

Letter to 2007 School Leavers

Catholic Colleges, Diocese of Palmerston North

Dear

Chosen for a purpose

When you leave school you will be taking one of the really big steps of your life. I hope you find a lot of joy in the life ahead of you. I mean the kind of joy that stays with you even when things don't turn out the way you hoped. In fact, that's when you most need to be sure that *you personally*, and *your life*, are part of a bigger plan.

To start with, it helps to know that at the moment you were conceived, there was only one chance in more than a million that it would be you. Any other combination of sperm and ovum would have been a different person. And the one moment when you could have come into existence would have passed forever. It really was *you* God chose.

It wasn't just the beginning of your life that God chose; it was your whole life. When you realise this, it opens up a whole new dimension for you.

God's reason for wanting *you* is written into your "heart" and your talents. It's also written into the circumstances of your life. It involves what you most need to do, and what the world most needs from you. The place where God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

Decisions

This means making decisions and choices. Every person's journey sooner or later meets cross-roads – when choosing one direction excludes other options. Don't get paralysed by trying to keep all your options open! Freedom and fulfilment and peace of mind come through *decision and commitment* – not through trying to keep all options open.

Sometimes the options in front of us are big and sometimes they are small; for example, when we choose between putting a little more kindness into the world or a little less kindness; more honesty or less honesty; more forgiveness or less forgiveness, and so on. Whether it's a big choice or just a little one, you can sometimes know which is the right choice by putting yourself at the far end of your life and looking back – the choices that will give you *the most gladness* then are the choices that are right for you now.

Special moments

There are going to be some very special moments in your life. They will be the kind of experiences that *point beyond themselves to something else*. For example, something wonderful in nature that leaves you feeling you are part of something much bigger than your own lifetime. Or, the sudden feeling that even the good things of life (a good marriage, a successful business, good friends, good health, etc) still leave an empty gap somewhere inside you. Your own deep self tells you that there's something more than all this.



fire

In union with the whole Church
we celebrate that day of Pentecost
when the Holy Spirit appeared to the apostles
in the form of countless tongues of fire.
- Eucharistic Prayer 1, Pentecost

Or, someone you love has died, and suddenly everything around you appears in a different light: the things that seemed so important to you don't seem quite so important now, and the things you knew about only vaguely, like heaven, suddenly seem so real.

Or, some sight or sound or scent will trigger some fond memory, and you know you are still linked to people and places of your past. There's a feeling that they are still part of you, and that one day all good things will come together again.

Or, you might be listening to the kind of music that makes you want to be still and quiet because it seems to be drawing you towards something. Or, in some quiet space on your own, you just experience the mystery of your own self, unique in all the universe. So why?

In all these experiences you are getting hints that there's more to your existence than you might have thought. But you are going to need more than just these hints. Joy comes with knowing for sure.

Your life on a larger screen

This is where the Church comes into the picture. What God has revealed through Jesus – and now makes known through the Church – is that you really are part of a wonderful plan God had in mind from the beginning. In his letter to the Ephesians, St Paul put it this way:

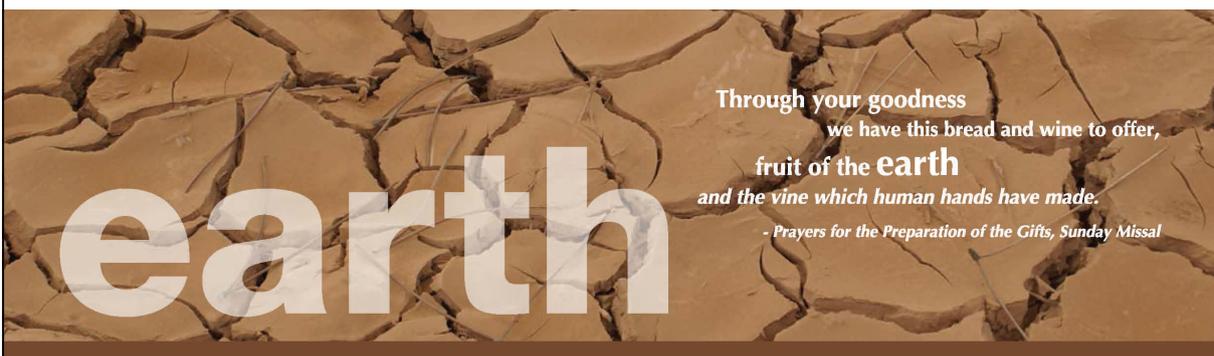
God has let us know the mystery of his purpose, the hidden plan he so kindly made **in Christ** from the beginning, to act upon when the times had run their course to the end; that he would bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth....

The very mystery that has been kept hidden in God through all the ages is now revealed – and dispensed – **through the Church.** (Eph. 1:9,10; 3:8-10)

The community we call the Church started when the first disciples of Jesus found themselves bowled over by his resurrection. That was a huge experience, especially after what happened to him on Good Friday. It showed the lengths God would go to for us – how much each of us matters to God. Who can blame them for passing on what they had discovered. It was the kind of experience any of us would want to share with people we care about. In the light of these experiences, the Church is able to interpret your own special experiences; it can confirm what your own experiences hint at.

I mentioned before that God has written the purpose of your life into your talents and into the circumstances of your life. But to read God's writing, it helps to know God's "style". This is what comes through to us in the way God has acted in the *lives* of other people down the centuries, and still today.

That's why the scriptures are like a mirror. In the liturgy, the Church holds this mirror up to us. In the different seasons and feasts of the liturgy it holds the mirror at different angles – always reflecting the way God is present in people's lives, including our own.



If we walk away from the practice of our faith we effectively walk out of the mirror-frame where we are revealed to ourselves in the light of God's purposes. We walk out on ourself! We need to be where we can see and hear what God is saying to us on the larger screen.

Of course you can also look up the gospels for yourself, and get some real close-ups of what Jesus was like and how he would speak to you; or, the Acts of the Apostles for first-hand impressions of what it was like in those early days after Jesus' resurrection. Things happened then that have touched *your* life.

Christians know that the worst that could ever happen in history has already happened – on Good Friday – and that even that was turned into life and joy on Easter Sunday. We are those who already know history's wonderful outcome, and live in anticipation of it. That is what we celebrate every time we celebrate the Eucharist.

World Youth Day 2008

Will I see you with the Pope in Sydney next July? Present estimates are that 500,000 will be at the final Mass. (In 1995, 4 million young people went to be with the Pope in Manila; in Rome in 2000, there were 2 million.) Even though the number in Sydney will be smaller, it will still be the largest gathering of people at any one time and place in the history of Australasia. We are expecting about 5,000 to be going across from New Zealand.

What all this says to me is that young people around the world are wanting to make *connections* between their spiritual experiences (the kind I mentioned above) and the Church (the larger screen I mentioned above).

Your local youth co-ordinator is able to give you more details, and I shall give you contact details at the bottom of this letter.

I realise that some of you have exams coming up, and I wish you all the best.

Yours sincerely,

P J Cullinane
Bishop of Palmerston North

A Daily Prayer

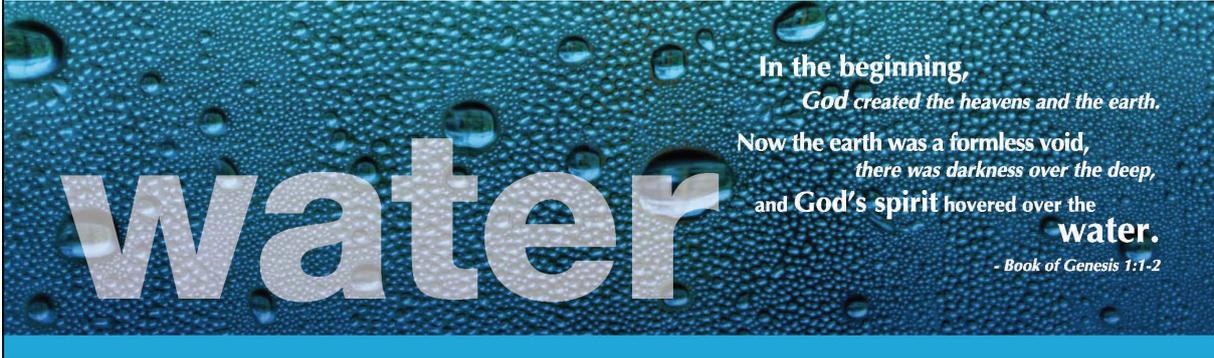
Dear God, make my life
a channel of your love
flowing into the world.

I want the world to be a better place
because I was here.

Help me to know what you had in mind
when you chose *me*.

Thank you for making my life
worthwhile for ever,
by what Jesus has done for me.

Keep me close
to the community in which
all this is revealed to me.
Amen



water

In the beginning,
God created the heavens and the earth.
Now the earth was a formless void,
there was darkness over the deep,
and God's spirit hovered over the
water.

- Book of Genesis 1:1-2

Visit the Maori village of Parihaka - where two Maori leaders and pacifists, Te Whiti and Tohu, initiated non violent resistance that later inspired Ghandi, and walk around Mt Taranaki, a majestic volcano that inspires reverence in all who see it.



TARANAKI

Youth Ministry Contact

Clare Whareaitu
021 050 2028
clarewhare@yahoo.co.nz

Experience an over night retreat in the native bush reserve of the Pohangana Valley and witness the 'stewardship' of the earth, of New Zealand's largest windfarm on the hills that overlook the region.



MANAWATU

Youth Ministry Contact:

Pogia Leatitagaloa
Afamasaga
021 509439
manawatu@dyc.net.nz

Journey up the Whanganui river to Jerusalem and visit the Catholic Mission of the Sisters of Compassion established in 1854, and one time home of NZ poet James K Baxter.



WHANGANUI

Youth Ministry Contact:

Tony Bouterey
021 469 267
boutereys@clear.net.nz

Visit and hear the history of the Mission Estate vineyard, New Zealand's oldest vineyard and the Hawkes Bay's largest - first established by French Marist Fathers in 1858. Have a taste as long as you're 18!



HAWKES BAY

Youth Ministry Contact:

Bill Dysart
021 509 437
ymachb@clear.net.nz



Diocesan
Youth Ministry Contact:
Jonny Boon
021 976 483
jboon@pndiocese.org.nz

wind

And **suddenly** there came from the sky
a **strong driving wind**,
and it **filled the entire house**
in which they were.

- Book of Acts 2:2