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Christmas Message 2020

Hello, everyone. As we move towards Christmas 2020, I'd like to offer some words of encouragement after what's been a very challenging year.

In the early months of the year, people in many parts of Australia were struggling with bushfires. At the same time, we were hearing reports of a coronavirus in some other countries. Within a few months, the pandemic had spread to Australia. Thousands contracted the virus and hospital staff worked overtime to care for them. The pandemic changed daily life for everyone. To curb the spread of the virus, we were asked to keep our distance from other people and wear masks. We could no longer gather as we usually do. Businesses were shut. Churches were closed.

I offer my sympathies to those who have lost loved ones to the virus. Often there's been extra sadness because patients had to be isolated and people died without their families being able to be with them. I offer my sympathies to everyone who's suffered extra stress this year. That includes those who've felt a sense of loss when we've not been able to come together as a community to celebrate Mass.

After months of tight restrictions, we're now able to gather again to pray, even though we still need to observe some COVID limits. I'm particularly happy that we'll be able to celebrate Christmas together in our parish communities.

In the midst of this challenging year, Pope Francis published a letter reminding us of the bonds we have with one another. He wrote of the links we have with each other as brothers and sisters in one human family. Pope Francis started writing this letter before the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world, but the pandemic has highlighted some of the key messages he wanted to share. The common suffering has reminded us that we're members of a global community. The tragedy of COVID has brought home the fact that in many ways we're all in the same boat. As we recognise that we share a common problem, we might also recognise that we need to work together to find a common solution. Pope Francis has encouraged us to dream together for a better future. He wrote, "Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing

the richness of our beliefs and convictions, each of us with our own voice, brothers and sisters all.”

Over the past couple of years I’ve invited people around our diocese to offer suggestions to develop our diocesan vision statement. Our vision is in tune with the vision of Pope Francis – the vision of a community of brothers and sisters. Our diocese is made up of local communities. All together, our diocese is a community of communities. I’d like to quote our diocesan vision statement.

We are a community of communities
from the Murray to the sea.
Inspired by the Gospel and nourished by the Eucharist,
we follow the example of Jesus
and the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
reaching out in joyful and humble service,
caring for all of God’s creation,
growing in love day by day
and looking forward to life with God forever.

That’s a statement of our diocesan vision. May it be fulfilled more and more.

As we come to the close of 2020, I wish you a merry Christmas and I pray that the new year will be filled with the peace and joy of Christ. God bless you all.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR

Bishop Paul has recorded this Christmas
message and it is available
to view on the diocesan website [here](#).