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Year after removing bishop, pope names new head of Toowoomba diocese

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- More than a year after Pope Benedict XVI removed Bishop William Morris as head of the Diocese of Toowoomba, Australia, the pope named the vicar general of the Diocese of Parramatta to succeed him.

Msgr. Robert McGuckin, 68, a canon lawyer and director of the Institute of Tribunal Practice at the Catholic Institute of Sydney, was named head of the diocese May 14.

Born in Sydney, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1973 and was incardinated in the Diocese of Parramatta in 1993. He holds degrees in canon law from St. Paul's University in Ottawa and served as president of the Canon Law Society of Australia and New Zealand, 1999-2006.

His predecessor, 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. Pope Benedict asked Bishop Morris to resign and removed the bishop from office when he refused to do so.

At the end of their "ad limina" visits to Rome last October, the bishops of Australia issued a statement saying they had met with officials at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Congregation for Bishops to discuss Bishop Morris' removal from office and the impact that had on the Diocese of Toowoomba.

The bishops' statement said the difficulties with Bishop Morris "concerned not only matters of church discipline but also of church doctrine definitively taught, such as on the ministerial priesthood." The bishops said removing him from office was a step aimed at preserving the unity of the church.

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