



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF AUCKLAND

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Pastoral Letter on the New Zealand Housing Crisis 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time: 15-16 September 2018

(Readings: Isaiah 50:5-9; James 2:14-18; Mark 8:27-35)

My dear people,

This Sunday marks the end of our Social Justice Week. In today's Gospel Jesus asks his disciples and each of us: 'Who do people say that I am?'

This is a question that is at the heart of our personal responsibility as followers of Jesus, who stood with the poorest and most vulnerable in society and who asks us to do the same.

Today I want to draw your attention to the Mission of the Church and in particular to the social services and justice and peace arm of the Diocese. It is wide-ranging and includes organisations such as De Paul House, St Vincent de Paul, Mother of Divine Mercy Refuge, Caritas, Catholic Social Services, Monte Cecilia, the Justice & Peace Commission and the Catholic Caring Foundation, to name a few. These organisations and many others provide care, services, advocacy, programmes and practical support to ensure family wellbeing is nurtured and enhanced. In addition, many of our primary and secondary schools make an enormous contribution through their outreach projects.

I acknowledge with deep gratitude all the works of mercy and justice that are being done daily in the name of the Church.

Pope Francis says it like this: "Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people" [The Joy of the Gospel n.268].

One of the biggest issues in Auckland Diocese at the present time is housing. Jesus was born in a stable and, with his family, was a refugee in Egypt. During his public life he often had nowhere to lay his head. He calls on us to open our hearts to families living among us today who have no housing, who have to sleep in cars, or live in substandard or overcrowded dwellings where their children often suffer ill health and risk having their education disrupted from housing insecurity.

As St James reminds us in today's second reading:

"If a brother or a sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm, and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." James 2:15-17.

Often the task can seem too hard to even begin to address personally. Parishes, though, can work together and with others, to be a Church that reaches beyond itself and becomes a centre of missionary outreach. I offer some examples of how this missionary outreach is making a difference in our Diocese today.

- Two Auckland based Catholic organisations, Monte Cecilia and De Paul House, make a significant contribution to housing the homeless. They are supported by many parishioners across Auckland. In recent years, they have worked closely with a number of Parishes.
- Maria Assumpta Parish in Beach Haven have made a Parish house available for De Paul House to use for emergency housing.
- Thirty years ago the Parish of Our Lady of Lourdes, Glen Eden, responded to the Diocesan Pastoral Council's plea on behalf of homeless families by purchasing a fire-damaged house that parishioners worked hard to make liveable and they committed themselves to a 25 year mortgage. Since then it has provided housing for over 20 families and helped them into their own accommodation.
- In 2015, the Dominican Sisters made one of their houses in Blockhouse Bay available to De Paul House for 3 years. This enabled a homeless working family to be supported to save for the deposit required to buy a house. In June of this year the family, through an Affordable Equity Programme with the NZ Housing Foundation, moved into a home of their own.
- St Ignatius Parish, St Heliers, has provided beds and bedding for every family in a low decile school in order to make their houses more liveable.

Many Parishes, from the resources they have available, have helped those in greatest need in their midst and yet the need continues to be great. As your Shepherd, I encourage you not to lose heart and together as a parish community to find renewed and creative ways to be "*an evangelizing community that gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives*". [The Joy of the Gospel n.24].

I urge you as a faith community to consider what response your Parish can make and whether your Parish, or individuals within it, can provide affordable rental accommodation or emergency housing or furnishings to help a homeless family.

Yours in Christ,

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✘ **Patrick Dunn**
Bishop of Auckland