



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Tēnā koutou katoa

My first 18 months as Bishop of our diocese has been a blessed time, as I have met you in our parishes, schools and faith communities. During this time, one of my priorities has been to listen to what is important to you. A common theme has been a desire for clarity around the Cathedral.

Over the past year, considering this question has been central to my prayer life. It has also called for the commitment of significant staffing resources in our diocese to assess the many important practical questions.

I now wish to share with you my thoughts regarding the location of a future Cathedral.

My vision is that our new Cathedral is beautiful, timeless in design and is a worthy house that honours God and represents our faith tradition. It must be a place where all feel welcome so we can continue to foster the faith we have received and to grow in our own call to holiness. It will be a unique place of worship that current and future generations will be proud of.

The initial question has been: Where is the best location for a new Cathedral? The world has changed since the decision in 2019 to build a Cathedral in Armagh Street. COVID-19 forced us to consider what is truly important; the Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry shone a light on our responsibility to those who suffered abuse while in our care; and the increase in both the cost of living and construction costs has highlighted the need for financial prudence.

In considering the question of the best site, we have engaged for feedback with our priests, religious,

parish leadership, Catholic Māori and diocesan representatives. We have also engaged specialists to provide analysis on the options available.

Three potential sites have been identified:

- the site at Barbadoes Street
- the land at Armagh Street
- Manchester Street
 - with the renovation of St Mary's Pro-Cathedral

To faithfully consider this project, we are following the Catholic practice of decision-making: prayer, dialogue, discernment and final resolution. Each site has been approached considering its historical and spiritual significance, the capacity for the site to accommodate supporting facilities: a community and cultural centre, a priests' residence, diocesan and parish offices, an adoration chapel and possibly a school or schools. We also considered potential for future growth, accessibility and parking, and ultimately the financial viability of each site, remembering our wider financial commitments to all parishes in the diocese and the important responsibility to support those who have suffered while in Church care.

A clear recommendation has been discerned as a result of those factors:

That we return to our humble and historical roots and locate our Cathedral on Barbadoes Street. For 166 years this land has been central to our story of faith. Living on this land for the past 18 months, I too have sensed its mana and future potential. It blesses us with a rich spiritual history, significant size - many times larger than the other sites - financial viability and accessibility.

“Our visible churches, holy places, are images of the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem, toward which we are making our way on pilgrimage.”

“Clarity around the Cathedral has been identified as a matter of priority ... it is time for certainty.”

Bishop Michael



The Barbadoes Street site is sacred to many. Representatives of our Catholic Māori community tell me the site is sacred to them as the place where Aperahama Te Aika, Tipuna Poua, a founding member of the Catholic Church for Māori in Te Waipounamu, was Confirmed. It was also a busy trading route for early Māori. The Carmelite sisters tell me it was the first place the seven-sisters who established a monastery in Christchurch went to pray after their boat docked in Lyttelton. Not forgetting the many humble migrant people for many decades who have invested their lives and savings into this land. It is a site steeped in history with many identifying it as an anchor for their faith in Christchurch.

Keeping with our Catholic principle of discernment, I now turn to you. I encourage each of you to reflect on this important decision, through prayer, dialogue and ongoing discernment, and to share the fruits of that process. After I have had the chance to listen to you, I will make the final decision as your Bishop.

I now invite you to join me in the first step of discernment: Prayer.

As a diocese, I invite us all to dedicate this coming week as a week of prayer, where we can place the intention of our Cathedral location before our God.

Following this week, we will then enter a three-month period of dialogue and discernment. To assist with this, our website will be updated on Monday 18th December with a short survey where you can submit

your thoughts and reflections. Hard copies of the survey will also be available from parish offices. The survey will be open to all until the end of March 2024.

The survey will form one of the elements I will consider before making a final decision. Other elements will include in-person parish group feedback sessions, technical information, financial considerations, the feedback I have received from key stakeholders and the guidance of my advisory bodies (the College of Consultors and the Diocesan Finance Council).

A lot of effort and expertise have brought us to this point; now is the time for you to share your feedback.

In this time of our history, we have the great privilege and responsibility of building an inspiring Cathedral to be a Mother Church for our diocese. The weight of this decision is not one I take lightly; however, I am equally aware it is the same Holy Spirit of Jesus who has brought us to this point in history and that will faithfully guide us in the journey ahead. I invite you to join me in committing this intention to your daily prayer through Jesus' mother, the patron of our country.

Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us.

St John the Baptist - patron of our diocese, pray for us.

+ Michael Gielen

Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Christchurch