



24 November 2023

To the People of the Diocese, Staff of the Diocesan Offices and Agencies, Schools, Clergy, Parish Leaders and Leadership Teams

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Re: A Message from Bishop Michael to the People of the Diocese

I write to advise you of some upcoming change and opportunity in two of our critical Diocesan teams – the Religious Education & Spirituality Team and the Pastoral Ministries Team.

In October 2022, the Diocesan Trustees authorised changes to the administration of our Catholic schools with the aim of better supporting schools and learning outcomes. At the same time, they authorised a later review for our Religious Education & Spirituality Team supporting schools, and our Diocesan Pastoral Ministries team.

The review was conducted by the esteemed Dr Dan White over the last several months and I have now received and accepted the report. I am grateful to Dr White and the many people who participated in and contributed to the review.

A key outcome of the report identified how valued each of these teams are. I recognise and thank each team for their ministry and the valuable faith formation they undertake as they share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

As with any review, opportunities for the future have also been identified and we now look to explore, listen and discern the ways we can best support our Diocese, our clergy, our parishes, and our people as well as those beyond on the margins and those who do not know Jesus Christ (*Evangelii Gaudium* (14), 2013).

It is with renewed enthusiasm that we now explore our approach to mission and evangelisation and how we help to bring people to encounter and build a relationship with Jesus Christ in the community of the Church. We recognise the central words of Pope Francis, as we too seek a transformative “missionary option”, sharing our joy and focusing on our proclamation of the Gospel rather than our mere self-preservation (*Evangelii Gaudium* (27), 2013).

The review established that our ministry work to-date has stretched far and wide and that now is the time to focus our missionary efforts and path forward as a community of Christ’s disciples.

Importantly, a number of central themes emerged from the review as we seek to prioritise the evangelising mission of the Church.

- i. Recognising the importance and centrality of our parish communities.
- ii. Securing the genuine engagement and collaboration from our clergy, parish leaders, parishes, and those beyond, as we build authentic partnerships and focus our works towards an agreed and central intent.
- iii. Recognising each of our schools as an important component and an extension of our parish communities – the importance of our families and our youth was a continuing theme throughout the work prepared by Dr White.

These ambitions will no doubt challenge us and require us to engage, to listen, to discern, and to go out from ourselves, as we focus our intent and navigate our path forward.

To help us achieve this, I will be considering the most suitable form of governance body to oversee our efforts in mission and evangelisation. Additionally, I will soon be appointing an Implementation Committee to oversee and manage the implementation of the review recommendations and to ensure we hear from all those wanting to share their vision and voice.

One of the early tasks of the Implementation Committee will be to hold a series of 'listening' opportunities in 2024, likely workshops or forums, where we can hear directly from our clergy, our parishes, our people, our schools, and families. I anticipate that key themes will emerge and consensus will be reached regarding priorities for our future.

Consultation, dialogue and communication are vital in our journey, and I encourage each of you to consider how you can actively contribute as we make a difference and nurture a Spirit-filled connection to our loving God. I trust that we will enter the conversation with patience, kindness, and understanding.

In conclusion, and echoing the words and sentiments of Pope Francis, my desire is that our diocesan community be a Church that welcomes and receives people by keeping our doors open, and that we also be a Church that finds new roads, that is able to step outside itself and go to those who do not attend Mass, to those who have quit or are indifferent. (My Door is Always Open: A Conversation on Faith, Hope, and the Church in a Time of Change 2014).

We do not walk alone as we go forth in this journey. We must walk together, and we must walk with Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol followed by the letters 'M' and 'K' in a stylized, cursive script.

Most Reverend Michael Kennedy
Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle