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**MEDIA OFFICE**


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Dated: Wednesday 18 October 2023

Subject: Catholic Diocese of Broome – Response to ABC Kimberley enquiry.

The Diocese of Broome received the following media enquiry from ABC Kimberley today – Wednesday 18 October 2023.

*“We have been reporting on the case of Bishop Christopher Saunders in recent years, and I wanted to ask questions related to his ongoing role in administrating or access church/charity funds.*

*The Guardian published this yesterday - <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/17/broome-catholic-bishop-subject-of-vatican-investigation-still-in-control-of-charities>*

*And here is a list of charities still attached to Bishop Saunders - [https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/person/9b3bf3af-f7bb-e811-a961-000d3ad24282?fbclid=IwAR2944okDHFGUmG7RCHQxDzj\\_3MplqOVAuct4sRWAI7NZEeiqSJzyRGKQOg](https://www.acnc.gov.au/charity/person/9b3bf3af-f7bb-e811-a961-000d3ad24282?fbclid=IwAR2944okDHFGUmG7RCHQxDzj_3MplqOVAuct4sRWAI7NZEeiqSJzyRGKQOg)*

*Can you provide an update on whether Bishop Saunders has any oversight or access to church/charity funds, as listed in the Guardian’s article?”.*

**The Diocese of Broome provided the following comments and statement in response.**

“The Catholic Diocese of Broome wishes to register its great disappointment at the inaccurate information, erroneously presented as facts, published in The Guardian on Tuesday 17 October 2023 – see link provided.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/17/broome-catholic-bishop-subject-of-vatican-investigation-still-in-control-of-charities>

The Guardian reported “A Catholic leader accused of sexually assaulting several young Aboriginal men still has control of nine charities in his former diocese”.

This is wholly inaccurate. **Since 12 January 2022**, Bishop Saunders has not had authority nor access to any Diocesan financial account, and no funds have been withdrawn by him.

The inaccurate representation and reporting by media that Bishop Saunders continues to have access to charitable funds of the Catholic Diocese of Broome is of great concern.

The Guardian reported “Saunders is still listed as the “responsible person” for nine charities, most of which are connected to parishes within the Broome diocese. Seven of them have no published financial information, which is not required for a “basic religious charity” under the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission (ACNC) rules. All of them are overdue in their reporting”.

In regard to the Australian Governments Charities Register, the Diocese can confirm that as of today’s date, no charitable organisation or entity associated with the Catholic Diocese of Broome nominates or records Bishop Saunders as having any responsibility whatsoever with the financial, administration or management of said charities.

It is important to restate that **since 12 January 2022**, Bishop Saunders has not had authority nor access to any Diocesan financial account, and no funds have been withdrawn by him for any purpose.

All the financial entities mentioned in the Guardian article have not been in the control of the former Bishop of Broome, Bishop Saunders or Therese Rogers since 12 January 2022, when the signatories were changed on all accounts.

Given the introduction of a new administration into the Diocese of Broome, working through many matters, the change in whom the responsible persons for these entities was not actioned.

Despite not changing the responsible persons for these entities until today, we reiterate that the only people who have been authorised to withdraw or to deposit monies into these entities since 12 January 2022 were the new signatories.

The process of correcting this information has begun, and continues, for the Catholic Diocese of Broome.

Bishop Michal Morrissey, Apostolic Administrator, Catholic Diocese of Broome, said:

*“I want to assure all those who so generously support the charitable works of the Church throughout the Diocese that they can do so with absolute trust that every contribution is directed wholly for its stated purpose.*

*I wish to refute the erroneous claim reported in the media that Bishop Saunders has access to the financial accounts of the Diocese’s charitable organisations. **This is simply not true.***

*I call on our generous supporters to continue to do so in support of our brothers and sisters in need”,* said Bishop Morrissey.

#### **End Statement**

Media enquiries should be directed to:

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*On behalf of The Most Rev M. H. Morrissey, Apostolic Administrator to the Diocese of Broome*