

UNHOLY ROW



FR NESTOR

Priest accuses Bishop Wilson of blind justice

By JENNY DENNIS

Archbishop Philip Wilson has been denounced as "blind and foolish" by a Wollongong priest incensed over his former superior's treatment of Father John Nestor.

Unanderra's Father Mark O'Keefe claims the former Bishop of Wollongong was conveniently shifted

sideways to Adelaide after suffering a personal humiliation when the Vatican decreed that Fr Nestor be restored to full pastoral duties.

His outburst was sparked by news that Wollongong's Catholic Church intends appealing Rome's decision to reinstate and compensate the controversial priest.

A media spokeswoman for the Diocese of Wollongong said the matter had moved on from the newly

promoted Archbishop Wilson and that the decision to appeal the decree was not his.

"The Diocese of Wollongong will not be drawn into debates over Archbishop Wilson's character traits," he said.

"His record speaks for itself."

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Priest accuses 'blind' bishop

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Fr Nestor was convicted of assaulting a 15-year-old altar boy, but the conviction was quashed in 1997 after a successful appeal to the Wollongong District Court.

Archbishop Wilson was the wrong person to be advising the new administrator of the Wollongong Diocese - Fr Bryan Jones - over Fr Nestor's fate, Fr O'Keefe said.

"Can one blind man guide another?" he asked.

He said Archbishop Wilson was blind in that he had failed to see how comprehensive was his humiliation when Rome decided to reinstate Fr Nestor.

Pride had also made the archbishop blind to

one of the most basic concepts of law - that of innocence.

He had had several opportunities to withdraw his "foolish" decision to impose conditions on an innocent man. He failed to do so, the decree from Rome was issued, and he was "conveniently moved sideways" to Adelaide.

"So, not so much a healing bishop, but a bishop who has failed to understand that penalties and conditions can only be placed on guilty people," Fr O'Keefe said.

Fr Jones could also expect a humiliation if he persisted, Fr O'Keefe warned. Even if the Vatican decided to accept the appeal, justice for Fr Nestor would be delayed, but not denied.

"He is a priest of the Diocese of Wollongong and the diocese has been directed

to reinstate him," he said. Giving Fr Nestor an appropriate appointment would be a vote of confidence in the Vatican's decision,

"I would like to think that the church is mature enough to accept a decision like this. But for the moment it seems not to be," Fr O'Keefe said.

He conceded it would be difficult for Fr Nestor to assume duties "in any normal sense" in Wollongong.

This is not the first time Fr O'Keefe has come out publicly in support of Fr Nestor. It was at Fr O'Keefe's Immaculate Conception Church in Unanderra that the former Dapto priest said mass in September 1998 in defiance of Bishop Wilson's orders.

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