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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRIESTS, DEACONS, RELIGIOUS, AND ALL THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ADELAIDE, FROM ARCHBISHOP PHILIP WILSON.

My dear sisters and brothers,

By now most of you would be aware that I have been charged by the New South Wales police with an offence under section 316 of the *Crimes Act, 1900* (NSW). The charge that has been filed in the NSW Local Court is based on an alleged conversation which a person says he had with me in the 1970s, soon after my ordination and when I was an assistant to the parish priest of East Maitland.

When I received this information from my legal advisor on the morning of St Patrick's Day, 17 March 2015, of course I was extremely disappointed.

However, as it happened, I had been on a prayer retreat the week before and through prayer I was able to prepare myself for these events. The Holy Rosary, our prayer to the Lord in union with Mary the Mother of God, has again been a very real and enduring source of comfort for me in this difficult time.

I want you to know that I deny the charge and I want you to know that I will be vigorously defending myself against it through the Court process over the next few months.

As the Bishop of Wollongong from 1996 to 2000, and then as Archbishop of Adelaide from 2001, and as a former Co-Chair of the National Committee for Professional Standards, I have dedicated myself to confronting child sexual abuse in the Church. I have undertaken this work alongside many dedicated people who work for the Church to combat child sexual abuse and to bring healing and justice to victims of child sexual abuse. These staff members and volunteers in professional standards offices, child protection units and police check units, and in our parishes and schools around the country, have my support and my admiration.

Consequently, you might understand my dismay that I now face an allegation which runs contrary to everything I have worked hard for over the last 20 years and that is why I am determined to prove that this charge is simply misconceived.

I have decided to take indefinite leave as of 17 March 2015 and as such I will not be performing my national roles in the Church or my work in the Archdiocese. I have handed over responsibilities to my Vicar General, Father Philip Marshall, who has been closely involved in the administration of the Archdiocese for the past three years. He will continue the smooth operation of the Archdiocese.

Given this charge, I will need to travel to NSW at the appropriate times for Court proceedings and I therefore expect I will have to spend considerable time out of Adelaide over the next few months. I hope that this matter can come before the Court as soon as possible and can be finalised in a matter of months.

I am conscious that Easter is approaching and that I will be absent for the Mass of the Oils, and all the Easter celebrations that are so important and dear to us as people of faith in the Risen Lord. However, you will all be in my thoughts and prayers constantly at this important time in our lives, and arrangements will be put in place in the Cathedral to ensure that all ceremonies take place as planned.

But as I reflect upon this event and the issues facing the Church in Australia at this time, I think it is more important that I ask you to pray for justice for all victims of child sexual abuse in the Church and beyond. Their voices should be heard and justice must be afforded to them, as a right before God and before the community in which we live. So I ask all priests and deacons, religious brothers and sisters, and all the People of God of the Archdiocese of Adelaide to put justice and healing for victims of child sexual abuse at the centre of your prayer. I also ask for your prayers and your support.

Please be assured that the Archdiocese is in good hands while I take the time I require to defend this charge and please know that you are all in my prayers.

Finally, I would like to thank the many, many people who have extended their support over the last few days and I want to reaffirm to all of you my deep love for the Archdiocese of Adelaide.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Philip Wilson".

Most Rev Philip Wilson DD JCL
Archbishop of Adelaide