NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Church unity motivated papal action against bishop, Australians say

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Oct. 24, 2011

Australian Bishop William Morris. (CNS photo/courtesy of Diocese of Toowoomba)

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI's decision to remove an Australian bishop from office last May was aimed at preserving the unity of the church, the country's bishops said in a statement after meeting the pope and Vatican officials.

The Vatican's difficulties with Bishop William Morris of Toowoomba "concerned not only matters of church discipline but also of church doctrine definitively taught, such as on the ministerial priesthood," said the statement from the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference.

The statement was released by the bishops in Rome Oct. 21 at the end of their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican.

In interviews with Catholic News Service and in their statement, the bishops said they had a special meeting with Cardinals Marc Ouellet, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, and William J. Levada, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to discuss the pope's decision to remove Bishop Morris from office in May. They also met both cardinals separately.

"Our discussions with them were substantial, serious and candid," and gave the bishops "a more adequate understanding" of steps taken by the Vatican over a decade to resolve difficulties with the Toowoomba bishop, the statement said.

Bishop Morris was asked to resign six times by three different Vatican congregations, according to news reports. But matters became even more serious in 2006 when he said in a pastoral letter that he would be open to ordaining women and married men if church rules changed to allow such a possibility.

In 2007, the Vatican asked Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, who was archbishop of Denver at the time, to conduct an apostolic visitation of Toowoomba.

The Australian bishops' Oct. 21 statement said, "What the Holy See did was fraternal and pastoral, rather than juridical in character. Although efforts continued over many years, a critical point came when Bishop Morris failed to clarify his position to the satisfaction of the Holy See" and declined to resign when the pope asked him to do so.

The pope removed Bishop Morris as head of the Diocese of Toowoomba but imposed no other sanctions.

"What was at stake was the church's unity in faith and the ecclesial communion between the pope and the other bishops in the College of Bishops," the statement said. "Eventually Bishop Morris was unable to agree to what this communion requires and at that point the pope acted as the successor of Peter, who has the task of deciding what constitutes unity and communion in the church."

The Australian bishops said they accept the pope's exercise of his ministry and they reaffirm their communion with him.

"We return to Australia determined to do whatever we can to heal any wounds of division, to extend our fraternal care to Bishop Morris and to strengthen the bonds of charity in the church in Australia," it said.

Source URL (retrieved on *05/02/2016 - 08:31*): http://ncronline.org/news/global/church-unity-motivated-papal-action-against-bishop-australians-say