

26 May 2020

Pastoral Letter on Leaving the Closed Room

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ

Kia tau te rangimārie ki a koutou – Peace be with you

In these days between the risen Lord's Ascension into heaven and Pentecost the apostles returned to the closed room. There they *joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers* (cf. Acts 1:12-14). It was from the closed room that the Church was brought to birth as the Holy Spirit came down upon the apostles and impelled them to go out and proclaim the Good News.

This year Christians around the world entered a “closed room” due to the pandemic. For some of you this has enabled a graced time of prayer and reflection. For others it has been a time to refocus and put lives in order. For some the “closed room” has led to family tensions or concerns about future employment. For others still this has been a time when they have allowed their faith to drift. Now the “closed room” of our churches is coming to an end.

With you we rejoice that we are able to take these first steps towards returning to some semblance of normality. The sacrifices we have made as a nation have averted what we have seen overseas. As we emerge from our “closed room” and return to our churches and community engagement we take this opportunity to thank those who protected and supported our sick, vulnerable and, indeed, all of us throughout the lockdown. We thank all those in our faith communities who have worked tirelessly to connect with parishioners offering spiritual support. Again, we have been delighted by the creative initiatives that have arisen and the way the risen Lord has used these to bestow his graces.

We share your joy at being able to celebrate Eucharist together. However, we still have to live under the restrictions that are there for the good of our vulnerable and elderly. Each parish is going to have to determine how it will offer Masses while ensuring health guidelines are kept. This may mean some churches will not open immediately. It may mean that there are more people wanting to attend Mass than can be accommodated. We ask you to be patient and understanding while your parish leadership determine what will happen in your parish. With the Government, we ask those who are vulnerable to the virus, those who are afraid and anyone who is not well to stay at home. All people continue to be dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass during this time.

As we emerge from our “closed room” we hope and pray that the Lord will pour out his Spirit upon us, guiding us to work for a better, more caring society. We hope and pray that the Spirit will inspire our faith communities, our parishes, schools and chaplaincies, to re-vision themselves towards a revitalised spiritual life, a renewed effort towards welcome and evangelisation and to a deeper awareness of and response to the needs of the wider community.

As we look towards Pentecost may we be inspired by the early Church that emerged from the “closed room” so long ago. Like those Spirit-filled disciples, may we too take the risen Christ to the world.

Yours sincerely in Christ

- ✠ **Patrick Dunn, Bishop of Auckland and NZCBC President**
- ✠ **John Dew, Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington and NZCBC Vice President**
- ✠ **Stephen Lowe, Bishop of Hamilton and NZCBC Secretary**
- ✠ **Paul Martin SM, Bishop of Christchurch**
- ✠ **Michael Dooley, Bishop of Dunedin**
- ✠ **Michael Gielen, Auxiliary Bishop of Auckland**