



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Church opens canonical investigation into Bishop Saunders

MEDIA RELEASE

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The Holy See has initiated a canonical investigation into former Broome Bishop Christopher Saunders, with Archbishop Mark Coleridge of Brisbane appointed to oversee the investigation.

Bishop Saunders stood aside as Bishop of Broome in March 2020 after media reports that Western Australia Police had begun an investigation into allegations of sexual misconduct. He strongly denies the allegations.

At the conclusion of its investigation, Western Australia Police confirmed that no charges would be brought against Bishop Saunders.

Bishop Saunders later tendered his resignation to Pope Francis, which was accepted in August 2021.

A letter being read at Masses in the Diocese of Broome this weekend, signed by Apostolic Administrator Bishop Michael Morrissey and Archbishop Coleridge, says the Church investigation “could not happen” until the police inquiries ended.

“The investigation is now underway,” the letter states, before indicating it is not known how long the investigation will take. However, the Vatican’s Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith “has granted an extension beyond the normal three months for such an investigation”, the letter explains.

Archbishop Coleridge, who has appointed a group of qualified persons to conduct the investigation, has also issued a decree stipulating that Bishop Saunders is to reside outside the Diocese of Broome “for the duration of the investigation”.

The public announcement of the investigation coincides with the time when the first Masses celebrated this weekend in the Diocese of Broome would commence.

“The Church’s protocols, particularly those enshrined in Pope Francis’ document *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, mean the outcome of a police investigation does not prevent the Church from conducting its own inquiry,” Archbishop Coleridge said.

“I have assembled a team of people who are highly qualified to conduct this investigation in a thorough way, mindful of the particular needs of the people of the Diocese of Broome.

“Their job will be to gather, as best they can, all relevant information to pursue truth and justice for everyone involved.”

Archbishop Coleridge said with the investigation now underway, it would be improper to make additional comment until the outcome could be announced.

He said if people wished to bring any matters to the attention of those carrying out the investigation, they should approach the Western Australia Professional Standards Office by calling 1800 072 390 or emailing director.wapso@perthcatholic.org.au