



# Diocese of Port Pirie Chancery

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## Letter to the Catholic Faithful of the Diocese of Port Pirie

Dear Brothers & Sisters

### **Concerning: Pentecost and a Diocesan Strategic Directions Planning Committee and Diocesan Discussions, and the Plenary Council of 2020**

This letter is addressed to Parish Councils, School and all Boards associated with ministry in the diocese, Regional Pastoral Councils and all gatherings such as CWL, Vinnies, and Prayer Groups.

Pentecost is upon us, the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. A group of frightened disciples was transformed into a community of brothers and sisters who would spread the story of Christ Risen to the ends of the earth, to set the world on fire. In Australia it marks the beginning of preparation for the first Plenary Council in Australia for eighty years in 2020: we shall look at the state of the Church and how we may live our vocation to be Church in these times.

As you are aware from the Diocesan Assembly and other communications, we have been looking at future directions for the diocese so that we can plan for the future as much as possible, rather than simply allow it to happen to us. The establishment of a group to look at the strategic directions has been discussed for some time in bodies such as the Council of Priests, the Diocesan Finance Committee and the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

To have the confidence to plan, we recall the wonderful work of the Holy Spirit in the life of our Diocese. We rejoice in the transformative power of faith, which has sustained us as Christians and as Catholic communities over more than 150 years. We have always been a rural and outback diocese with limited resources because of our situation, but we have met and survived the droughts and floods, high and low copper prices, the closing of mines, the Global Financial Crisis and ups and downs in our key industries, and the depopulation of our smaller towns. Part of our strength has been our *esprit de corps*, our sense of community as a diocese, and our pride in the diocese. We are the heirs of the pioneering farming and mining families who brought the faith with them, the pioneer priests from Austria (Sevenhill) and Ireland, and the missionary work of St Mary of the Cross McKillop.

Our history includes many episodes of change and adaptation, as our diocese moved to meet the challenges of new circumstances. This capacity to adapt and embrace change and develop is with us still, as we have seen the growth in prison ministry, the growth in Centacare Catholic and its various ministries of service, new work amongst the First Australians, the formation of Pastoral Associates, the deepening rapport between our schools and our parishes, the programmes for spirituality in such

activities as the Retreat in Daily Life, prayer groups and Alpha, the continuing loyalty to service of the poor through Vinnies and Fred's Vans, the growth in ecumenical enterprises, the successful amalgamation of the five River Murray parishes into the new Our Lady of the River Parish, the formation of the Regional Parish Councils, the Diocesan community building through our annual Diocesan Assembly over the last two decades, the formulation of the seven strategic emphases, and the arrival of priests from Africa, Iraq and the Philippines. Among other initiatives, the RCIA found its first home in Australia here in our diocese.

With a prayer for that same spirit of resilience and flexibility, we face the new challenges to being Church in our rural and Outback diocese. A very real challenge is the availability of priests for work in our diocese. This will depend increasingly in the future on the generosity of men from overseas volunteering to work amongst us. We are indebted to the Diocese of Morogoro in Tanzania for the presence of two priests, and various dioceses in the Philippines for our present four Fathers. The diocese will be blessed with a new priest when Deacon Hau Le will be ordained on the 26<sup>th</sup> May. There are presently no other seminarians for our diocese. Deacon Gary Stokes is our one Permanent Deacon, with another man in training.

It is not only the provision of priests that will affect our parishes, the financial ability of the parishes to support themselves and future requirements such as Pastoral Associates is a real factor. Finances are a major issue for our diocese. The schools are self-providing, and the two Homes for the Aged in the care of the diocese are functioning well financially and in all other aspects. Centacare Catholic Country SA (Port Pirie Diocese) now numbers more than 150 employees and is functioning very well in several centres in the diocese, with Ceduna being our largest commitment. YourTown (formerly BoysTown) is self-funding in its great work among needy young people, and Vinnies is supported through the generosity of the parishes. All of our parishes, however, have experienced declining numbers of participants. Among the consequences are difficulties in finding and providing for the lay leaders we need, the decline in financial income, such that several parishes have become dependent on the diocese to make ends meet. More parishes will eventually be in that category. As things stand, the central finances of the diocese cannot sustain such support. And it is not only parish running costs. In fact, the prediction is that the Clergy Support Fund, which provides sustenance and stipends for our priests, will be depleted in twelve or fifteen years' time, unless through Bequests or other means we can find ways to avert that situation.

In such a situation of decreasing priestly personnel and diocesan finances, it is time to look at our strategies for the future. As one or two have suggested, is our future a reintegration into the Archdiocese of Adelaide? It is clear to me that the overall sentiment of the diocese is that we maintain our own identity, and the thinking of the Bishop and all those he asks is that we should strive for this.

You will be aware that various consultations have recently been conducted in the diocese. You have been provided with what the table groups at the Diocesan Assembly listed as "Areas of Importance for the Future of the Diocese". A summary was circulated some weeks ago. There are two other surveys which have been forwarded to me, opinions on the two models of parish clusters that were sent out, and responses to another questionnaire, "Future of Parish Leadership". Most, but not all, parishes have responded to these surveys.

Among the groups which will be analyzing these responses will be the newly formed Diocesan Strategic Directions Planning Committee. The members of this new body, the Diocesan Strategic Directions Planning Committee are Fr Jim Monaghan (Vicar General), Mr Greg Adey, (Consultant on Aged Care and Boards), Ms Jen Cleary (CEO of Centacare Catholic Port Pirie Diocese), Mr Cosimo De Cianni (Diocesan Business and Finance Manager), Mr Neil Davidson (Assistant to the Business and Finance Manager), Dr Peter Munn (former CEO of Centacare Catholic Port Pirie Diocese) and Mr John Lemm (former State Manager of CCI, SA). This Group has met twice so far and its membership and gender balance are to be extended to include two more women and two more priests.

A charter for this Committee has been prepared and states, "The Strategic Directions Planning Committee provides insight on long-term strategies in support of long-term sustainability of the Diocese of Port Pirie". The comments from parishioners on parish clusters and the "Future of Parish Leadership" have also been forwarded to this Committee for their consideration. Ultimately the Committee will report to the Bishop of the day, and its recommendations will be reviewed by the Diocesan Pastoral Council, the Council of Priests, the Diocesan Finance Council, and the College of Consultors.

With a new Bishop in the offing at some time, he will have the advantage of reading the thoughts and aspirations of the diocese concerning future change and growth. It will give him an account of what various groups of the diocese are thinking and praying for concerning the future development of the diocese. The process is an important way for us to situate ourselves as the Australian Church prepares itself for the Plenary Council in 2020. The table group surveys are the responses of individuals at the tables, responding to the request of the Facilitator at the Assembly, Lana Turvey-Collins that people write down five areas of importance for the diocese to focus on during the next twelve months. The parishes whose opinions were not represented in the table group surveys at the Diocesan Assembly because of their inability to be there at the time, or who have not replied to the questionnaire "Future of Parish Leadership" (a copy of this questionnaire is attached for your convenience) are asked to do so, as the Spirit speaks through all of us. The Committee hopes to present brief updates of its work through *Witness*, the Diocesan web site, and short inserts for parish Sunday bulletins.

Your attention is drawn to the recent issue of *The Witness*, in particular the Bishop's article "To Be Church" and Br Cronin's article "Looking Forward in Hope" where challenges and possibilities and hopes for our future are reported. As discussion starters for Parish Councils and Boards and groups there are the following attachments to this letter:

- "Five Areas of Importance for the Diocese"
- "Future of Parish Leadership"
- "Parish Clusters"
- "Questions Arising from Bishop's Article"

I ask that Parish Councils and any wider parish groups, Regional Pastoral Councils and School Boards as they represent our youth and future, and CWL and Vinnies Conferences and Knights of the Southern Cross to discuss those articles and also this letter over a number of meetings and send their reports to the Bishop's Chancery which will forward them to the relevant bodies. I ask parish priests, chairs and leaders of Boards and groups to initiate this action.

Clearly, this is an important process for the future of the diocese. The Strategic Directions Committee is of high significance for our future. The discussion will also help towards our preparation as a Diocese for the Plenary Council of the Catholic Church's Australia in 2020. I commend that you implore the Holy Spirit for the graces of insight and wisdom.

The Strategic Directions Planning Committee is due to report to the Bishop by the 8<sup>th</sup> December this year, Feast of Mary Immaculate, Patroness of the diocese. So your observations as groups or individuals are requested by the end of September.

Yours in Christ



+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ  
**Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie**