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## **Bishop Paul retires**

The Catholic Diocese of Ballarat marked the conclusion of a distinguished chapter of leadership, pastoral care and dedicated service to the community with a Mass of Thanksgiving on March 2 for Bishop Paul Bird as he retires as Bishop of Ballarat. Bishop Paul has served as the Bishop of Ballarat since 2012.

When bishops turn 75, they are requested to offer their resignations to the Pope. Bishop Paul turned 75 in 2024 and offered his resignation but was asked to stay on till a successor could be found. On January 7, 2026, Pope Leo appointed Fr Mark Freeman to be the new Bishop of Ballarat. At the same time, Pope Leo appointed Bishop Paul as Apostolic Administrator, to care for the diocese until Bishop Elect Mark is ordained and installed as the ninth Bishop of Ballarat on March 19.

Bishop Paul has been defined by a steadfast commitment to spiritual leadership, community outreach, and the strengthening of parish life across the region.

Throughout his years of service, Bishop Paul has been widely respected for his warm pastoral presence, thoughtful guidance and unwavering dedication to fostering a sense of unity and hope within the Church.

The Mass of Thanksgiving was held at St Patrick's Cathedral, with around three hundred people in attendance including priests of the Diocese, Redemptorist priests and people from many of the parishes around the Diocese all joining together to wish Bishop Paul the best for his retirement.

Bishop Paul expressed deep gratitude for the people of the diocese and the privilege of serving them. Bishop Paul said, "As I draw towards the end of my service as Bishop of Ballarat, I'm glad of this opportunity to give thanks for the years I've spent in this role and I'm grateful to you all for joining me in the Eucharist, our great prayer of thanks.

"I give thanks to God for the blessings of my time as Bishop of Ballarat and I give thanks to each one of you – those here in the cathedral and those joining us online. I thank you for the support you have given me in this ministry," Bishop Paul said.

Bishop Paul led the diocese through the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Responses to Child Abuse and then through several hearings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse. These were particularly difficult years – for those who had suffered abuse, for their families, for parishes and schools and for the whole community.

During the celebration, there was recognition of the Bishop, on behalf of the Laity, on behalf of the Religious of the Diocese and on behalf of the Clergy of the Diocese

Noeline Hogan, East Wimmera Parish, on behalf of the Laity said, "we are grateful for your unwavering dedication and support as you enabled the amalgamation of parishes and encouraged the different communities to work together. Your counsel has inspired the leaders in our parishes, and your example has embodied servant leadership at its finest, as was demonstrated through the Diocesan Assembly held in 2024. You have enabled people to follow their passions and encouraged individuals to become involved in parish and liturgical life."

Sr Marie Davey rsm, on behalf of the Religious, stated that "for the past fourteen years you were teacher and faith leader to those who live in the Diocese of Ballarat. As our Bishop you met the needs of not only the local parish

communities, but also those who lived in religious communities. Your empathy and understanding of people has been greatly enhanced by your years as a Redemptorist leader.”

Fr Marcello Colasante, Vicar General, continued “We pay tribute to Bishop Paul, with a sense of great gratitude, as the priests of the diocese. It's often said we are given particular leaders at a particular time in history, and in the history of our diocese, none better than Bishop Paul came to us, giving his life for us, and we extend heartfelt gratitude, and wish him all the best, as life is different for him, as it goes forward.”

A poignant moment at the end of the celebration was when all stood and gave Bishop Paul a blessing by singing “May God Bless and Keep You”.

We wish Bishop Paul all the best in his retirement.

The Catholic Diocese of Ballarat is a diverse and geographically extensive Diocese of twenty-three parishes which covers the western third of Victoria, extending from the Murray River in the North to the Southern Ocean. To the west it is bounded by the Archdiocese of Adelaide and the Diocese of Port Pirie, to the north by the Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes and to the east by the Diocese of Sandhurst and the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

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