioners. These discussions have been pivotal in acquiring very valuable feedback. We have also received your valuable feedback through emails and the Diocese web portal, by telephone, and even via SMS and social media. All of your feedback has been carefully considered and has led to a large number of very practical and necessary amendments to the Diocese Constitution that has been released today.

Given the overwhelming feedback we have received to date, we have also extended the timeframe to provide further feedback to Monday, 7th December 2020.

Response to misinformation raised on social media

To address the misinformation circulated to the community by those who reject any change, we have provided factual responses for your clarification. Please see some of the incorrect claims raised on social media:

FICTION: This constitution is not in the spirit of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

FACT: The changes were requested by His Holiness Pope Tawadros. As the supreme head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, His Holiness knows what is in the best interest for our Church.

FICTION: This constitution diminishes the authority of His Holiness and gives all the authority to the Board of trustees.

FACT: This aspect of the constitution has not been amended. Rule 1(2): *"The leader, overseer and shepherd of the Coptic Orthodox Church is the Pope of Alexandria and the Patriarch of the See of St Mark. The authority of the Pope and the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church extends to the entire See of St Mark, both inside and outside Egypt."*

Rule 10(2) states: "... this constitution may be amended at any time by His Holiness the Pope."

FICTION: The constitution diminishes the authority of the clergy.

FACT: The Diocese Constitution provides our beloved clergy more oversight into the dealings of our Diocese. Our clergy are now able to elect their Vicar General who will automatically be a valuable member of the Board of Trustees.

Our clergy will also have more oversight into their parish finances, with only our clergy and their secretaries and treasurers able to determine what funds are able to be spent from their Parish accounts.

Our clergy will also be able to provide their input into the affairs of our Diocese, by being members of the Diocese Advisory Board. This level of oversight by our beloved clergy has never been possible under the previous 2003 Diocese Constitution.

Our clergy are still answerable to our Bishop and to His Eminence in the exercise of their ecclesiastical duties under Rule 2(4) of the Diocese Constitution.

FICTION: All the Priests are answerable to the Board of Trustees and not to the Bishop.

FACT: Rule 2(4) has not been amended and states: "*The Bishop or Papal Representative is responsible for ecclesiastical duties of the Diocese such as the ordination of the priests and deacons in the Diocese, consecrating Churches, altars, baptisteries, icons and all the vessels of the altar and is responsible for the religious services in the Diocese. The Bishop shepherds his people as he receives the shepherd's staff from the Pope. He shares with the Pope in his apostolic services and in ordaining new Bishops, as he is also a member in the Holy Synod, as are all other Bishops of the Coptic Orthodox Church.*"

FICTION: The authority of the Parishes has been diminished and will be controlled by the Board of Trustees.

FACT: Our Parishes, being the heart and soul of our Diocese, will now have greater authority, more autonomy, and more freedom to govern their own services and their own future needs.

Rule 3(4) states: "*The Parish Council is responsible for the financial and administrative aspects of the Parish. The spiritual services of the parish shall be entrusted to the Parish priests.*"

FICTION: The Board of Trustees will oversee the ecclesiastical affairs of the Diocese

FACT: "Rule 2(4) has not been amended and states: "*The Bishop or Papal Representative is responsible for ecclesiastical duties of the Diocese...*"

FICTION: The Board of Trustees is the highest level of authority.

FACT: The new Diocese Constitution gives our beloved father His Holiness Pope Tawadros II greater authority over the formation of each management board within our Diocese, and provides to His Holiness a greater level of oversight over the dealings of our Diocese.

The ecclesiastical functions of our Diocese, our Parishes will still be overseen by His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, His Eminence Metropolitan Tadros and His Grace Bishop Daniel.

The Holy Synod is the highest canonical authority in our Church pursuant to Rule 2(7).

FICTION: The current constitution allows the Parish Council members to be nominated by the Priests and then approved by the Bishop. The new constitution removes the clergy involvement in nominating a Parish Council member.

FACT: The Clergy are involved in the election of the Parish Councils (Rule 3 (7)) and have the authority to approve the nomination of candidates wishing to be elected to the church committee (Parish Council). This authority is not available to the clergy in the current constitution.

Feedback

To provide feedback concerning the draft Constitution please visit our website: www.coptic.org.au

God Bless.

Interim Board of Trustees

Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Sydney & Affiliated Regions