

14 September 1994

Memo. to: To the Council of Priests

From: Bishop Peter

Re: Aspirations of Maori Catholics - Agenda item

At a meeting with the Maori Missioners and Maori lay leaders from each part of the diocese, some of the long-standing concerns of the Maori people surfaced again. Because these concerns go to the heart of our pastoral ministry, I once again ask the Senate to take up this subject.

The desire of Maori Catholics to practise the faith in Maori ways is based on a human need and a human right which is acknowledged (at least theoretically) in official Church documents. As you realise, it is an obstacle to people's faith and to the gospel itself to expect a people to practise the faith in ways that are culturally not natural to them.

I am not suggesting that we have been doing this. On the contrary, we have implicitly acknowledged their needs and their rights by providing for and supporting Maori missioners. But have we not also let ourselves off the hook in this way? By having easy recourse to the Maori missioners we have failed to equip ourselves for ministry to a whole section of the Catholic flock. This is why I have previously urged that the Maori missioners be seen as specialists who assist us in our priestly ministry to the whole Catholic people.

Our chickens are going to come home to roost as it becomes increasingly difficult for the Society of Mary to provide priests. How are we going to cope, and are the Maori Catholics going to believe that we want to? Maori Catholics are afraid that they will end up with neither Maori missioners nor our ministry. We still haven't given them clear enough evidence of our interest in them.

The first priests in this country served among the Maori people, and the immigrants were accommodated within a model of Church centered around the needs of the local, i.e. Maori, people. But as the European population increased, the Church's personnel were diverted more to the immigrants' needs and experience of Church. And so, a European model of Church developed and the Maori people were provided for through the parallel institution of the Maori missions. Maori Catholics are conscious of having lost out through this development, and some have a real fear that they will be the ones who lose out again with the impending shortage of priests.

The long-term solution to this, of course, is more vocations from among Maori Catholics themselves. To this end, we need to involve Maori Catholics in the exercise of pastoral care. That is why the Waka Aroha was, and is, so important. But the interim solution will require greater involvement by ourselves. To this end, I ask you to reflect on the following questions:

- are we willing to be more present to Maori Catholics especially at times like funerals? (I realise this has practical difficulties, but I am asking whether we need to review the way we prioritise our various activities; we ourselves are already under pressure, and I am wanting to ensure that the needs of the Maori people are not overlooked in any re-prioritising we have to do.)
- are we caught in a vicious circle, i.e. do the Maori missionaries keep on providing a total ministry to the Maori people (instead of just complementing our ministry to them) because we aren't yet ready, and are we not yet ready because they are still available and better able to do it? Is it realistic to continue this situation if we already know that the availability of SM priests for the Maori mission is likely to run out?
- if we have to break out of that vicious circle, what is the step needed to break the circuit?
- are we calling on the services of the Minita-a-iwi, whose names I sent out to all parishes?
- should we involve them only for Maori occasions, or for other parish occasions as well?
- how do we involve these Minita-a-iwi without this becoming too onerous for them? What are their needs as men and women with family responsibilities?
- should it become a requirement for ordination that future priests be able to celebrate Mass in Maori?

These are just some of the questions that we need to face in terms of our own responsibilities as pastors. Other factors may occur to you. Please discuss this matter at the Deaneries in preparation for the next Senate meeting.

I take this opportunity to notify you of the establishment of a Maori Apostolate Co-ordinating Board to advise me concerning the practical implementation of policy. Its function is analogous to the function of the Board for Religious & Pastoral Education. Its members are Fr Hemi Hekiera, Sr Rita Hickey (representing the Sisters of Compassion), Mr George Kuru and Mr Paul Cowan.