



Catholic Diocese of Sandhurst

MEDIA RELEASE

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'My story now becomes part of your story': Bishop René begins ministry as Sandhurst's ninth bishop

Bishop René Ramirez RCJ is a self-declared unlikely Bishop. Having survived three heart attacks in three different countries and being formed in three different seminaries due to 'obedience' problems when he was young, Bishop Rene is grateful for where the Holy Spirit has led him.

Installed as the ninth Bishop of Sandhurst at Sacred Heart Cathedral, Bendigo earlier today, he spoke before a congregation of more than 1100 people from across central and north-east Victoria, including civic leaders, clergy and representatives of Catholic organisations. Many members of Victoria's Filipino Catholic community also travelled to Bendigo to witness the installation of the first Filipino-born Bishop of Sandhurst.

Addressing the congregation for the first time as their bishop, Bishop René RCJ reflected on the unlikely journey that had brought him to Bendigo. "When we look back on our lives, we can often see that God was guiding us all along," he said. "My story has taught me one simple lesson: we can trust the Lord. God sees what we cannot see. He knows the road ahead, including its unexpected turns. He can work through our strengths, our weaknesses and even our damaged hearts."

Born in the Philippines, Bishop René entered the seminary as a teenager and was ordained a priest in 1998. In February 2025 he was ordained an Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne and was appointed Bishop of Sandhurst just 18 months later.

With characteristic humour, Bishop René recounted surviving heart attacks in the Philippines, Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic and aboard a flight between Los Angeles and Chicago. "I have had three heart attacks in three different countries," he joked. "I do not recommend collecting countries in this particular way."

The congregation laughed as he admitted he found it difficult to believe he had first been called to become an auxiliary bishop, and now Bishop of Sandhurst. Behind the humour, however, was a message of resilience and trust.

"Nothing entrusted to God is wasted," he said.

Bishop René said he was joining a Diocese with a rich history of faith and service stretching back more than 150 years.

"I enter a story that has been unfolding for more than 150 years, written through the faith of generations, the ministry of clergy and religious, the witness of families, and the quiet service of many whose names may be known only to God." Having previously spent time in the Diocese, he said he had already witnessed the generosity and resilience of its people and wanted to build on that foundation."



Rather than outlining a detailed program of reform, Bishop René described a leadership style centred on listening—to one another, to the community and, through prayer, to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

"Instead of preparing our plans and then asking the Holy Spirit to approve them, let us allow Him to guide us from the beginning."

Bishop René said renewal would come not through organisational change alone but through people working together with purpose, courage and compassion, and called for parishes to become more welcoming and outward-looking, with renewed support for families and young people and a commitment to reconnecting with those who have drifted away from the Church. He also emphasised that leadership is shared, saying clergy and lay people each have gifts to contribute to the Diocese's future.

He acknowledged that change can be challenging and asked the people of Sandhurst for patience, honesty and prayer as he begins his ministry.

"I ask you to share in this vision; a Diocese led by the Holy Spirit, centred on Christ, committed to evangelisation and strengthened by prayerful and courageous leadership. Let us give this mission of zeal and mercy a chance to take deeper root among us."

Established in 1874, the Diocese of Sandhurst serves more than 93,000 Catholics across central and north-east Victoria through 38 parishes, 55 Catholic schools, early learning centres, healthcare, aged care and community services, making it one of the region's largest faith-based organisations.

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