



Archbishop of Wellington

PO Box 1937, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

PASTORAL LETTER

15 February 2019

Dear Parishioners

In the last few days I have sent your Pastoral Team and leadership group a document which contains a directive. It is very rare that I direct parishes to take a certain action, so this indicates the seriousness of what I am asking of you.

Between 2013 to 2017 the Archdiocese carried out a parish amalgamation process, resulting in the reduction of the number of parishes from 47 to 22. This means, of course, there are now parishes with two or more churches, more than is necessary for worship and pastoral care. In some places the integration of church communities has been slow.

In addition, the Archdiocese continues to experience pressures that compound the present situation and carry major implications for the future:

Earthquake resilience issues mean we have unsustainable insurance costs and buildings with unacceptable NBS ratings.

The reduced number of priests, which is accelerating each year, means that in most parishes there is a single priest (often elderly) expected to minister in more than one church. **Availability** and **ability** of priests are highly significant factors governing decisions for our future that cannot be delayed.

The 2017 Archdiocesan Synod voted for new priorities which must be addressed. They cannot be simply "add-ons" to what we already do. They require us to look with new eyes and, with Pope Francis, to radically rethink how we are to be "the People of God" in today's environment.

We are called to be "missionary disciples", which in the words of Pope Francis, makes an attitude of "we've always done it this way" not only damaging to the Church, but invalid.

Here is our situation:

- We have too many churches and presbyteries for our Mass count, and for the number and age of our priests.
- Some of the churches require large sums of money to address their earthquake resilience and general maintenance.

- Pope Francis and the Synod have challenged us to be more outward-looking and to serve those who are marginalised or disadvantaged.

If we are to respond well to present and future challenges, we need to act together in favour of the common good of all parishes, and support one another in a process of change. This is not an easy task for any of us.

Some of you may see this as a threat to the status quo, but I would like you to see our situation as an opportunity to let the Holy Spirit work in our midst to create a sustainable and mission-oriented future.

So, I am directing every parish to carry out a review of its churches and presbyteries, including parishes with only a single church. The review is to be with me, complete with developed proposals, no later than 30 October 2019.

The review will identify how many churches the parish needs to cater for its Mass count (taking into account the availability of priests and lay pastoral leaders), and the ideal location of the church or churches. **For most, if not all parishes with more than one church, this will mean reducing the number of churches in the parish.** Provision for accommodation of priests is part of the review.

The review involves collecting and analysing information, and consultation among parishioners. It should result in proposals that are both realistic and practical. Your Pastoral Team and leadership group have received more detailed information, and will be meeting in the near future to look at how the parish might carry out this process.

You need to be prepared to be radical in your thinking and discernment.

The theme of parish amalgamation was “A Future Full of Hope”. This hope-filled future will only start to take shape when we honestly and courageously engage with and answer the many questions about our buildings.

Yours sincerely in the Lord



✠ John A Cardinal Dew
Archbishop of Wellington