

12 February 2018

Dear sisters and brothers,

Flourishing by Grace - a Pastoral Letter From the Bishop

Last week, the clergy of the diocese in active ministry had the privilege of meeting together for two days to reflect on our diocesan life. It was an encouraging time where we prayed, worked hard and deepened our relationships.

We celebrated the signs of a healthy future emerging in the diocese but recognised fully that we are in difficult times. Our crisis arises from changing patterns of religious expression, our static ministry structures and resourcing, and the past failure to protect people in the church. Together we affirmed that the status quo is not an option. We affirmed that together we must embrace some further and significant changes.

There was a clear resolve to offer more opportunities for lay people to explore and deepen their faith. Over the coming months, your priests will be exploring opportunities for bible study and theological reflection for people attending the church and in the community. I invite you to pray about this work and get involved. Each faith community will be doing it differently. Our hope is that across the diocese there will be more opportunities to discover, experience and explore the wondrous loving grace God has bestowed on his creation.

We also reaffirmed the power of a personal invitation to friends and family to join in a church-based activity. For some, this will be an invitation to join in worship but for others that would be too demanding. Yet we can invite people to events, study groups, and activities in which grace and relationship can be experienced. I encourage you to pray for those whose life might be touched or transformed by a positive and helpful encounter with church community. Who are they? What might you invite them to?

We spent some time coming to terms with the reality that the way we use currently use our resources, physical and human, limits our mission and ministry decisions. Our goal is to ensure that we apply the gifts we have been given in the best way possible for God's mission. After our careful discussions, I indicated to the clergy that I would ask the Newcastle Anglican Church Corporation Board to undertake a review of our assets across the diocese as well as our needs. I have also asked it to propose some strategies to us. We have both our rules and our commitments are to ensuring good communication and consultation through these processes. Each step along the way needs to be shaped by our intention to flourish by God's grace.

It was impossible to meet without being aware of the story of abuse in our diocese and our response. The resolve to ensure a safe church and a prompt pastoral response to survivors was clearly evident. We have been touched greatly by our learnings and we have a strong resolve to embrace the findings of the Royal Commission and ensure the diocese serves its communities well.

I am delighted at the joy that has been shown that Sonia Roulston and Charlie Murry will join me in episcopal leadership in the diocese. Please pray for them, for Arthur Copeman, Katherine Bowyer and Stephen Phillips as they join with me as the senior leadership team of the diocese.

I have begun celebrating the Eucharist in the Cathedral each Wednesday, when I am in the Diocese. The focus of prayer for those who gather is the parishes in a specific deanery and a diocesan agency. Please know of my prayers for you all.

I commend to you the matters in this letter for your prayer and reflection during Lent – that we will spend time deepening our discipleship, that we will for and invite people to draw closer to Christian community, and that we will make good decisions about using our resources for mission.

With every blessing,

Your servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter'.

Bishop Peter Stuart
BISHOP OF NEWCASTLE