

Vatican removes Australian bishop who said he was open to ordaining women

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Rome, May 2 (ENInews)--The Vatican on 2 May announced that it relieved Australian bishop William Morris of his post, five years after he published a letter interpreted to indicate that he would be open to ordaining women and married men as priests if it were not prohibited by church rules.

In an open letter released in his Toowoomba diocese, which is west of Brisbane, Morris said his 2006 letter had been "misread, and, I believe, deliberately misinterpreted." Morris said he was encouraged to resign but that he declined to do so on the grounds that doing so would "mean that I accept the assessment of myself as breaking communion [with the Holy See], which I absolutely refute and reject." He added that he was being forced into early retirement.

In this 2006 letter, Morris suggested it might be time for the church to consider married priests and the ordination of women due to the dwindling numbers of Catholic priests particularly in rural and regional areas such as his diocese, according to the Toowoomba Chronicle newspaper.

The Chronicle also reported that supporters of Morris scheduled a candlelight walk and vigil for the evening of 3 May in Toowoomba.

The Vatican did not elaborate on its decision. Church doctrine stipulates that since only men were chosen as Jesus' apostles, only men can serve as priests. Although the church accepts former Anglican clergy who are married, the tradition of priestly celibacy has endured since the Middle Ages and has been debated since the earliest years of the church.