

**THE RIGHT REVEREND DONALD KIRK
BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF RIVERINA
IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA**

DIOCESE OF RIVERINA PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS ORDINANCE 2018

In the matter of the Reverend Robert William Harris

**Announcement of Decision pursuant to section 73 of the Diocese of Riverina
Professional Standards Ordinance 2018**

1. My purpose today is to convey my decision following consideration of the recommendations notified to me in the Determination of the Professional Standards Board (PSB) proceedings against the Reverend Robert William Harris (Fr Harris), issued on 15th November 2022.
2. On the evening of 16th September 2020, I received advice from the Professional Standards Committee (PSC) of the Diocese of Riverina that several complaints had been received against Fr Harris that were of a sufficiently serious nature that the PSC recommended that he be suspended from active ministry within the Diocese pending the outcome of investigation into the complaints.
3. On 17th September 2020 Fr Harris was presented with these complaints and I then issued him a Letter of Suspension from active ministry. Having received this Letter and considered the matter, Fr Harris chose to voluntarily resign and retire from ministry as the Dean of the Cathedral and Rector of Griffith with the Diocese.
4. It needs to be recognized that the complainants were all people in relation to whom Fr Harris had authority. He was responsible to direct their ministry/employment. This placed them in a different position from parishioners who received his ministry as parishioners.
5. It also needs to be recognized that because Fr Harris was the Dean and Vicar General, and therefore a senior member of clergy in the Diocese, I decided that the Professional Standards Committee of another Diocese (the Diocese of Gippsland) be asked to investigate the matter on behalf of the Diocese. This allowed for a non-prejudiced, objective, and independent consideration of the complaints received.
6. Having determined there was a case to answer, the matter was heard by the PSB, the membership of which is external to the Diocese and therefore objective and independent.

7. I recognize that the Professional Standards process has taken a long time to come to fulfilment. This has been hard on all involved – the complainants, Fr Harris, and the Griffith parish community.
8. The Professional Standards Board conducted a hearing of the allegations. Evidence was presented and both Fr Harris and the Diocese were legally represented. The PSB found that Fr Harris had engaged in harassment, bullying and emotional abuse of three church workers. This misconduct occurred on a number of occasions over time, causing harm to those three church workers (two priests and one lay person). I accept those findings.
9. I note that, as recommended by the PSB, I have written to Fr Harris censuring him for his inappropriate actions towards the complainants.
10. In conveying my decision I make the following Orders and Declarations:
 - a. **That Fr Harris has ceased to hold any office or license in the Diocese of Riverina.**
 - b. **That Fr Harris is prohibited from being licensed to the incumbency of any Parish or position of authority in the Diocese of Riverina.**
 - c. **That Fr Harris shall be restricted from exercising any supervision or pastoral oversight of church workers.**
11. I hope that Fr Harris and his supporters understand that there is still a place for him in the Church, but in order to take that place he must embrace a spirituality of restraint in which he demonstrates that he understands that his conduct has caused harm to those he supervised in ministry who, like him, are part of the Body of Christ.
12. The purpose of this decision is not to be punitive. The decision of the Bishop is made public so that the Church can see the care and attention given to such matters by the Bishop and the Diocese and that the people of God, especially the clergy, might reflect on what is expected of them in ministry and life together. We have a responsibility to ensure that God's people are treated with dignity and respect, whether they be parishioners, clergy or members of the laity who are working in ministry.

24th November 2022

The Right Reverend Donald Kirk
Bishop of Riverina