



MEDIA RELEASE – Archdiocese of Brisbane

9 March, 2020

ARCHDIOCESE MOURNS THE LOSS OF RETIRED ARCHBISHOP JOHN BATHERSBY AO

The retired Roman Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane, John Bathersby, has died following a recent stroke.

Emeritus Archbishop Bathersby, 83, led the Archdiocese from December 3, 1991 until his retirement on November 14, 2011. He is one of only five Catholic Archbishops of Brisbane since 1917.

Born and bred in Stanthorpe, Archbishop Bathersby was only the second Queenslander appointed to lead the Brisbane church in its 160-year history.

Archbishop Bathersby had been a priest for 58 years, and in retirement enjoyed a return to the Granite Belt before settling into the Canossa Complex, Oxley, and St Vincent's Aged Care at Carseldine.

He died at the Wesley Hospital at Auchenflower on March 9.

"In his 20 years as Archbishop of Brisbane, John Bathersby was no high-powered administrator or fiery preacher. What he brought to the office was something deeper and more enduring," Archbishop of Brisbane Mark Coleridge said.

"John was consumed by the desire to know and love Jesus, and he spoke of this more and more as time went by. This is his greatest legacy to the Archdiocese.

"This led to a focus on deepening prayer, not only in his own life but in the life of the Archdiocese. The mystic shone through in the little Aussie battler; and the effect of that is hard to measure but impossible to deny.

"From this there flowed his passion for Christian unity: he understood that the Jesus whom he had met knocked down the walls that divide. His deep sense of communion extended not only to other Churches but to the community as a whole. Here he consolidated the legacy of Archbishop Frank Rush."

Archbishop Bathersby was ordained for the Diocese of Toowoomba at St Joseph's Church in Stanthorpe on June 30, 1961.

His first parish appointment was to Goondiwindi from 1962 until 1969, at which time he was invited to study spiritual theology in Rome, completing a Doctorate in 1982. This was to assist him in his role as Spiritual Director at the Pius XII Seminary.

In 1986 he was ordained as Bishop of Cairns, a position he enjoyed until succeeding Archbishop Rush at Brisbane in 1991.

Archbishop Bathersby's leadership saw a continuation of the pastoral approach and encouragement of the laity that had typified his predecessor.

The expansion and building of the Archdiocese continued steadily, keeping pace with southeast Queensland's rapid development, particularly between the Gold and Sunshine Coasts.

Archbishop Bathersby was firmly committed to ecumenism, serving with energy and distinction on two international bodies dialoguing with the Methodist and Anglican churches.

Some highlights throughout his time as leader included a Reconciliation Gathering at Lang Park in 1997, the restoration of St Stephen's Chapel – Queensland's first church – in 1999, an Archdiocesan Synod in 2003 and the Holy Spirit Seminary's relocation back to Banyo in 2008.

For recreation, Archbishop Bathersby enjoyed mountain climbing and watching sport.

He is survived by his three sisters; Carmel Mahoney, Sue Nolan and Anne Johnson; his brother Michael Bathersby, and numerous nephews and nieces.

A Funeral Mass is being planned at the Cathedral of St Stephen, to be presided over by Archbishop Coleridge, who was a friend of Archbishop Bathersby from their days of studying in Rome. Archbishop Coleridge succeeded Archbishop Bathersby in 2012.

"John was a rare human being, with a heart as big as his mind and soul and his sense of humour," Archbishop Coleridge said.

"I've met few more memorable people in my life than John Bathersby; and for many reasons, not all of them obvious, I owe him a deep personal debt of gratitude."

Bishops of Brisbane

Bishop James Quinn (1859-1881)

Archbishop Robert Dunne (Bishop of Brisbane from 1882, Archbishop from 1887-1917)

Archbishop James Duhig (1917-1965)

Archbishop Patrick M O'Donnell (Coadjutor Archbishop of Brisbane 1949-1965, Archbishop of Brisbane 1965-73)

Archbishop Francis R Rush (1973-1991)

Most Rev Archbishop John Alexius Bathersby DD AO (1991-2011)

Most Rev Archbishop Mark Coleridge BA DSS (2012-)

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