



**AUSTRALIAN
CATHOLIC BISHOPS
CONFERENCE**

THE PRESIDENT

MEDIA RELEASE

7 OCTOBER 2026

Statement regarding the Christopher Saunders sentencing

The following can be attributed to Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference:

Today the District Court of Western Australia imposed a sentence on Christopher Saunders for the crimes he perpetrated against his victims.

The sentence and the remarks made by His Honour Judge Flynn recognise the gravity and serious nature of the offences, as well as the profound impact on the victims and survivors of these crimes.

We join with Bishop Tim Norton, Catholic Bishop of Broome, in standing with each of the victims and survivors, those who have supported them, and the communities who have accompanied them to this day.

Those who came forward to tell their story did so with great courage. They have our admiration and respect. Their journey to justice, marked by today's sentencing, affirms and honours their resilience and strength. But the journey continues, for no court sentence can undo the suffering that has been caused or restore all that each person has lost.

To each victim and survivor who courageously revealed what they had endured, we want to say this: We are sorry for the pain and suffering that was inflicted on you. We are sorry that your trust was so directly and profoundly betrayed by a leader of the Church.

The journey of the Church must also continue. The crimes for which the former bishop of Broome has been sentenced today are a shocking and shameful reminder of this.

The bishops of Australia together, and in the name of the Catholic Church in Australia, reaffirm and renew our commitment to the work of healing, reconciliation and renewal; to listening, to learning, and to redoubling our efforts to ensure that safeguarding, accountability and transparency remain at the very heart of the Church's life and mission.

ENDS

A statement from Bishop of Broome Tim Norton:

To my sisters and brothers across the Kimberley,

The Broome diocese acknowledges the custodial sentence handed to the former bishop of the diocese, Christopher Saunders, following the recent District court trial. We express gratitude to everyone involved in bringing this matter to justice.

The sentence is another step in a process that has brought different emotions to many people. Our diocese once again acknowledges the courage and integrity of victims, survivors and other witnesses who came forward to express their truth. They showed extraordinary resilience and inner strength and deserved to be heard with compassion and treated with dignity.

We remain deeply sorry for the pain, hurt and loss you experienced. We are sorry for the shame you endured. We are sorry that it took so long for your voices to be heard and for your experiences to be acknowledged.

We understand that the public sentencing of Christopher Saunders, in whom many placed their trust, may trigger reactions of anger, loss, confusion and grief across our diocese.

We also acknowledge that the sentence cannot heal the damage done. As a diocese, we have a responsibility to consult with local people about rituals and processes that may begin to address in contextual ways some of these raw feelings.

Along with the process of our diocesan Synod, this will provide a basis for us to walk together into the next stage of the life of our diocese, a stage informed by the healing power of the Spirit of this land that we rely upon so deeply.

Truth, faith and flexibility must always be at the centre of this process.

We will continue to listen and learn. I encourage any of you with concerns or comments to raise them. For those who require particular support, please come forward so our diocesan staff can connect you with independent support services.

We ask Our Lady Queen of Peace, the patroness of our diocese, to intercede for us and accompany us on this journey of reconciliation, healing and hope.

I remain yours in the Divine Word,
Tim Norton SVD
Bishop, Diocese of Broome