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Memorial Service in the Ballarat Synagogue, December 21, 2025

Thank you for the invitation to be with you for this memorial service. I appreciate this opportunity to offer a word of support on behalf of the Catholic Community. As a member of the Victorian Council of Churches, I would also like to assure you of the support of all Christian communities throughout Victoria.

We share in the profound grief that has come upon so many over the terrible attack at Bondi Beach last Sunday. People had come together for the start of the festival of Hanukkah. It was the time when they would light the first Hanukkah candle to celebrate the triumph of light over darkness. Tragically, their celebration was violently interrupted when two gunmen opened fire, killing fifteen people and wounding many others. Where there had been good will and peace, suddenly there was hatred and violence. Where there had been the light of life, suddenly there was the darkness of death.

That attack sent shockwaves throughout Australia and throughout the world. Yet the Jewish community and the Australian community as a whole have been firm in their resolve that hatred and violence should not have the last word. People have come together to support one another. I was consoled to hear that the Jewish community in Ballarat has received many expressions of support. People have become all the more determined to protect against hatred and violence. We want to make our community a community where people can live in peace, a community where people can practice their faith freely, a community where darkness is overcome by light.

On behalf of the Catholic community, I extend our deepest condolences to our Jewish brothers and sisters. Please be assured of our prayers and closeness during this time for all the victims of this attack, their families, and the entire community.

I also recall the statement from the Victorian Council of Churches. The Churches together offer their support to our Jewish sisters and brothers. We stand with you in solidarity. An attack on your community is an assault on the dignity, safety, and freedom of all people. No one should fear violence while gathering in peace to celebrate their faith. We condemn acts of terror and all forms of hatred, antisemitism, and religious intolerance. Such violence has no place in our society and stands in direct opposition to the values of dignity of each human life, mutual respect, and care for neighbour that are central to our faith traditions.

Hanukkah and Christmas occur around the same time as festivals of faith and family, of gifts, and especially of light. I pray that the light that shines in the darkness will not be overcome. May the oil of kindness and hope burn longer than the hatred that seeks to extinguish it. May the light of compassion, justice, and peace continue to shine upon us.

Bishop Paul Bird CSSR