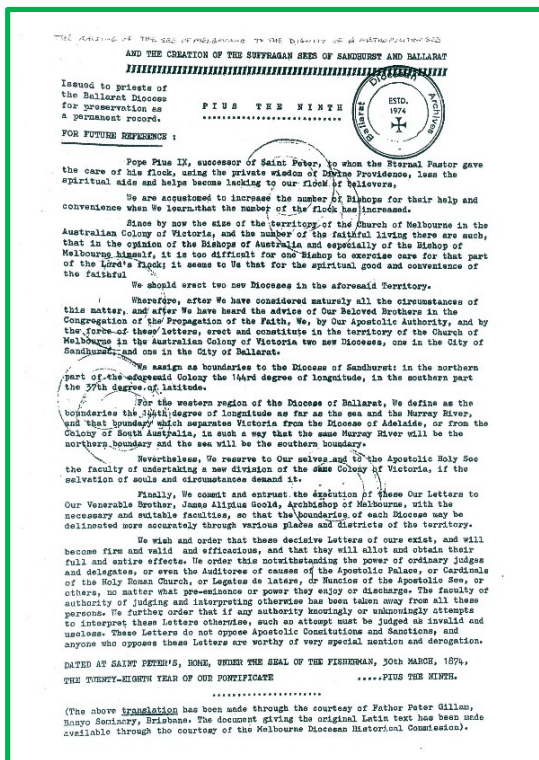


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An Easter with a Special Anniversary

This Easter, our diocese will be marking a special anniversary. It was on March 30, 1874, that Pope Pius the Ninth issued a decree establishing the Diocese of Ballarat. So, when we gather for the Easter Vigil on March 30 this year, it will be 150 years to the day since our diocese began.

The official description of a diocese focuses on the people who make up the diocesan community. The Code of Canon Law describes a diocese as “a portion of the people of God, which is entrusted to the care of a bishop” (Canon 369). So, when the number of people increases, there comes a time when a new bishop is appointed to care for that community. This is what happened in 1874 with the start of the Diocese of Ballarat. The population in the Colony of Victoria had grown so much that there were too many people for the Bishop of Melbourne to care for, so the Pope appointed two new bishops, one in Ballarat and one in Sandhurst (Bendigo), with responsibility to care for the communities of those regions.



Pope Pius the Ninth wrote as “the successor of Saint Peter to whom the Eternal Pastor gave the care of his flock”. This is how he explained the setting up of the new dioceses.

“Lest spiritual helps become lacking to the flock of believers, we are accustomed to increase the number of bishops for their assistance and convenience when we learn that the number of the flock has increased. Since by now the size of the territory of the Church of Melbourne in the Australian Colony of Victoria and the number of the faithful living there are such that, in the opinion of the bishops of Australia and especially of the Bishop of Melbourne himself, it is too difficult for one bishop to exercise care for that part of the Lord’s flock, it seems to us that for the spiritual good and convenience of the faithful we should erect two new dioceses in the aforesaid territory. Wherefore, after we have considered maturely all the circumstances of this matter, and after we

have heard the advice of our beloved brothers in the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, we, by our apostolic authority and by the force of these letters, erect and constitute in the territory of the Church of Melbourne in the Australian Colony of Victoria two new dioceses, one in the city of Sandhurst and one in the city of Ballarat.”

The Pope’s decree described the boundaries of the new dioceses. The Diocese of Ballarat would include the western region of Victoria. “For the Diocese of Ballarat, we define as the boundaries the 144th degree of longitude as far as the sea and the Murray River, and that boundary which separates Victoria from the Diocese of Adelaide, or from the Colony of South Australia, in such a way that the same Murray River will be the northern boundary and the sea will be the southern boundary.” One hundred and fifty years later, we continue to echo the Pope’s words in describing our diocese today. Our diocesan vision statement begins with the words, “We are a community of communities from the Murray to the sea.”

The 150th anniversary will occur on March 30, which in 2024 happens to be Holy Saturday. This means that we will be able to mark the anniversary as we celebrate the Easter Vigil. Each time we light our tapers from the Easter candle, we give thanks that Jesus is risen and is with us as we gather in his name. When we celebrate the Easter Vigil this year, we might well remember that the risen Jesus has been with us as a diocesan community for the past 150 years. He has been with us through the joys and struggles of these years and he promises to remain with us always.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR

