

ADDRESS BY BISHOP BIRD
In Response to the Diocesan Welcome and to all present

Thank you, Brenda, David and Fr Peter. I very much appreciate your words of welcome on behalf of the people of the diocese and the parish communities and on behalf of the priests and religious and all those who have special ministries in the diocese. I am very grateful too for your kind gift – a beautifully written copy of the New Testament. I thank you all for this gift – those who are here in the cathedral, those who are watching on the big screen in the hall and the people throughout the diocese. The gift you have given will be a reminder to me of what is at the heart of our Christian lives – the good news of Jesus Christ.

My appointment as bishop of Ballarat was announced on August 1, the feast of St Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorists. Today is the feast of another Redemptorist saint, Gerard Majella. I feel a great sense of support in the prayers of these saintly confreres who have gone before us.

I have also felt immense support from so many people since my appointment. My family and friends have been wonderful in their good wishes and prayers. I am delighted that my sister Ann and brother Maurice and many others of my family could be here today and also the friends who have come from many different places to be with us.

My Redemptorist confreres have been most encouraging and they are also with us in good numbers, including the Australian provincial, Fr Pat Corbett, the provincial from Thailand, Fr Joe Apisit, and the coordinator of the Asia-Oceania conference of the Redemptorists, Fr Ben Ma, who is representing the Redemptorist superior general.

Since my appointment, I have been able to make a couple of visits to the Ballarat diocese and I have been greatly encouraged by the warm welcome from the priests and religious. I thank the priests and religious for their dedicated service in the diocese and I thank them for their presence here today.

On this special occasion we also have a large number of bishops with us. I have received wonderful messages of encouragement from bishops from all around Australia and I am delighted that so many could be present for the ordination today. I would mention in particular Archbishop Denis Hart of Melbourne. I thank Archbishop Hart for presiding at the ordination and particularly for his words in the homily encouraging me to bring the Redemptorist missionary spirit to my service as bishop.

I thank also Bishop Peter Connors who has been so welcoming and so helpful in introducing me to the diocese. Bishop Peter seemed particularly pleased to see me! I thank Bishop Peter for the welcome he has given me and even more for the service he has given as bishop of this diocese for the past fifteen years!

Since my appointment, I have received messages of support from members of various Christian churches. I have appreciated these messages very much and I thank the representatives of the various churches who have come to pray with us in this celebration.

I have also received messages from government and civic leaders. This is a tribute to the role that the people of our diocese play in the daily life of local communities. I thank the representatives of government and civic organisations for their presence here today.

Twenty years ago, the Redemptorists were celebrating the opening of a new house in the Sydney suburb of Kogarah. Cardinal Clancy was presiding and we came to a point where the cardinal was to read a prayer of blessing. He was holding his crosier, his pastoral staff, and he wondered where he could put it while he read the prayer. Just next to him was a wooden statue of Christ, the Redeemer, with arms outstretched towards the people. Cardinal Clancy placed the crosier between the arms of Christ.

That image of the bishop's staff in the arms of Christ may help to remind us that Christ himself is the chief shepherd. He cares for each one of us as a good shepherd cares for the flock. We sometimes speak of a bishop as a shepherd, but in a sense, a bishop is more precisely an assistant shepherd. A bishop is an assistant to the chief shepherd. A bishop is called to follow the example of Christ, looking after the flock in the spirit of the good shepherd himself.

I would add that in our own ways we are all called to be assistant shepherds. We are all called to follow the example of Christ, the good shepherd. We are called to be shepherds to one another, to look after the weak, to build up the strong, to care for the sick, to go in search of the stray. We are called to care for one another in our needs. We are called to be shepherds to one another.

When Jesus met his disciples after his resurrection, he said to them: "Peace be with you." I have chosen these words of Christ as my motto as bishop. I hope my ministry will foster the peace of Christ – the kind of peace that is built on justice and crowned by love. I pray that each one of you might be blessed with this peace. I pray that each person and each parish in this diocese might know this peace of Christ. I pray that each person in our troubled world might come to know such peace in their hearts and in their communities.

Thank you all for your prayers for me. I pray likewise for God's blessing upon you.

+ Paul Bird CSsR
Bishop of Ballarat

October 16, 2012