



**Franciscan Friars**  
*Provincial Office*

*Province of the Holy Spirit*

*incorporating*

*Custody of St Anthony*

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### **Address re: Mother Romana Home, Kew**

Saturday 15 September 2012 – Residents and families

Sunday 16 September 2012 – Slovenian Community

Monday 17 September 2012 – Staff

Ladies and gentlemen, Fr Stane, Fr Ciril, members of the Board of Trustees, friends, employees, distinguished guests (and here I refer specifically to all those residents who call Mother Romana Home, their home):

Stan Prosenak has presented a clear statement of why we are gathered here today and so there is no need for me to repeat the details of his statement. I am present here today to offer my support to the Board of Trustees and to assure you all that the decision to close Mother Romana Home has not been made easily or lightly. It is a decision made with a combination of heavy heart and practical reality, a decision made with a loving care for the residents and employees and with consideration for all associated with the vision of Fr Basil and his successors here in Kew.

As you know from what has been said already, the Australian Franciscans have provided the legal framework in which the Mother Romana Home has operated. All of my predecessors as Provincial Ministers since the Mother Romana Home was established (Frs Maurice West, Daniel Neylon, Kevin Goode, Stephen Bliss) – and now me – have been proud to support the work of the Slovenian Franciscans in their ministry here in Australia. We have been particularly proud to support and encourage the work of Mother Romana Home and to know of the utmost care and respect that has been given to the residents of Mother Romana Home by those who care for them. While we Australian Franciscans may not have been physically present in this Home all that often, we have been kept informed, by Fr Ciril and those before him, of the special nature of this ministry of aged care.

For the past twelve months, Fr Ciril and the Board of Trustees have worked hard to evaluate the circumstances in which Mother Romana Home found itself and to seek an appropriate way forward. I am pleased to say that I have attended several of their Board meetings and some other additional meetings. I have witnessed their deep concern for 'doing the right thing' according to the trust vested in them. They have at all times acted conscientiously and strived to examine the vision of Fr Basil and balance that with the needs and resources of the present time. Fr Ciril and the Board members are men and women of integrity who have always had the best interests of the Slovenian community in mind, and particularly the residents of the Home.

Right from the outset of discussions about the future direction of Mother Romana Home, it has been a professional exercise. The current Board of Trustees comprises professionally skilled persons in various fields of business, some with long experience on the Board and some with shorter experience. This Board has built upon the dedication of the previous Boards who also gave generous service and

wise advice. While recognizing their own abilities – and limitations – the current Board needed to call upon the expertise of Catholic Homes, a body under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Melbourne for the purpose of managing Catholic Aged Care facilities. As Stan has already told you, Catholic Homes has played a vital, integral and professional role in helping make the decision, as well as providing resources and personnel in this difficult process of transition and eventual closure.

We have also had the services of an independent lawyer at several meetings to guide us in a process of decision-making and to ensure that the rights and entitlements of all key players, particularly the residents and employees, would be respected. Mr Don Brookes is a lawyer independent of Mother Romana Home and the Slovenian Franciscans, but someone known to the Australian Franciscans and one who understands our Franciscan values and desire to serve the poor, the needy and the sick as the Gospels ask of us.

As Provincial Minister of the Australian Franciscans and therefore the representative of the legal owners of Mother Romana Home, I take this responsibility seriously. If you have any serious questions or concerns about what is happening for you in the coming months, I urge you to contact Stan as the chair of the Board of Trustees, or Fr Ciril, or me. With the assistance of Catholic Homes and the management and staff of Mother Romana Home, we will do our best to make this transition as smooth as possible for residents and their families and the staff.

In the past year, whenever the Board has gathered for its meeting, there has usually been a photo of Fr Basil or Mother Romana on the wall, as if looking over us and urging us on to better ways. I believe that their spirit and good deeds will live on in the Slovenian community in many ways. Already there are suggestions about how to continue the name 'Mother Romana' and surely there will be more inspiring ideas to come. A name on a plaque, a photograph on a wall or an award in their memory might be a constant and wonderful reminder of their place in past history – but perhaps probably not the only way in which to remember them into the future. Rather, if all of us put into action something of their great spirit of vision and dedication, then that will become the greatest gift that we can give to them and their memory and to the Slovenian community in Melbourne.

I wish you well in this period of transition. For residents moving to a new home, I trust that you will find a friendly welcome, fine care and new friends. For staff moving to new places of employment, I trust that you will find personal fulfillment, job satisfaction and appreciation of the skills which you gained and shared at Mother Romana Home.

None of the Board, nor Fr Ciril, Fr Stane or myself, underestimates the sadness of this announcement and the emotional upset as people move from this Home. All of us acknowledge your sadness and loss and we keep you in our prayers and Masses. Thank you in your own special ways for making Mother Romana Home the place it is – a true 'home', not just a house or a building or an aged care facility – a Home. Mother Romana and Fr Basil would be very proud.

May God bless you all.



*Fr Paul Smith OFM  
Provincial Minister  
Franciscan Province of the Holy Spirit  
Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia*

13 September 2012