



**Catholic Religious Australia**  
Australian Conference of  
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13<sup>th</sup> May 2011

His Excellency Most Rev Giuseppe Lazzarotto  
Apostolic Nuncio  
PO Box 3622  
MANUKA 2603

Dear Excellency,

We write as the Executive of Catholic Religious Australia. We greet you warmly in this Easter season wishing you the blessings of the risen Lord.

Like many Catholics in Australia, we have been deeply affected by the early retirement of Bishop Bill Morris of Toowoomba Diocese. We have a significant number of members deeply embedded in the life of that local Church. They are especially distressed at the loss of their pastor, a man they believe to be solicitous of all Christ's faithful entrusted to his care - especially the needy and marginalised. They and the people with whom they minister are left with an abiding sense of disempowerment and confusion.

In light of listening to some of our religious and lay sisters and brothers of the Australian Church we share with you some of the questions being asked:

1. How can all in our Church be heard and empowered by our ecclesiastical leaders and processes when private and confidential opinions are given such importance?

We understand that a confidential report by the Apostolic Visitor to the Toowoomba Diocese indicated that the Diocese was in theological and disciplinary decline. Yet closely following the Visitation letters of pastoral support for the bishop were signed and sent to Rome by all Pastoral leaders and members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council and the majority of the priests (except three) of the Diocese. We wonder how the words of this group were heard in this process.

2. How is the decreasing availability of Eucharist, 'the source and summit' of our lives' to be addressed into the future?

Like many Dioceses in Australia, Toowoomba covers an enormous geographical area. The celebration of Eucharist and other sacraments are only available to some of the faithful on a monthly basis – or even more irregularly. This situation is set to worsen as the number of active priests in the Diocese continues to decline. Bishop Morris, aware of this situation, suggested the need for conversation. What is the message of our Church in these difficult circumstances?

3. What do we say to the people who have lost an inspirational shepherd and pastor at a time that the people most need him?

Bishop Morris is known to be outstanding in encouraging lay people to take up appropriate leadership in the local church, as well as vigorous in promoting prayer and ecumenical dialogue. He has been tireless in moving our church and society forward in the difficult and sensitive area of professional standards in ministry.

The people of his Diocese, like many rural Australians, have suffered over the past ten years from the effects of severe drought and, more recently, dramatic floods that have taken a high toll in lives and property. Bishop Morris has stood by them through these difficult times with courage and fidelity. We understand that the Visitator acknowledged the Bishop's strong pastoral giftedness; however his people are feeling acutely the loss of their much-loved pastor and shepherd in their time of need and are asking who will advocate for them now.

At a time when many good people in our country are feeling disengaged from the Church we so need Bishops who are first and foremost Pastors who like the Good Shepherd care for their people. We as Religious know that it is this care that will bring people back to the Church.

Your Excellency we may not be cognisant of all the circumstances in this matter. Yet our members are hearing the cry of the faithful who do not understand why their much loved bishop is no longer with them. They are left with empty hearts at this time.

We thank you for listening to our concerns for our Church and her people and for your generous service of the Church in our land. If it was possible for you to address these concerns during your visit to the CRA Assembly in June we would be most grateful.

We have written to Archbishop Wilson also to express our concerns.

Yours in Christ



Sr Anne Derwin rsj  
President

On behalf of the CRA Executive (Sr Anne Derwin rsj, Fr Timothy Norton svd, Sr Marie Duffy rsm)