



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Bishop Brian Finnigan
Apostolic Administrator
Diocese of Toowoomba

Dear Bishop Brian

On behalf of the Australian Bishops, I write to you – and through you especially to the priests, religious and faithful of the Diocese of Toowoomba – to express our sadness at the retirement of Bishop Bill Morris. The decision came at the end of a complex process which began thirteen years ago and which ended in deadlock. It was then that the Holy Father found it necessary to exercise his Petrine care for the whole Church. This has been difficult and distressing for all concerned, and it is not surprising that the decision has caused varied and intense reactions.

Much of our time at the recent meeting of the Australian Bishops was given to discussion of what has happened – a discussion which at one point included hearing the concerns of forty leaders of Religious Congregations, many of whom have members working in the Diocese of Toowoomba. We sought to understand the events and agree on the best way to respond.

We reflected on our responsibility as Bishops and on what it means for us to serve the communion of the Church and to exercise our ministry collegially as pastors of Christ's flock, as teachers of the apostolic faith and as moderators of the sacred liturgy.

We also reflected upon the unique role of the Pope as head of the College of Bishops. It is his task to guard and promote the communion of the Church and the integrity of the Church's faith. We reaffirm our faith in this mission which the Successor of Peter has received from Christ himself, and we gratefully acknowledge Pope Benedict's faithfulness to the Petrine ministry, even when it involves very difficult decisions. We commit ourselves anew to teaching faithfully what Christ taught as the Church has handed it down.

Discussion of the process and the decision which it produced will continue during our *Ad Limina* visit to Rome later this year. There we will have the opportunity to share

with the Holy Father and members of the Roman Curia the fruits of our discussion and to share our questions and concerns with an eye to the future. We will also have the opportunity to pray at the Tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, to whose intercession we will entrust our own ministry, the Diocese of Toowoomba and the Church in Australia.

We appreciate that Bishop Morris' human qualities were never in question; nor is there any doubt about the contribution he has made to the life of the Church in Toowoomba and beyond. The Pope's decision was not a denial of the personal and pastoral gifts that Bishop Morris has brought to the episcopal ministry. Rather, it was judged that there were problems of doctrine and discipline, and we regret that these could not be resolved. We are hopeful that Bishop Morris will continue to serve the Church in other ways in the years ahead.

Our prayers are very much with you as Apostolic Administrator, with Bishop Morris and with the priests, religious and faithful of the Diocese of Toowoomba at this difficult time. We especially encourage the priests to reassure their people and to strengthen them in faith. The Diocese of Toowoomba has a great history of faith, and that faith has never failed in the face of many hardships. It will surely not fail now as the Diocese looks to the future.

We express our support for you personally as you assume the challenging task of Apostolic Administrator, and we are confident that you will help to bring peace and unity to the Diocese. May the prayers of Mary of the Southern Cross and of St Mary MacKillop guide us all safely on the journey that lies before us.

Yours fraternally in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Philip Wilson .". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Archbishop Philip Wilson

President

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

From the Shrine of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop

North Sydney,

12 May 2011