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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A long running dispute between a Morwell Catholic priest and his former bishop over the running of the parish has ended with the Vatican judging in favour of the bishop.

The Vatican's highest judicial authority has judged that the now retired Bishop Jeremiah Coffey was correct in removing Fr John Speakman as parish priest in 2003.

Fr Speakman twice successfully appealed to the Congregation for the Clergy against the decree ordering his removal, but Bishop Coffey then appealed those decisions to the Apostolic Signatura.

In announcing an end to the eight year dispute, current Bishop of Sale Christopher Prowse outlined the eight year history, including the adjudications in favor of Fr Speakman in 2004 and 2006, and the ultimate appeal against those decisions by Bishop Coffey in 2007.

He said that the latest decision was a definitive judgement from the supreme apostolic tribunal at the Vatican and could not be challenged.

Bishop Prowse said the Signatura had judged that the Congregation for the Clergy was correct in the procedure in which it reached its decision, however, it did not consider all the reasons presented to it by Bishop Coffey.

A new parish priest would now be appointed for Morwell which has been run by administrators since Fr Speakman's removal in July 2003.

He would discuss with Fr Speakman suitable possibilities for a fresh appointment in the Diocese of Sale.

“My prayer and hope is that this definitive judgement by the Signatura will help us to move to a closure and healing of this vexed issue.

“I am grateful for the patience and priestly zeal that both Bishop Coffey and Fr Speakman have demonstrated in these many years of waiting.”

For further information or backgrounding, contact Diocesan Media Officer Colin Coomber on 5144 6132 or 0407 213 328.