Diocese of Wollongong

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Press Conference.
WIN T.V. News.

28 September 1999

BISHOP ONLY AUTHORITY TO DETERMINE STATUS OF ORDER OF SAINT CHARBEL

Bishop Philip Wilson, Bishop of Wollongong, has investigated claims of ecclesiastical approval for the group known as the Order of Saint Charbel of North Nowra.

The investigation follows statements made by William Kamm that his order has received approval from a man claiming to be a Catholic bishop, and that this approval constitutes recognition by the Roman Catholic Church in Rome.

Bishop Wilson reaffirms that only he has the authority to legitimise any group seeking designation as a new religious order in the Diocese of Wollongong. Any group in the Diocese of Wollongong seeking recognition as a religious order cannot receive it from any authority except the Bishop of Wollongong.

Mr Kamm claims Bartholomew Schneider, who lives in Germany, has approved formally the Order of Saint Charbel. Bishop Wilson's investigations reveal that Bartholomew Schneider is not a bishop and he holds no office of authority in the Roman Catholic Church.

Bishop Wilson says his enquiries in both Germany and Rome reveal Bartholomew Schneider holds no office in the Church and is an imposter. In fact, a warning about his illegal activities was published in the *L'Osservatore Romano* on 19 September 1995. A letter from Bartholomew Schneider to Bishop Wilson reads in part: "We've always stayed united with the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church, anyone who claims otherwise lies". However, Bartholomew Schneider's letter goes on to indicate that he does not have Vatican approval. His name does not appear in the official published list of the names of Catholic bishops.

Mr Kamm also wrote to Archbishop Nesti, the Secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life in Rome, making the claim of approval. Archbishop Nesti has reaffirmed the Congregation's view that any recognition would have to be given by the bishop of the diocese in which the group is residing.

Mr Kamm has also claimed that the Archbishop of Manila, Cardinal Sin, has approved his order. Cardinal Sin has denied this claim in recent correspondence with Bishop Wilson.

Bishop Wilson has written to William Kamm urging him to refrain from making public statements that his organisation has received ecclesiastical authority.

He has also urged Mr Kamm to inform members of his organisation that no such approval has been given, and advise them of the invalidity of their vows. A third request requires Mr Kamm to instruct his members not to wear any semblance of religious habit in public.

Bishop Wilson says the opening of the canonical doctrinal investigation does not constitute approval for the group. He advises that this doctrinal investigation is still in a preliminary stage. A large number of documents has been received by the diocesan office. These documents are archived for the second phase of the investigation. This second phase will begin with the appointment of members of the commission.

Bishop Wilson says in a bid to accomplish a full and fair investigation, he has sought advice from various authorities throughout the world and within Australia on the correct process for such an investigation. Bishop Wilson says he will do all in his power to conclude the investigation expeditiously.

However, in the meantime Mr Kamm cannot lay claim to the approval of the Catholic Church for his organisation. Such approval can only come from the Bishop of Wollongong and that approval has not been given. The task of the Commission is otherwise: its job now is to determine the truth of Mr Kamm's opinions and teaching.

+ P. Wilson.
26/9/99.