



TOGETHER ON THE JOURNEY

LIVING NO LONGER FOR OURSELVES BUT FOR CHRIST

A Pastoral Letter from Bishop Steve Lowe
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INTRODUCTION:

Christ is the light of all nations, and the Church desires to bring the light of Christ to all people by proclaiming the gospel to all creatures (cf LG 1). To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinising the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel (GS 4). These thoughts from the Second Vatican Council set the backdrop to this pastoral plan for our diocese in this particular moment in history. Pope Francis, following the direction of the Council, has been calling the Church to be more synodal; that is, that the Church as a whole reflects on where the Holy Spirit may be leading us. This five-year strategic pastoral plan is the fruit of a process involving men and women from across the Diocese reflecting on where we find ourselves as Church in our time and place in history and in prayerfully charting a course for the next five years. Accordingly, I present this Strategic Pastoral Plan, trusting in God's providence for us, his Church, as we continue to "put out into the deep." Let's journey together.

BACKGROUND:

Following the *With Hearts Burning* reflection process, and the information that was gained from that, the Council of Priests recommended the formulation of a strategic pastoral plan for the Diocese. Taking Pope Francis' call for us to be more synodal, in May 2020 I asked all Parish Priests, Chanel Centre Staff, Catholic Primary and Secondary Principals, Deacons, Seminarians, Religious, and Catholic Family Support Services, to nominate representatives for a strategic planning workshop. I am grateful to the forty people from across the Diocese who met in October 2020 for the two day

workshop. Various speakers briefed us on the state of the Diocese while others provoked us to look at new possibilities as we looked to our future. After reflecting together on the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, the participants recommended to me a direction for the Diocese in the form of a vision statement and five strategic focus points for the pastoral life of the Diocese. The Diocesan Pastoral Team has assisted me in preparing processes for the whole Diocese to engage upon. In addition to this a much smaller workshop was held in February 2021 to consider a framework to assist in planning in regards to property within the Diocese. The fruit of this work is found in the document, "At the Service of Mission"

VISION:

At that Last Supper, Jesus prayed that we be one, that is, TOGETHER in unity... *Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you... With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise that it was you who sent me* (cf Jn 17:23). This is Jesus' prayer for us. Working for this unity, this togetherness, is the task of us all. Every Sunday we profess our belief in a Church, that is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The more we live our "one-ness" in, with, and through Jesus, and also with our brothers and sisters in Christ, the more we are able to grow in holiness. To grow in this one-ness we need to grow in our appreciation of the catholicity, that is, the universality of diversity, of the Church. As we do so we hopefully become more apostolic, growing in our ways of sharing the gospel of Jesus with others for the salvation of the world. Every Sunday Jesus invites us to partake in and of His Eucharist so that we might become more one with Him and all our brothers and sisters.

The evil one is opposed to this togetherness in Christ and he sows suspicion and division (Gen 3:4) for he is “the accuser” (Rev 12:10). St Paul warns us, *if you go snapping at each other and tearing each other to pieces, you had better watch or you will destroy the whole community* (Gal 5:15). Jesus calls us together in Him as His one Body. To receive the Lord worthily we are called to be agents of unity. Underpinning all pastoral activity in the Diocese is the call to be TOGETHER in Christ.

In this task we are all ON THE JOURNEY with each of us being at different places and stages on our journey. The Church herself is also on the journey as she responds to changing times and the signs of the time in the light of Gospel. The journey reminds us that faith is not a formula. Each of us, and the Church herself, continue to grow in our understanding of the Christ and his call to become his missionary disciples. This means we need to constantly review and assess how we as Church are the Body of Christ for the people of our time and how we speak to and relate to the people in our wider communities. A defining part of our journey of faith is that Christ is in relationship, not only with us, but with all the people He holds in His heart. We recognise that these relationships with each of us are fragile and have to be nurtured. We recognise that no two relationships can be the same. It is this that compels us to seek the living presence of Christ in every encounter we have. Therefore, underpinning all pastoral activity in the Diocese is the call to recognise that every encounter we have has the opportunity to be a graced moment ON THE JOURNEY of faith, hope and love.

To respond to these graced moments we need to keep our eyes fixed on Christ, for we are LIVING NO LONGER FOR OURSELVES BUT FOR CHRIST (2 Cor 5:15) and he has promised to be with us

whenever two or three gather in his name. Christ is the one who stepped into the world and became one with us in our humanity. He experienced a fully human journey through His life among us. As he steps towards us, so he invites us to step towards him, to become one with Him for He is the Way, the Truth, the Life, and He wants us to have life in abundance, in this life and in the life to come. We cannot want this life for ourselves without wanting it and working for it for others. Christ thus becomes the central point of our lives. He interprets our lives and directs us on the path ahead. Underpinning all pastoral activity in the Diocese is the call to LIVE NO LONGER FOR OURSELVES, rather to empty ourselves and to be more Christ-centred in our spiritual life and in our pastoral outreach, LIVING FOR CHRIST so that He might transform us and through us transform the world.

SIGNPOSTS:

The vision sets our direction as a Diocese for the next five years. Along the way we will be guided by a signpost for each year.

2021: Companioning

2022: Facilitating Encounter with Christ

2023: Mission & Outreach

2024: Partnerships - Mana Ōrite

2025: Empowering People

2020-2021 THEME: COMPANIONING

A Diocese of Companioning Communities and Disciples

The basic origin of the word “companion” is “sharing bread.” In Eucharist, Christ becomes our Bread as he nourishes us with His Body in the Eucharist, the sacrament of charity, that calls us to unity in Him and with the whole people of God. We receive the Body of Christ and we are called to be the Body of Christ and in receiving the Eucharist we already participate in the heavenly Banquet when God will be all in all. From the beginning, throughout the Scriptures, we see God companioning his people to unity, leading them forth not only as individuals but also as a community. God’s companioning of his people is not passive - God engages, encourages, shapes, challenges and corrects us. This companioning has a dimension of shepherding and guiding beyond where we are now into ever new ways of being God’s people. The fullness of God’s companioning us, the people of God, is found in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who becomes one with us, one of us, who walked and talked with his disciples. He continues to do so in His Spirit so that we might become one with Him and in Him. Christ has entrusted His Church with the task of companioning.

In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation on young people, the Holy Father reflects on the disciples journeying to Emmaus. In doing so he explains the essential attributes of companioning. *Jesus walks with two disciples who did not grasp the meaning of all that happened to him, and are leaving Jerusalem and the community behind. Wanting to accompany them, he joins them on the way. He asks them questions and listens patiently to their version of events, and in this way he helps them recognize what they were experiencing.*

Then, with affection and power, he proclaims the word to them, leading them to interpret the events they had experienced in the light of the Scriptures. He accepts their invitation to stay with them as evening falls; he enters into their night. As they listen to him speak, their hearts burn within them and their minds are opened; they then recognize him in the breaking of the bread. They themselves choose to resume their journey at once in the opposite direction, to return to the community and to share the experience of their encounter with the risen Lord (CV 237).

In our communities we often encounter people who have yet to grasp the significance of the faith or Christ's presence in their lives. We often find them clouded wanting something, be it a sacrament or preference certificate, when they have fears, difficulties, are conflicted with a faith issue, when something in their life has been shattered, when they are searching, lost or had some spiritual experience. In the Gospels Jesus shows us that companioning is about patiently entering into their story and then patiently and gently sharing our story. It is about enkindling in others and in ourselves the presence and fire of the Holy Spirit.

We are not alone in wanting to companion others through life. There are many other voices that want to shape and direct. Some of these can be distracting, negative or even destructive. These other "companions" can uproot people from family, culture and faith practice leaving them spiritual nomads, unable to root themselves in the basic relationships with God, others, self and creation for which the human person is created. As such growth is stunted.

As the risen Christ promised that he would be with us always, to the end of time, so too the companioning that the Church offers must

be seen as a lifetime endeavour. It needs to be coordinated and integrated rather than fragmented. It should draw on the riches of family, school, parish, groups, community and the universal Church together to assist the entire people of God in the hikoi of faith. As such the community as a whole has the task of companioning, a companioning that accepts, motivates, encourages and challenges and ultimately leads to full and active participation in the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian life.

At the Synod on young people a repeated theme was the shortage of qualified people devoted to the task of accompaniment or companioning. The Synod participants called for a rethinking and renewing of the ways that priestly and all ministry is exercised. Again, the concept of accompaniment is “go with”- the concept of companioning is taking others with us while at the same time recognising that we might be taken on the journey in a new way. This year is about us rethinking and reviewing how we companion people in the ways of faith, hope, and love, leading to the fullness of life we find in Christ. The pathways below are designed to assist you and your community to become better companions after the example of Christ our Companion.

OVERARCHING GOALS:

Companioning, and the four other signposts, direct us to three goals.

GOAL 1 - SPIRITUALLY ALIVE

Leading people to a more vibrant and transformative spiritual & sacramental life.

GOAL 2 - FORMATION

Forming people to become missionary disciples of Christ.

GOAL 3 - COMMUNITY

Welcoming and engaging all who enter through our door and remaining committed to dialoguing and journeying with them.

Marked by the signposts, there are three pathways towards achieving these goals; a pathway for Parishes, Diocesan Agencies and all people.

PARISH PATHWAY

ACTION STEP 1:

I charge all parishes and their schools (schools are servants of the parish) to lead their people to a more vibrant and transformative sacramental and spiritual life.

- i. Review how prayer is taught and how different forms of prayer are offered in the parish. How is prayer taught? Does the way prayer is taught or led companion people into the mystery of God?
- ii. Christ has given us His Eucharist as His way to companion us into a deeper relationship with Him. The rediscovery of the beauty of the Eucharist as Christ's gift for all His people is essential for this. Is the parish celebration of the Eucharist beautiful? How well have those involved in ministries at Mass been formed to understand and evaluate how they fully and actively participate in the liturgy in their various ministries?
- iii. What importance does Eucharist play in the life of the school? How are students and families companioned to the Sunday Eucharist? How is the liturgical life of the parish promoted in the school with students and in the various forms of social media? How is participation in the Sunday Eucharist celebrated within the school?

- iv. Our presence and engagement at Mass companions people deeper into the mystery of the Eucharist while our lack of presence and engagement at Mass leads them away. How can we renew a commitment from all staff leadership, teachers, and priests to keeping the Mass at the heart of the Lord's day? How can we renew a commitment to the Sunday Mass from all the people in the pews?
- v. How do we educate parishioners to pray the Mass. What is the parish and school doing to help those exploring the Catholic faith to pray the Mass? What is the parish doing to renew the fervour of regulars in their praying of the Mass?
- vi. How are all the other sacraments and rites of the Church especially the OCIA/OCIC and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, promoted and made available in the parish and school? What preparation is given before? What follow up is given after? How are various groups companioned, the sick and elderly, the newly wed and married couples, the divorced, those with same sex attraction, families teenagers, young adults, those of various professional groups?

ACTION STEP 2:

Recognising the joint responsibility of parents, parish and school, I charge parishes and schools to collaborate in the formation of the young people entrusted to their care, to help form them to become missionary disciples of Christ.

- i. How are families involved and empowered in the school and parish so that the domestic church might reclaim its role as the primary teachers of the faith?
- ii. What resources have been developed and what training of catechists has there been to tailor programs to those involved in sacramental preparation to suit the diversity of places people are in their faith journey?
- iii. How can the process in which preference cards are given be better utilised as an opportunity to build family, parish, school relationships?

ACTION STEP 3:

Together, I charge all parishes and their schools to welcome, engage, dialogue, and journey, with all who enter through their door.

- i. How are new people/families welcomed into the parish or school community and how are appropriate bridges made between the school and parish? What happens after the initial welcome?
- ii. What does the parish offer in terms of pre-evangelisation and evangelisation outreach? What do the schools offer for non-practicing or non-Catholic students when they enter into the school to facilitate their transition? How do the secondary schools prepare their students for a life of faith beyond the College?

- iii. How are and can existing spaces, media (i.e. newsletters, websites, social media), programs and events engage with people no matter where they are on their faith journey? What does welcome look like before Mass but also after Mass?

- iii. What new opportunities can be created for connection, responsibility, and leadership that will draw people into the life of the church?

ACTION STEP 4:

I charge all priests, parish, school staff and all Christ's disciples, to recommit to a ministry of presence in the parish and wider community.

- i. Reflect how the parish engages as a whole in the wider community. How are people formed to take their identity as a Catholic into the world?

- ii. What does priestly visitation of school look like?

- iii. What does parish visitation look like, especially for the new, the sick and elderly, those preparing for sacraments?

ACTION STEP 5:

I charge all parishes and their schools to dedicate themselves to the pastoral care of all staff through:

- i. Retreats
- ii. Pathways for teachers to enter church
- iii. Formation
- iv. Prayer

DIOCESAN AGENCIES PATHWAY

College of Consultors, Council of Priests, Diocesan Finance Council, Diocesan Pastoral Council, The Pastoral Services Team, Catholic Education Team, Catholic Integrated Schools Team, Chanel Centre Staff, Catholic Family Support Services, Commission for Social Justice, including service groups and movements in the Diocese.

ACTION STEP 1:

I charge all Diocesan agencies to lead a more vibrant and transformative sacramental & spiritual life.

- i. What does prayer look like in the Diocesan agency? Is prayer a functionary or a time of beauty that connects with the presence of God?

- ii. How does Eucharist model and inspire all that the agency does? How important is Eucharist for the agency?

ACTION STEP 2:

In collaboration with the Priests' Council, Pastoral services team, and the Catholic Education Team, I commit to providing:

- i. Resources that promote the rediscovery of the beauty of liturgy as Christ's gift for all his people.
- ii. A definition of full and active participation in the liturgy.
- iii. Resources, events, and initiatives that assist Catholic school leadership, teachers, and priests to keep the Mass, in particular the Sunday Mass, at the heart of Catholic Character in parish schools.
- iv. Resources, events, and initiatives that assist the promotion, availability, and accessibility of the Sacrament of Reconciliation both in the parish and school.

ACTION STEP 3:

I charge all Diocesan Agencies to commit to companioning parishes and their schools through:

- i. Better communication of the services they can provide to the faith communities across the diocese.

- ii. Assisting with the provision of resources, events, and programmes that help to companion people at the different stages of their faith formation journey, and help the faithful to become more confident in their companionship of others.
- iii. Reviewing with stakeholders what the Agency could do better to assist the mission of the school and parish.

PATHWAY FOR ALL PEOPLE

ACTION STEP 1:

I charge all the faithful to live a vibrant spiritual life.

- i. Reviewing and renewing their prayer life. Is my prayer, and the prayer within my family leading us more fully into relationship with God and his infinite mercy? Do we reflect on the Scriptures as a family? What is on offer at both parish and diocesan level that could help me and my family to grow deeper in my friendship with Jesus Christ?
- ii. Re-engaging with Sunday Mass. Christ has given us His Eucharist as His way to companion us into a deeper relationship with him. What importance does Sunday Eucharist play in the life of my family? How am I and we in our family growing in our love of the Mass? Can I explain the beauty of the Mass to my family and friends?
- i. Reflecting on the importance of mercy in our family and the Sacrament of Reconciliation in our relationship with God.

ACTION STEP 2:

I charge all individuals and families to renew their call to being “domestic churches” (ref CCC #1666).

- i. Looking at your home and asking would visitors to our house know that this is a Catholic home and Christ is an essential member of our family? Where is prayer found in your home?
- ii. Reflecting on the relationships in your home and asking do they reflect Christ’s relationship to us? Is the home a place of welcome, hospitality, love, forgiveness, faith and peace?
- iii. As a domestic church, how is your home and family welcoming those from your parish home and family?
- iv. At the end of Mass we are sent out to announce the gospel and to glorify God by our lives. How does your family announce the gospel and glorify God by your lives when you go to educational or work places, sports or entertainment activities?

ACTION STEP 3:

I acknowledge all of those women and men who do not identify as Catholic but are involved with schools, parishes, and diocesan agencies and even within your own home.

- i. How has the Catholic faith of others influenced you? How can you accompany others in their faith journey?

THE LOGO:



TOGETHER ON THE JOURNEY

LIVING NO LONGER FOR OURSELVES BUT FOR CHRIST

The Five-year Strategic Pastoral Plan logo symbolises Christ, our source of unity, in two ways.

THE EUCHARIST

Particularly in Mass where the Priest lifts up the Eucharist saying “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world.”

It is through the breaking of bread that we are made one in Christ.

THE TRUE VINE

The kowhaiwhai speaks to Christ as the True Vine. “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.” (John 15:4)

Together abiding in Christ we bear fruit.

The colour has been taken from pounamu. This is because the Eucharist is our great taonga. The green also speaks to our fruitfulness in being connected to Christ, the True Vine.



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