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POPE FRANCIS BESTOWS PAPAL HONOURS ON THREE SOUTH AUSTRALIANS

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Three members of Adelaide's Catholic community are the first to be awarded papal honours by Pope Francis.

Businessman Graham Spurling has been made a Knight of the Order of St Gregory the Great while Dr Krista Maier and Pauline Connelly have been made Dames of the Order of St Gregory the Great.

Adelaide Archbishop Philip Wilson said the awarding of the ancient titles was "rare" and on this occasion was particularly significant because they were the first to be granted by Pope Francis.

"The honours acknowledge these three individuals' extraordinary Christian leadership," Archbishop Wilson said.

"Their lives are exemplary models of Christian living, and all of them are well recognised in the community as people of the highest integrity, distinction and leadership."

Archbishop Wilson said Mr Spurling, a leader in the manufacturing industry, had completely reformed and revitalised the financial structures of the diocese in his role as Chairman of the Diocesan Finance Council. Married with five children and 15 grandchildren, he is an active member of his local Brighton parish.

Dr Krista Maier, also from Brighton parish, is a GP serving residents of the southern suburbs, particularly those in disadvantaged circumstances. The mother of three was described by Archbishop Wilson as "a committed Catholic who lives out her faith in her role as a medical doctor" as well as a person of "great charity and generosity" as reflected in her voluntary community work.

Pauline Connelly is a social worker and counsellor and is currently the Assistant Director of Centacare Catholic Family Services. She is highly regarded for her support for migrant and refugees and members of the Aboriginal community as well as for her involvement in developing child protection policies and procedures, and cultural awareness training for counsellors.

"Pauline Connelly is one of the most distinguished lay women in the Archdiocese of Adelaide," Archbishop Wilson said.

The honours signed by Pope Francis will be presented by Archbishop Wilson later in the year.