



Diocese of Palmerston North

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9th February 1983

The Priests of the Taranaki Deaneries

Dear Monsignor and Fathers,

As you know, a clear diocesan policy concerning our apostolate among the Maori people has long been called for by various sectors of the Church, including the priests and sisters on the "Maori Mission". I acknowledge that the development of such a policy must be worked out in consultation with all concerned, including above all the Maori people. As part of this process, I also wish to consult with you, the priests of the parishes in Taranaki, because of new developments affecting your region this year.

In my letter to the priests (December 6th, 1982) I outlined certain key points which form a framework for the development of such a policy. One of these points was the need for the Maori apostolate to be more parish-centred (i.e. not an independent development), while at the same time fully respecting the need and the right of the Maori people to experience what I have called "separate opportunities".

Another key point was that in future the priests whom we have traditionally called the "Maori Missioners" will be available "primarily to the priests of the region - to help them fulfil their ministry to the Maori people." This decision was reached following discussion with my diocesan consultors and representatives of the Society of Mary, but it has its roots in discussions and reflections that have been taking place over many years now, involving also the Maori people. I wish to emphasise that this shift of focus does not mean a reduction of our commitment to the Maori people but rather an increased commitment.

In practical terms, this means that instead of the "Maori Missioners" doing the baptisms and weddings of Maori parishioners, visiting their sick, etc., these functions will fall in the first place to the priests of the parishes. The same applies to presiding at those Sunday Masses which take place from time to time on Maraes, and which are to be regarded as "parish" Masses even though they are intended to provide for the special needs of Maori parishioners.

Some priests of parishes are already fulfilling these functions, but it is hoped that this will be common practice as soon as possible.

The "Maori Missioners" will continue to be available to assist the priests of parishes when required. It is expected that priests of the parishes will continue to need their help especially for funerals for some time yet.

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Often, it will be the Maori people themselves who feel that the help of experienced Maori Mission priests is required. I ask you to be sensitive to any difficulties which the Maori people might experience in making these adjustments. Indeed, there will be many Maori people who are not yet ready for even a gradual transfer of the kind described above. And so these measures are not intended to be interpreted as cutting off the freedom of Maori missionaries and Maori people to contact each other. But they do mean that when the assistance of Maori Missioners is required - e.g. for liturgical functions - it should be requested by the priests of the parishes. Gradually, it can be expected that Maori parishioners will become more used to turning first to their own parish priests.

The expectations mentioned here have been discussed with the Maori people of Taranaki by Father Peter Conaghan, SM, and we are indebted to him for this. I also intend personally to discuss these matters with the Maori people.

What is said here about the relationship between Maori Mission priests and the parishes applies also, of course, to other Maori Mission personnel, such as the Sisters. Just as importantly, our non-Maori parishioners must be encouraged to take a fuller interest in the concerns of our Maori parishioners.

Father Conaghan is willing to make available to the priests of the parishes a small and very helpful book which explains Maori customs, and he is willing to spend time with Deanery gatherings of priests when he returns from his own renewal time, at the beginning of May. During his absence, Fathers D. Gledhill, SM, and J. Durning, SM, are available to the priests in the ways mentioned above.

I recognise that these new developments will take time, and that we will all have to learn as we go. I shall look forward to discussing these matters with the priests of the Taranaki Deaneries, perhaps at a special meeting after the beginning of May.

With every best wish.

Yours fraternally,



P.J. Cullinane
Bishop of Palmerston North