



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

May 12, 2005

Catholic Bishops thank Australians for sympathy and support expressed since the death of Pope John Paul II

The Catholic Bishops of Australia, meeting in Conference, wish to express their deep gratitude to the Australian community for the many expressions of sympathy and support that have come since the death of Pope John Paul II.

The Catholic community in Australia has been moved by the outpouring of respect and affection for our late Holy Father which has come from a very wide range of people from throughout Australia.

We thank particularly the leaders of other churches and religious communities who sent messages of condolence. Pope John Paul's tireless efforts in the areas of ecumenism and interreligious relations will have a lasting legacy and leave us all with a firm foundation on which to move forward.

This spontaneous reaction of sadness and grief at his passing spoke volumes about the ability of Pope John Paul to cut across boundaries and speak to people's hearts. He was a true witness to Jesus Christ, a holy and wise Chief Shepherd and a major figure on the world stage for over a quarter of a century. For a generation of people, he was the only Pope they had ever known.

Never before has a papal death and election been subject to such intense and immediate media focus. We are thankful for the manner in which Australian media professionals and their overseas colleagues brought news and coverage of this momentous event to the Australian people. To see front page banner headlines on the eve of the Pope's death saying simply, 'Let us Pray' meant a great deal to all Catholics in a time of mourning. Media commentary was vigorous and diverse as one would expect in our society, but almost always respectful and sincere.

We thank God that through the Cardinal Electors we now have a new Pope – the successor to St Peter – Pope Benedict XVI. We pray for him as he begins his Pontificate and offer him our loyalty and support. His wise and gentle words, both at the funeral of Pope John Paul and in the days following his own election as Supreme Pontiff have been inspiring.

We share with him particularly the hope that he found in the young people who were so much part of the great events in St Peter's Square. He told them that through their presence during "those sad days of the Pope's illness and death, it became wonderfully evident to us that the Church is alive. And the Church is young. She holds within herself the future of the world and therefore shows each of us the way towards the future".