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A Christmas message from Bishop Garry

Dear friends,

Greetings from Ballarat for this happy season. I hope that this Christmas will bring unexpected joys and blessings, as well as the warm familiarity of family and friends.

I'm hoping for fresh oysters and ham and turkey on Christmas Day!

2025 has been a tricky year for me.

My dear Mum, Lorna, died peacefully at my home on Shrove Tuesday. She was being cared for by her friend Jill while I went to a meeting in Melbourne. After a simple tea of a pastie with sauce and a glass of her beloved Farmers Union Iced Coffee, Mum lay down and died. Although there were some tense times, Mum's five and a half years living with me were happy and I don't regret a minute of that time. I was very grateful for the support of many carers. Mum's Requiem at the Ballarat Cathedral was really beautiful and a couple of weeks later we held a thanksgiving service at St Peter's Glenelg, where Mum had worshipped for over 50 years. Her ashes were interred in the church garden after refreshments had finished. A wonderful, rich, varied and full life - thanks be to God.

Following Mum's death I was increasingly plagued with leg problems and by Anzac Day I went to St John of God hospital here in Ballarat with almost complete failure of my legs. After three months of seemingly endless tests the neurological team here and in Melbourne decided that I had a rare and difficult diabetic neuropathy affecting my lumbar nerves and therefore my ability to stand and walk. Nearly 5 months later I am still in the rehabilitation hospital having physiotherapy twice most days and other medical interventions. Just in the last few weeks I have been able to stand with a frame, to walk assisted with some confidence and to navigate with both a manual and a motorised wheelchair. The doctors are hopeful that I can go home sometime in mid January.

I have learned from this experience

- how to depend on others (a new experience for me)
- patience (a virtue I have rarely exercised)
- that the love and prayers of many people keep me alive
- the many ambiguities of our medical system and medical personnel
- that the Church and the Diocese can thrive without me being in charge
- a deep gratitude for those who have persisted even in dark times.

I reckon there might be a retirement book in this experience. We'll see!

I've watched a lot of TV news this year and it has been tough. Ukraine, Gaza, Israel and Lebanon and the Yemen have been places of real pain and tension. And now Syria has joined the list. It would be easiest to revert to simplistic name calling and "taking sides", but all human relationships are complex, even at an international level. Too often even the most respected journalists use simplistic analysis eg the almost deliberate obfuscation of the difference between anti Zionist and antisemitic protests.

Of course, our Christian hope is that into all this mess, the call of Christmas for goodwill among people and peace on the earth might be heard anew. Our personal distresses and the international messes are not so different today than they were at the first Christmas.

I am grateful for your prayers and support. Cath Zala has been my primary carer, along with Jill Gale, Fr Chris Keast my Chaplain and Fr Mike O'Brien. The Vicar General has been a tower of support and will be consecrated to serve as an assistant bishop in Ballarat in February next year. Andy and De Wurm continue to love, cajole and support me from a distance and have visited for lengthy stays in Ballarat. Alice Knight reminds me of the realities of life and has provided Vietnamese pork meals - a good antidote to hospital food. My episcopal colleagues have been very supportive, especially Phillip and Joy Freier, Kate Prowd, Brian and Robyn Farran, Andrew and Jan Curnow, Jeremy Greaves and Kay Goldsworthy. I am always grateful for the diocesan leadership group.

May Christmas bring us all joy and peace, new energy and hope for the year ahead, and a deeper dependence on God's grace and mercy.

With love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Garry Weatherill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning of the first name.

Garry Weatherill.