



Catholics urged to pray over Calvary

By Graham Downie

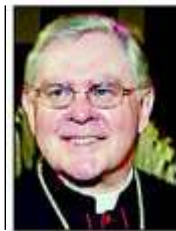
The Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn is urging his diocese to become “vigorously” involved in the proposed sale of Canberra’s Calvary Public Hospital.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge is opposed to the controversial sale, which has been agreed in principle by the Little Company of Mary Health Care and the ACT Government.

The Canberra Times understands Archbishop Coleridge will distribute a letter to Canberra Catholics this weekend calling for them to “pray that the will of Christ may be done in this negotiation so that the result may work for the good of the ACT community and Catholic health care”.

The letter will urge parishioners to contribute to the six-week consultation on the proposed sale, Archbishop Coleridge saying that he remains unconvinced by arguments of the ACT Government and the Little Company of Mary in support of the sale.

“Not every Catholic may agree with my assessment of the situation, but I would ask that there be a very active and widespread engagement with the consultation,” he



OPPOSED:
 Archbishop Mark Coleridge

said. “That is required of us, I think, if we wish to honour the legacy of those who worked so hard to establish and conduct Calvary as a first-rate Catholic hospital at the service of the whole community, especially those more vulnerable.”

The Government has proposed buying Calvary Hospital from the Little Company of Mary for \$77 million, and selling to it the hospice, Clare Holland House, for \$9 million. The agreement would also see the Little Company of Mary spend more than the net \$68 million on a private hospital adjacent to Calvary Hospital.

Health Minister Katy Gallagher said yesterday the alternative to buying the hospital was to build a third public hospital in Canberra.

This would not be sustainable but if it were to occur, Calvary would be starved of much-needed funds for upgrading.

Calvary Hospital required capital expenditure of more than \$200 million. If the Government spent this much on an asset it did not own, the ACT’s annual budget deficit would double.

In his letter, the archbishop says it is not easy in the complex negotiation to know the facts and grasp the issues but, “it is important that the Catholic community, which has had such a stake in the hospital through the years, makes every attempt to do so”.

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Ms Gallagher said it was fair to say Archbishop Coleridge had not been happy about the proposed sale from the beginning.

"He sees it as a diminution of public health care," she said.

But the ACT Government paid the entire annual \$115 million for public health care at Calvary.

Archbishop Coleridge asked the Vicar General of Canberra and Goulburn, John Woods, to speak to *The Canberra Times* on this matter yesterday. Monsignor Woods said he believed all of the Government's concerns over financial accounting could be addressed in other ways. "I am not convinced from what has emerged that it has to change," he said.

But he was not giving political direction to Catholics. Indeed, he said this was a matter for the entire community to consider.

It seemed reasonable to ask whether Calvary Hospital had been starved of funds and now had to catch up. And what was the Government's real driver behind wanting to buy the hospital.

Monsignor Woods said Archbishop Coleridge was very respectful of the Little Company of Mary. To suggest the archbishop was interfering was an ignorance.

Though the contract was with the Little Company of Mary, the archbishop had an oversight role.

Canon law required transfers of more than \$5 million to be con-

sidered by church officials in Rome. The archbishop could not veto any decision by the company, but he could forward an opinion to Rome. That opinion would be considered with any opinion by the company and Rome could make a final decision.

Ms Gallagher said she would have to depend on the ACT Legislative Assembly to approve the sale. "There is risk on either side," she said. "I would hope that whatever process goes on in Rome takes cognisance of what goes on in Canberra."

Public consultation on the sale ends on November 12.