



BISHOP'S HOUSE

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Australia

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ

Just over eighteen years ago on 10 February 1993 I was ordained as your Bishop, responding to an invitation from Pope John Paul II. On that day I told you a story about an old priest who was invited by a couple whom he had married twenty-five years previously. Also invited to the celebration was a friend of theirs who was a Shakespearian actor and quite famous around the theatres of London. As often happens at such celebrations those who have certain gifts are asked to entertain the group and so our Shakespearian actor was asked to do just that.

A conversation occurred between himself and the guests as to what they would like to hear him recite, finally the elderly priest suggested that he might like to recite the 23rd Psalm...The Lord is my Shepherd. He responded by saying that he would do so if the priest would recite it after him, which he willingly agreed to.

The actor began his recitation and as he finished reciting the words of the Psalm the voice of the little old Padre could be heard. A deep silence spread throughout the room as the priest recited the Psalm...and when he had finished there was a hush that enfolded the room and a number of guests had tears in their eyes.

The Shakespearian actor, seeing this, turned to the priest and said; I am an actor, a very good one and I know I have the skills to hold people's attention and to capture their imagination, but the difference between you and I in reciting this Psalm, is that I know the words but you know the Shepherd.

It would be my hope that as I say good-bye to you as your Pastor, that we can both say, because of our relationship over the last eighteen years we all know the Shepherd a little better.

I came to the diocese from the Gold Coast with little knowledge of this wonderful Local Church, or you the people who are the Local Church. I

found welcome, friendship, encouragement, challenge, prayerful support, a home among you and a real sense of belonging. It is with true sadness therefore that I write this letter to you.

While the overwhelming majority of you have been supportive of me and have worked collaboratively with me to ensure the ongoing life of the diocese, and its mission to be a bearer of the Gospel to the wider world, a small group have found my leadership and the direction of the diocese not to their liking.

While I have tried to deal with all people fairly and to involve all in the ministry and mission of the diocese I have not always been able to succeed. Some of those who have been disaffected by my leadership have exercised the option of making complaints about me, some of these complaints being based on my Advent Pastoral Letter of 2006 which has been misread and I believe deliberately misinterpreted. This led to an Apostolic Visitation and an ongoing dialogue between myself and the Congregations for Bishops, Divine Worship and Doctrine of the Faith and eventually Pope Benedict. The substance of these complaints is of no real import now but the consequences are that it has been determined by Pope Benedict that the diocese would be better served by the leadership of a new bishop.

I have never seen the Report prepared by the Apostolic Visitor, Archbishop Charles Chaput, and without due process it has been impossible to resolve these matters, denying me natural justice without any possibility of appropriate defence and advocacy on my behalf. Pope Benedict confirmed this to me by stating "*Canon Law does not make provision for a process regarding bishops, whom the Successor of Peter nominates and may remove from Office*". This makes my position as Bishop of Toowoomba untenable. I have never wavered in my conviction that for me to resign is a matter of conscience and my resignation would mean that I accept the assessment of myself as breaking *communio* which I absolutely refute and reject and it is out of my love for the Church that I cannot do so. I have never written a letter of resignation.

To find a way through this moral dilemma I put forward the proposal that I was prepared to negotiate early retirement. As Canon Law does not make provision for a process regarding bishops this seemed the only course open to me. I do so with profound sadness knowing that I still enjoy the support of the vast majority of the people and priests of the diocese. The Consultors are aware of all the facts as I have met with

them on a regular basis to keep them up-to-date with what was happening. Through them, the priests and the pastoral leaders, you will be given the full story.

To the entire Diocese I say a heartfelt thanks for your support, friendship, love and prayers over the last eighteen years. You have been a great gift to me it has been a privilege to serve you.

I make my own the words of St Paul to the Phillippians:

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. (Phil: 1:3 – 7a, 7c – 11)

Whatever the future holds for me you will always have a place in my heart and prayers. I thank you once again for your love, friendship and support, you will always have mine, and until we meet again may God bless you with every good gift.

Your Brother in Christ

William M Morris, DD
BISHOP OF TOOWOOMBA