



Archbishop of Wellington

PO Box 1937, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

9 June 2021

Dear Marlon and John, Chairs of Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Finance Committee

Re: The Review of Te Wairua Tapu Parish properties.

I recently wrote to you with the request that you hold off making any announcements about the Parish Property Review. There are several issues that prompted me to re-think what had been proposed.

As I understand it the parish's review group, and later the parish, focused on a whole-of-the-Hutt Valley plan which involved the Catholic Parish of Te Awakairangi. This approach was set out in the Te Wairua Tapu proposal document: that document says:

"The core of this proposal is combining the two parishes of the Hutt Valley Pastoral Area i.e., Te Wairua Tapu and Te Awakairangi. This is to create a Catholic presence in the Lower Hutt Valley with a core hub and satellite buildings to provide additional community services, maintaining a presence throughout the Hutt Valley...we recommend one united Lower Hutt parish, with a northern (Taita) and southern (Petone) hub...." (From proposal document)

I did ask parishes to consult with their neighbouring parishes and this needed to be done. While there was a need to consult with Te Awakairangi about the effects of closing one church in each parish, it appears that Te Wairua Tapu's decisions about its churches were made in the context of a plan for the whole of the Hutt Valley, an approach not reflected in Te Awakairangi's proposals.

I certainly appreciate that the review group was seeking to be visionary in its proposals, but I cannot overlook the possibility that if Te Wairua Tapu had focused only on its own properties, the parish's proposals may have been different. In fact, the approach taken by Te Wairua Tapu is ruled out by the Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, Cardinal Mauro Piacenza who has written:

"In determining whether or not the required just cause is present in the case of a proposed parish modification (cf. can. 515 §2) or the required grave cause in the case of church closure and relegation (cf. can. 1222 §2), each case must be considered separately. Although the Bishop may take into consideration the needs of surrounding parishes or

even that of the diocese as a whole, he must always motivate his decree with a cause that is specific, i.e., ad rem, to the individual parish or church under consideration.”

Covering Letter from Cardinal Mauro Piacenza to “Procedural Guidelines for the Modification of Parishes, the Closure or Relegation of Churches to Profane but not Sordid Use, and the Alienation of the Same”

Assuming that the Wainuiomata church remains because of the geography of the area, the three churches which I believe should have been considered together are Petone, Waiwhetu and Eastbourne. Our Lady of the Rosary is the church closest to the centre of the parish, with the biggest congregation according to our annual Mass count figures, and which serves the area of greatest deprivation for the part of the parish on the valley floor.

I note that the parish currently has seven weekend Masses. When Msgr Charles Cooper and Fr Michael Stieller are fully retired, the number of Masses will have to drop to six or less. At this point the future of Eastbourne will come into question. Even if the ideas suggested about an ecumenical venture in Eastbourne come to pass, I cannot see that there will be weekend Masses in Eastbourne when there are just two priests in the parish. Our Lady of the Rosary church is the closest church for Eastbourne people who would be doubly disadvantaged if both San Antonio and Our Lady of the Rosary churches were closed. I see this as working against the “good of souls” which I am obliged to consider when relegating churches.

A bishop needs to establish “grave cause” for the relegation of a church to secular use. It is difficult to establish grave cause for the closure and sale of Our Lady of the Rosary church. The Mass count is steady and is the largest in the parish, the church can be strengthened and the parish would have the means to do this, and there is a commitment from the SVDs to provide two priests for parish in the foreseeable future. In addition, the financial viability of the parish would be threatened by the loss of the Waiwhetu parishioners to Te Awakairangi.

In the case of Our Lady of the Rosary church, the factors above and the nature of the parish’s review process have led me to reconsider my agreement with the parish’s proposal to sell the church.

I would like you and the Pastoral Council to look again at the possibilities the Waiwhetu site or another site in the same area offers for Te Wairua Tapu Parish. In doing this I would like the Pastoral Council members to reflect upon these words of Pope Francis in his homily for Pentecost Sunday:

“The Spirit also tells us, ‘Look to the whole’. The whole, not the part. The Spirit does not mould isolated individuals, but shapes us into a Church in the wide variety of our charisms, into a unity that is never uniformity. The Paraclete affirms *the primacy of the whole*. There, in the whole, in the community, the Spirit prefers to work and to bring newness ... the Paraclete impels us to unity, to concord, to *the harmony of diversity*. He makes us see ourselves as parts of the same body, brothers and sisters of one another. Let us look to the whole!”

What happens to Our Lady of the Rosary church is a matter for the whole parish, not just for the parishioners who normally worship there. The presbytery does not have to remain, as when Fr Michael retires the priests of the parish will be accommodated elsewhere. A visionary approach is needed, not just a narrow focus on strengthening the existing church. Te Wairua Tapu does not have a large church which can be used for big feasts and celebrations involving the whole parish, and this should be able to happen at times. Could a renovated or new church on the Waiwhetu site be this bigger church? Could the existing church be strengthened, and a parish centre developed where the presbytery is? Could the presbytery become low-cost housing for struggling families? I believe these and other possibilities should be explored.

I am very aware that you have spent a lot of time putting the proposals together and hesitate to ask you to do more, however as I have thought more about the situation of your parish, I am confident in saying that it needs to be looked at again. I would appreciate it if you could make a time to come and have a talk with me about this, and I would also like to invite some of our Church Mission Team to be present, as they will be able to assist you in moving forward. We also have two members of the Archdiocesan Board of Administration who have offered to help parishes to look at properties and assist in planning for the future. They are John O'Sullivan and Matthew Jansen. Please do not hesitate to contact them through me if you would like to accept their offer.

Thank you for all you have done so far and for all you do in the parish.

With all good wishes and every blessing.

Yours sincerely in the Lord



✠ John A Cardinal Dew
Archbishop of Wellington