

40th anniversary; notes for Welcom

What pastoral role were you doing at the time of your appointment?

After parish ministry in Wellington during the 1960's, I was on the staff of the Pastoral Centre, Palmerston North, during the 1970's. This put me in touch with people from all over NZ who wanted the renewal introduced by the 2nd Vatican Council. We provided a wide range of courses – scripture, liturgy, catechetics, social justice, etc. for laity, Religious and priests. The enthusiasm of people committed to renewal, and the heart-breaks of those who experienced opposition to it, highlighted for me the need for on-going adult formation at all levels. This became a priority in my ministry as bishop.

You were the diocese's first bishop; what were the challenges of establishing a new diocese?

My first office was a small kitchenette at the Pastoral Centre, which is a way of saying that administratively we started with nothing. The process of “disengagement” between the Archdiocese and the DPN, and the equitable sharing of assets, was carefully worked through by competent people from both dioceses, and the very fair-minded contribution of Cardinal Tom Williams.

But the main assets of the new diocese were its people, Religious and priests. Programmes of formation for lay ministries (Hand On and Waka Aroha) were important developments. So too was the appointment of lay women and men to important diocesan leadership positions, including Finance and Catholic education. Eventually we appointed Lay Pastoral Coordinators to lead parishes rather than amalgamate them.

We felt able after a short time to “park” our Diocesan Pastoral Council in favour of five deanery pastoral councils, which were open to the participation of a much wider representation of the people of the diocese. I met with each of deanery initially three, later two, times a year. The main limitation was that we were not used to working together on this scale. But it seemed consistent with the reason for creating the diocese in the first place: to bring people, priests and bishop into closer, more frequent, contact. It was that way of working together that Pope Francis is encouraging – a synodal journeying together, listening at grass-roots, and sharing responsibility. The only way to get used to it was to do it.

In similar vein, the annual financial report of the Diocesan Finance Council became regional meetings with Parish Finance Councils.

A bigger challenge was to enable the full participation of Catholic Maori. The traditional “Maori Mission” ran alongside the parishes in parallel. It gave Maori a strong sense of belonging in the Church, and we are permanently indebted to the priests, Sisters and Brothers who made this possible. But there were weaknesses: it was dependent on the Religious Orders, who were gradually less able to provide personnel, and made known their eventual withdrawal. Further, so long as Religious were doing this work, diocesan priests did not feel any responsibility for it, and parishes felt no need to become bi-cultural. Maori did not feel “at home” in parish liturgies, programmes and apostolates. The challenge was to help Maori feel their place in the Church was not on the margins, while ensuring they could continue to experience their own ways of gathering. To help with this challenge, we established a Maori Apostolate Coordinating Board (with wide-open representation) which I met with two or three times a year. The appointment of Koro Danny Karatea Goddard as my vicar for Maori was a milestone. So too, was the ordination of two Maori widowers, Pehi Waretine on the Maungarongo marae in 1992, and Tamati Manaena on the Waitapu marae in 1998.

Big challenges arose in regard to Catholic schools. Integration into the State system was conditional upon our schools being brought up to the material standard of the state schools. But the cost of doing this was beyond our means, and we were literally faced with having to decide which schools to keep and which to close, if we could not integrate them all. The government saved the day when it offered suspensory loans. There was no let-out earlier, however, when in the very first days of the diocese, I was told by the then Chancellor of the Archdiocese that I would need to halt a collection already in progress in Hawkes Bay for the building of a new co-ed school, or face long-term, crippling indebtedness. It was a very up-setting time for us all.

The liturgy renewal brought its challenges, and its great rewards. Good liturgy takes us into the mystery of God's presence, becoming an experience of awe, adoration, thanksgiving, deep joy... But it is the awe and adoration of a community acting as one. This is what determines the meaning of participation and of reverence. Liturgy is not an individualistic, silo-type experience. Contrary to claims made in support of the 1962 Missal, the difference is not merely a matter of different liturgical tastes, because in practice, most of those who cling to the liturgy of their childhood are also absent from other aspects of parish life, ministries, apostolates and on-going formation. It is a partial way of dropping out.

What were some of the milestones and highlights during the 40 years?

The consecration of the diocese to the Holy Spirit was a milestone. I was at a bishops' meeting overseas on the Sunday we were to pray the prayer of consecration, and I remember getting up in the night to pray it at the same time as Sunday Masses in the diocese. We hope to renew this consecration on Pentecost Sunday this year.

Traditionally, each diocese had a "chancellor" who had responsibility for the oversight of diocesan assets and finances. The chancellor was usually supported by lay financial advisors. The appointment of a lay person (Mr. John Stone) as Diocesan Executive Advisor and following him, of Mr. Tony Murphy as Diocesan Manager, were precedent-making steps. It is a step that has since been taken by other dioceses.

Eventually, the appointment of Owen Dolan as coadjutor bishop was a great milestone because we complemented each other in important ways. It turned out that on the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator, one of us is INTJ and the other ENSP (guess which!). On hearing this, one of our priests commented that "now we have one whole bishop". This was not the Catholic people's first experience of "Peter and Owen"; McKeefry and Snedden had preceded us! (But they were imports from Auckland; Owen Dolan and I are home brew.)

Another highlight was the renovation and re-dedication of our cathedral in 1988. The architect (Brian Elliot) was awarded for this work, and the cathedral was later featured on a NZ postage stamp. More importantly, while preserving its original gothic lines, it is now formatted for the renewed liturgy. It also features Maori artifacts.

What is the hardest thing about being a bishop?

In the early years of the diocese, perhaps it was matching the needs of priests with the needs of the people. Priests were truly prophetic in their witness to faithfulness, by being at their posts week in, week out, year in, year out. But pre-Vatican II seminary formation had not prepared any of us – priests,

laity, bishops - for the challenges of the Council, including that understanding of the faith which leads to the greater involvement of laity, liturgical renewal, ecumenism, inter-faith relationships etc. And, nor had it prepared us for some of the problems that have occurred more recently. In many ways we have all been in a catching up situation.

How has the Church in NZ changed over these forty years?

I count it a blessing to have lived on both sides of the Council, and nurtured by both. It is easy today to underestimate the extent to which we have changed. For those who can make the comparison, it is most obvious in the liturgy. When I was growing up, it really was “Father’s Mass” which everyone else only “attended.” The call to holiness was more for clergy and Religious; and responsibility for the mission of the Church was for the bishops, and for laity who were “delegated”.

The move away from these symptoms of clericalism means accepting that the call to holiness is for all the baptized, and responsibility for the Church’s mission is also for all.

How do I see the Church’s future? What are the big issues?

At the beginning of the diocese, we adopted the Acts of the Apostles as our “mission Statement”, and at one of the Bishops’ Synods, I spoke of the need to re-image the Church as the “community of Jesus’ disciples.” In both these ways I see the Church moving into the future with its eyes on where it is coming from: ka titiro whakamuri kia anga whakamua. I think in these ways the Church will find itself.

What’s life like for a retired bishop?

In a letter recognizing my 32 years of leading the diocese, the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples spoke of a continuing apostolate of prayer and sacrifice. I really do find this is how I can continue to contribute . I am also very happy to be involved in parish ministry where and when required; at times more re-cycled than retired. The title “emeritus” looks a bit prestigious and flattering, but my Latin dictionary brings it down to earth: “a veteran, old, disused...” I’m loving the slower pace. And I do not regret my calling.

Anecdotes/particular memories?

It was the Easter season when the diocese came into being, and so I chose a logo that featured the contours of the diocese, with Ruapehu at the top from where the Risen Christ speaks – kai tau te rangimarie ki a koutou. The bottom boundary is not shown, out of respect the local iwi who had felt cut across the middle by where the boundary was placed. The only personal touch in the logo is the reference to Hebrews 5:7-9. Some time later, I was rebuked by the Heraldic Society for not conforming to traditional coats of arms; I haven’t slept since!