



OUR Faith OUR Future

A Pastoral Letter to the Faithful of the Christchurch Diocese 1st Sunday of Advent, December 1st, 2019

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Today on the 1st Sunday of Advent I write to you to respond to your feedback and announce my final decision regarding the Our Faith Our Future proposal for the future of our diocese.

I am so grateful for all the feedback I received, and I have found it very helpful. Thank you for taking the time to reflect, listen and pray about the proposal. All of the feedback has been read, a robust process has taken place, it has been independently analysed, and you will find a summary on the diocesan website.

I was heartened by the fact that only 20% of those who fed back were uninspired by the vision that I proposed. It was encouraging for me to hear people make comments such as:

- *"I wish you to know that I am supportive of your plan and of the proposed changes even though I recognise that change is not always easy and for some there will be a great sense of loss but I am confident and I pray that with these changes will come new opportunities to build stronger, dynamic and more vibrant parish communities."*
- *"This plan will allow groups to come together and share skills and talents. I am looking forward to being involved in this new bigger Parish. "*
- *"We would like to commend Bishop Paul for his bravery in putting forward a clear vision for the future of the diocese."*

I don't discount the fact that there are some people who continue to struggle or are uncertain with the proposal. There were some valid issues highlighted in the feedback which fell into a number of broad themes and I will respond to these later in the document.

From my reading of the feedback I believe there is a majority support and enthusiasm for the proposal outlined and a clear direction has emerged. I now present to you the final plan.

THE PARISHES IN CHRISTCHURCH CITY AND THE GREATER CHRISTCHURCH AREA WILL BE:

CHRISTCHURCH CENTRAL - CATHEDRAL amalgamated from the existing Mairehau and St Mary's Pro-Cathedral Parishes and will be located at a yet to be finalised site in central Christchurch. This is a change to the original proposal, and I have outlined my reasons in the discussion about the changes to the North Parish. The Te Rangimarie Maori community will also be a part of the Cathedral Parish while remaining at their Gloucester Street centre.

Fr Simon Eccleton will be the Administrator of the St Mary's Pro-Cathedral Parish commencing on Sunday 26th January 2020. He will also remain as parish priest of Mairehau parish. The assistant priests of both parishes will be **Fr Job Thyikalamuriyil** and **Fr Thanh Tran**.

From Pentecost Sunday 2020, Fr Simon Eccleton will be the Administrator of the new Cathedral Parish and Fr Job and Fr Thanh will be assistant priests at the new Cathedral Parish.

CHRISTCHURCH NORTH amalgamated from the existing Bryndwr, Burnside and Papanui Parishes with a new church to be built at the St Joseph's Papanui site on Main North Road. This is a change from the original proposal.

Feedback was received about the possibility of Mairehau amalgamating with the Cathedral. The reasons given were:

- The originally proposed North Parish would have had the three largest schools in the diocese. This creates logistical issues especially around sacramental programmes and pastoral care for our schools.
- With a number of Mairehau parishioners coming from the Dallington/Shirley/Linwood area the Cathedral parish would be geographically closer for them.
- Based on existing parish numbers the North Parish would have had over 2000 parishioners which was considered too large by many.

Feedback was also received asking that the Bryndwr Parish amalgamate with the North Parish.

The reasons given were:

- Burnside and Bryndwr have been working closely together for a number of years and currently have a combined parish council and the same parish priest and assistant priests.
- Parishioners of Bryndwr Parish felt they were more likely to travel to Papanui than the city.

Fr Rick Loughnan will be the parish priest of Bryndwr, Burnside and Papanui parishes commencing on Sunday 26th January 2020. The assistant priests will be **Fr Alister Castillo**, **Fr Edwin Colaco SDB** and **Fr Kevin Wei**.

From Pentecost Sunday 2020, Fr Rick Loughnan will be the parish priest of the new North Parish and Fr Alister, Fr Edwin and Fr Kevin will be the assistant priests at the new North Parish.

CHRISTCHURCH WEST

will remain as it was proposed, amalgamated from the existing Riccarton and Sockburn Parishes and the Hornby part of the present Hornby-Darfield Parish, based out of an expanded church at Our Lady of Victories Sockburn site, Main South Road.

Fr Michael Therese Scheerger CSJ will be the parish priest of Hornby-Darfield, Riccarton and Sockburn parishes commencing on Sunday 26th January 2020. The assistant priests will be **Fr Sean-Mary Britto CSJ** and **Fr Phillip Suelzer CSJ**.

From Pentecost Sunday 2020, Fr Michael Therese Scheerger CSJ will be the parish priest of the new West Parish and Fr Sean-Mary and Fr Phillip will be the assistant priests at the new West Parish.

CHRISTCHURCH EAST

will remain as it was proposed amalgamated from the existing Christchurch East and Ferrymead Parishes, based out of the St Anne's, Woolston site on Ferry Road.

Fr Benito Velasco will be the parish priest of Ferrymead and Christchurch East parishes commencing on Sunday 26th January 2020. The assistant priests will be **Fr Peter Costello** and **Fr Paulo Filoialii**.

From Pentecost Sunday 2020, Fr Benito Velasco will be the parish priest of the new East Parish and Fr

Peter Costello and Fr Paulo will be the assistants at the new East Parish.

Fr Paulo Filoialii will also be the Samoan Chaplain.

Fr Bryan Parish is to retire as of Sunday 26th January.

CHRISTCHURCH SOUTH

will remain as it was proposed amalgamated from the existing Addington-Beckenham and Hoon Hay-Halswell parishes.

Feedback was received about the possibility of using the existing church at Addington rather than a new build at Hoon Hay. The reasons given included ground conditions, parking and traffic difficulties, current facilities available at Addington and the availability of space for extension.

I sought advice and considered carefully the possibility of using the Addington site rather than the Hoon Hay site. I asked the Diocesan Property team to relook at this possibility. Their advice to me was that in regard to the ground conditions well-respected geotechnical engineers were employed to provide suitable advice on the engineering solutions relative to various ground conditions across the city. To date no site has been identified that has a ground condition that couldn't be resolved with a cost-effective engineering solution.

On the Addington site there is not sufficient land available to provide for a presbytery, pastoral centre and church and sufficient car parking (on and off

street) to support the larger parish being located at Addington. This does mean that the Hoon Hay site will need to expand by reconfiguration of the school and possible land acquisitions. A general site plan has been explored for the Hoon Hay site and it does show that it is feasible.

Therefore, a new church will be built at Our Lady of the Assumption Hoon Hay site on Hoon Hay Road.

Fr Peter Head SM will be the parish priest of Addington-Beckenham and Hoon Hay-Halswell parishes commencing on Sunday 26th January 2020. The assistant priests will be **Fr Phil Bennenbroek SM** and **Fr Barry Malone SM** with **Fr Allan Jones SM** in residence.

From Pentecost Sunday 2020, Fr Peter Head SM will be the parish priest of the new South Parish and Fr Phil and Fr Barry will be the assistant priests at the new South Parish with Fr Allan in residence.

The **SELWYN** region will become a new parish amalgamated from the existing Lincoln and Leeston Parishes and the Darfield part of the present Hornby-Darfield Parish. The churches will be retained in each place. In time it is hoped that a new church and school will be built at Rolleston.

Fr Brian Fennessy will be the parish priest of Lincoln and Leeston parishes commencing on Sunday 26th January 2020. The assistant priest will be **Fr Chris Orr**.

From Pentecost Sunday 2020, Fr Brian Fennessy will be the parish priest of the new Selwyn Parish and Fr Chris will be the assistant priest at the new Selwyn Parish.

I have considered options for **NORTH CANTERBURY** and I have decided to keep the parishes separate while encouraging both parishes to work more closely together.

COMMENCEMENT

The new parishes will commence on Pentecost Sunday 2020. Communities will continue to worship from their current sites as parishes decide and begin on either a building or renovation programme. This is a long-term process and it may take a number of years. I ask all of you to be patient, generous and flexible as we move into this new reality.

PRIEST APPOINTMENTS FOR THE REST OF THE DIOCESE AS OF SUNDAY 26TH JANUARY WILL BE:

Greymouth:

Parish Priest - Fr Mathew Siji MCBS

Assistant - Fr Dan Doyle (*until his retirement at Pentecost June 2020*).

Hokitika:

Parish Priest - Fr Joaquin Camano

Hurunui:

Parish Priest - Fr Michael Pui

Mid Canterbury:

Parish Priest - Fr Denis Nolan

Assistant - Fr Huynh Tran

Timaru and Waimate Parishes:

Parish Priest - Fr Chris Friel

Assistant - Fr Do Nguyen

Waimakariri Parish:

Parish Priest - Fr John Adams

Assistants - Fr Tien Cao and Fr Arsène Kapya (*till Sept 2020*)

There are no clergy changes in **Akaroa, Opihi, Mackenzie or South Westland** parishes.

RESPONDING TO THE THEMES IN THE FEEDBACK

I want to conclude by commenting on various themes that arose out of the feedback and the area and consultation meetings. Please appreciate that not everything can be covered below, but these themes stood out quite clearly.

“Our parishes are already vibrant”

This comment came up frequently through the feedback process. A number of people reported that they experience a sense of community and belonging, with a good number of people attending Mass and a range of groups and programmes. You are right, many of our parishes are doing good work but there remains something deeply wrong. Despite the good being done, we have an aging population, there are fewer and fewer young people in our churches, and we are struggling to help people engage people and help them develop a mature faith. Our mission is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus, so we need to ask ourselves; are our parishes evangelising in everything we do? Are our parishes making disciples and bringing new people into the church every year? Are we training all of our people to share the good news? We have to be honest, and say, no, we are not.

Transport

There was a high level of concern for the elderly, disabled and those without vehicles and their ability to get to Mass. It will be a priority for each of the parishes to make sure that everyone who wants to go to Mass can do so.

St Pope John Paul II wrote about developing a spirituality of communion in which each of us thinks of the other as their brother or sister. I am confident that each parish, with a missionary outlook will take on this challenge.

Our Cultural Communities

We are blessed and enriched in this diocese with many active and vibrant cultural communities and I was pleased to read your thoughtful feedback. You expressed a desire to continue to have places and opportunities to meet and celebrate Mass in your own language and express your culture as part of parish life. As the amalgamation process proceeds, I will ask parish leadership teams to reach out to each ethnic community that currently worships within the parish boundaries to seek to understand your needs and desires and work with you as we move forward.

Community

Some comments in the feedback concerned the potential loss of community and identity and some felt that bigger parishes are not better. The experience in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas

suggests that larger parishes can still foster a good sense of community and can work very effectively. As a church grows bigger, it needs to grow smaller in that it needs to develop small groups, so people find meaningful community as they grow as disciples of Jesus. In this area we are already at an advantage as we have many small groups such as Passionist Family Groups and Catholic Women's League. We will need to develop even more groups. Some groups expressed a hope in their feedback that larger parishes will help them increase their membership. However, parishes will need to be intentional about it, seeking out those on the fringes and those struggling to find their place and welcome all.

Currently Employed Parish Staff

People wished to know what processes are in place to ensure currently employed staff are treated fairly and receive appropriate pastoral care. A number of meetings have already been held with staff and support is being provided for them. All staff will be treated justly and fairly, and legal requirements will be met, but we are also asking staff about their thoughts on what future positions should look like, listening to their concerns and providing independent support where needed.

School Chapels

Some issues were raised about the size of the proposed school chapels and some expressed a desire to be able to celebrate Mass for whole learning cohorts of up to 100. Plans have already been drawn up for 50 seat and 100 seat chapels and this will be worked out on a case by case basis.

There were also questions around demolishing existing churches to then build chapels. The requirements of each parish and school will need to be assessed on a parish by parish basis and plans developed out of this.

Questions were asked about whether weekday Masses can be celebrated in the chapels as well as baptisms, funerals, weddings, and cultural Masses. This is certainly possible, and it will be for each parish to decide.

Finances & Property

In the feedback some questions were raised about the finances required for the proposed plan and the possible sale of current land held by parishes.

These focused generally around only a high level of financial information being provided, with a number of people expressing a desire to view the financial model. Others queried whether land sales were necessary and on what basis these would be carried out.

Due to commercial sensitivity, such as potential property purchases, I cannot release the financial modelling, however I hope the following comments from the diocesan property and finance staff will be helpful.

A significant amount of work has been put in to prepare for this proposal, assisted by the Diocesan Management and Finance Board and the College of Consultors and we have looked at multiple scenarios in a high-level analysis. We invested in independent advice around the risks for all of this work to ensure that we have everything covered and a risk management process is in place. This has included provision of construction figures from the diocese's quantity surveyors (Rawlinsons) together with experience gained during construction of New Brighton, Hornby and Lincoln churches. The assessment of costs for the purchase of new property has been undertaken in consultation with valuers Colliers and Ford Baker. Based on these figures I am satisfied that the amalgamation is feasible when combined with a well-planned fundraising programme and the sale of surplus assets. Now that it has been decided which parishes will amalgamate together, the diocesan finance and property teams will work with the new individual parish priests and their parish councils and finance committees, to look at the many options available to them and work with them closely to agree a way forward. Discussions will include the possible rebuild work in the parish and any assets that could be sold to support this.

The next step in the process will be to produce accurate costings for all new facilities, facility upgrades, land acquisitions and land sales. Through the parish priest and the parish councils the parish will be fully involved in determining what buildings will be needed for the new parish. While we will be working with individual parishes, we are also conscious of the principle of the common good and how it can be applied to ensure that each parish has a relatively similar financial position where possible.

We have been very conservative with our projections to ensure this can work. Fundraising will be required (as it was before this proposed change) and especially in areas that haven't had a parish campaign so far. Our biggest concern has been completing upgrades through to the last project, so we have completed a great deal of work to ensure we can manage the cash flow throughout this period

and ensure we are still able to operate the Diocese at the end of all of this work and that parishes remain sustainable into the future.

The Process

Some issues were raised about there being only one proposed option on which to give feedback. I felt that it was better to have one proposal to comment on, or it could have potentially taken us years to make any solid plans.

Additionally, some thought that the feedback form was too prescriptive and asked too many quantitative questions. I am sorry to those who felt this way. The Pastoral Team worked hard to try to develop a form that was fair and provided sufficient quantitative and qualitative data, on which to base my decision. I know that a number of you who felt the form inadequate wrote letters or emails providing your opinions and I can assure you these were read and taken into account and I hope you feel that you have been able to express your views.

IN CONCLUSION...

It has not been possible for me to respond to every comment or concern, but I do thank you so much for your well-considered feedback, your love of the church in this place, and your desire for it to grow.

While these changes are significant and you may experience unease and a sense of loss, I hope you will also be excited that we are stepping into a new era of trying to bridge the distance that many of your family and friends feel between themselves, Jesus and His church.

I thank those who have been praying the Prayer to the Holy Spirit. I have certainly felt the power of all your prayer over these months. I ask that you continue to pray it often as we embark on this journey together because we need more than ever, the power of God in our lives.

The season of Advent is an opportunity for us to experience again the newness, the beauty and the adventure that is relationship with Jesus Christ. Let us use this time as an opportunity to commit to each other, to Christ and to His mission in a new and deeper way.

My blessing and prayers for you all during this Advent season.



+ Paul Martin SM
Bishop of Christchurch