



Archbishop of Wellington

PO Box 1937, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

MEMORANDUM

To: Pastoral teams, Pastoral Councils and Parish Finance Committees

From: Cardinal John Dew

Date: Wednesday 13 February

RE: **CHURCHES AND PRESBYTERIES**

In the years from 2013 to 2017 the Archdiocese carried out an extensive process of amalgamating parishes.

At the time of the amalgamation Masses, the new parishes had been created canonically and legally, had taken steps to set up one Pastoral Council and Finance Committee, and had managed, or were in the process of creating, one set of financial accounts for the new parish. The integration of the communities and ministries within the new parishes and the rationalisation of parish assets to better fit the new circumstances were mostly still tasks for the future. Difficult as the amalgamation is for some parishes, all parishes are making progress in deepening the integration process.

At the same time as the amalgamation was occurring, the Archdiocese was experiencing pressures from factors which have significant implications for the future. These pressures remain:

Earthquake resilience issues: The Christchurch and Kaikoura earthquakes left the Archdiocese and its parishes with unsustainable insurance costs and a number of buildings with unacceptable NBS ratings, including parish churches and the Cathedral. Insurance costs have continued to rise and we are constantly having to review our coverage to determine what we can afford.

Reduced number of priests: The aging of priests and the decrease in their numbers which will accelerate in the near future have meant that in most parishes there is a single priest (often elderly) who must now travel regularly between several church communities. The availability of priests and their ability to sustain the number of church communities in parishes has become a very significant factor in making decisions about the future. Having fewer priests has also limited their involvement with our schools and young people. At the

time a number of parishes were created (in the 1950s and 60s) there were many more priests available. The number we have now, probably less, will be the “new normal” for the foreseeable future. Lay pastoral leaders now share in the pastoral ministry in parishes, but cannot provide sacramental ministry. We receive valuable assistance from international priests, but we need to remember that their home countries in general have much higher people to priest ratios, and there is a justice issue involved in asking international priests to sustain our structure which has many fewer people per priest.

Parish amalgamation: The amalgamation of parishes has resulted in a number of new large parishes with three or more churches. There has been some progress in integrating the communities within parishes, but generally church communities remain the same as they were prior to integration. In the context of producing vibrant, active, unified and mission-oriented parishes, amalgamation will not be complete until we have faced looking at trends in Mass counts, the location of churches and presbyteries, and their present and future use. At the Clergy Assembly last year and in Stewardship workshops in parishes people were very enthused by the concept of becoming a “missionary disciple”. We need to make changes in order to make that happen.

2017 Archdiocesan Synod: The Synod has given us new priorities which must be addressed. These are not just about carrying on as we are with some “add-ons”. If we take this approach nothing will happen in some parishes because they do not have the human and financial resources to add much to what they already do. Pope Francis is calling us to radically re-think how we are church, and this is reflected in many of the Synod outcomes. He has created an environment in which we need to look at many aspects of our mission through new eyes. We need to re-organise and direct our resources to mission.

The interaction of these four factors means we cannot see our ministry and the life of the Catholic community in the Archdiocese as “business as usual”.

The four factors above, of critical importance in the future of the Archdiocese, can be viewed as a threat to the status quo, or as an opportunity to let the Holy Spirit work in our midst to create a sustainable and mission-oriented future.

In some ways the issue is simple: 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. At the same time, Pope Francis and the Synod have challenged us to be more outward-looking and to serve those who are marginalised or disadvantaged.

SYNOD OUTCOMES SECTION 4

The Synod called for parishes to carry out “a review of their property, beginning with an assessment of needs based on the Synod outcomes” (Synod Outcomes Section 4). Assessing what parish plant is needed to cater for a parish’s current and predicted Mass count, and the demographic predictions for their area is part of that process, as is taking into account the decrease in the number of priests.

Some parishes have begun to look at their building needs, but are facing entrenched interests which are not making the process easy for them to do on their own. Some parishes have not started, and almost all face issues.

If we are to respond well to the challenges of the present and the future, we need to act together in favour of the common good of all parishes and support one another in a process of change, as this will not be easy.

DIRECTIVE

In order to

- respond to the critical situation with the availability of priests
- make wise and prudent use of our buildings,
- ensure that parishes are supported in making and implementing decisions for the future,

I am directing all parishes to begin (or to actively progress) a review of their churches and presbyteries, with this review to be completed and proposals developed by 30 October 2019. This is not optional, I am requiring that it be done.

The rights of parishes are to be respected, but stewardship, the preferential option for the poor, and the common good (which includes the pool of priests and lay pastoral leaders shared by all parishes), and collaboration with neighbouring parishes, should guide the review, together with the Synod outcomes.

Stewardship

As a faith community we need to take a stewardship approach to the gifts of God, including the resources of the parish, and our individual contributions to those resources.

Stewardship requires us to make efficient and effective use of our resources.

As a fundamental principle, each generation should aim to pay its way in the parish and put aside adequate reserves through its giving, without relying on investments (eg in rental property) by previous generations or selling assets to meet operating costs.

Sharing our resources, individually and collectively, as an expression of gratitude to God is an essential part of good stewardship.

Preferential option for the poor - "A poor church for the poor"

If a parish is to have income available for charitable and mission purposes, it must make efficient use of its buildings. Maintenance and insurance costs are high, and it is hard to justify ownership of churches which are used for a few hours a week when there is another church close by. If we are to develop our support for the poor and the marginalised, we may have to make sacrifices.

The common good

All parishes share the pool of available priests and lay pastoral leaders. The most likely scenarios in the near future, even for large parishes, are either one active priest, one active priest and a lay pastoral leader, or a lay pastoral leader with one or two retired priests in

sacramental ministry. This means that most parishes will have lesser ministry hours by priests. Parishes being served by religious order priests should not assume this will continue, as religious orders make their own decisions about their priorities for mission.

Parishes need to be prepared to be radical in their thinking and discernment, and prepared for the reactions that change inevitably brings. Letting go of the established order is necessary if we are to be well-prepared for the future and willing to free resources for mission, rather than simply maintaining what we have and what we do. This is not about a reduction in pastoral care in our parishes, but about doing things differently, providing pastoral care in new ways as well as becoming “missionary disciples”.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

In city parishes adjoining parishes should collaborate on their reviews. Parishes with only one church and presbytery are to carry out the review in order to assess their own situation and to enable them to work with adjoining parishes.

I ask you to use the following review process as the basis for your discernment:

1. The review is to include:
 - demographic trends and projected changes in the area covered by the parish eg densification, sub-division, loss of people. (For North Island parishes – go to this [website with population forecasts](https://home.id.com.au/demographic-resources/population-forecasts-resources/?submissionGuid=376f1adc-4437-429e-a9ae-27dad931f2f4) then select NZ¹. The interactive map can be used to find predicted population growth from 2019-2043 in parishes in the lower North Island. Local body websites and other sources will need to be used by South Island parishes.)
 - current and predicted Mass counts.
 - capacity of existing churches in the parish (including possibilities for extending capacity in each church);
 - parish school roll numbers and trends.
 - a realistic assessment of what ministry can be provided by a reduced number of priests, and by available lay pastoral leaders. Parishes should not assume they will have their present complement of clergy.
 - earthquake strengthening issues for parish property.
 - consultation with neighbouring parishes.
2. Parishes are to identify
 - the amount needed annually to sustain a prudent 10-year maintenance plan and insurance costs for parish property;
 - operating costs for the parish for one year, including realistic annual maintenance and insurance costs;
 - what is needed from parishioners to ensure the parish does not run at an annual loss.

¹ <https://home.id.com.au/demographic-resources/population-forecasts-resources/?submissionGuid=376f1adc-4437-429e-a9ae-27dad931f2f4>

3. The review is to identify:
 - how many churches the parish needs to cater for its Mass count (taking into account the availability of priests), and the ideal location of the church or churches. For virtually all parishes with more than one church this will mean reducing the number of churches in the parish.
 - what provision needs to be made for accommodation of priests, what form it should take and where it is best located.
 - what steps the parish needs to take in relation to its churches and priest accommodation.
4. Once the review is complete parishes should revisit their pastoral plan to determine whether there are changes needed as a result of the review. As part of this the parish should identify the skills and resources which can be called upon for mission, and the financial giving needed to sustain the life of the parish.
5. The review is to result in proposals regarding the parish's churches and presbyteries, to be sent to the Archbishop's Office by 30 October 2019. If a parish wishes to act on a property matter prior to 30 October 2019, the completed review must accompany the documentation provided to the Board of Administration.

If we don't take some action to work together in addressing the issues arising from the reduced availability of priests, earthquake resilience, too many churches for our Mass count, amalgamation, and the Synod outcomes, then as an Archdiocese we face a future which will be impossible for our priests and lay pastoral leaders to sustain, and which for lay people will be dominated by fundraising for years to come. Our future should be about worship, formation, and ministry, with a new emphasis on mission. To this end we need to give serious, even radical, consideration to how we can best use our assets.

Throughout this process please ask parishioners to pray that we will all be open to the Holy Spirit in our discernment, and that we will respect and care for one another as we work to create a future full of hope.

Yours sincerely in the Lord

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John A. Cardinal Dew". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✠ John A Cardinal Dew
Archbishop of Wellington