

PASTORAL LETTER FROM ARCHBISHOP JOHN DEW
TO CATHOLICS IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF WELLINGTON – HOLY WEEK – 2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In my regular newsletter to the priests, lay pastoral leaders and archdiocesan department directors I have quoted Archbishop Vincent Nichols of the Archdiocese of Westminster. He had reflected on the 'Priest as Witness' and spoken of self-renunciation, '*the exorbitant price paid by Christ and reflected in the life of the priest*'. Sadly we have become aware that not all priests have reflected Christ's self-renunciation. Right now there is deep hurt in the Catholic family, as we have all been shocked and stunned by the deviant and sometimes criminal behaviour of clergy in many parts of the world. This is compounded by the revelation that some bishops have minimised the seriousness of abuse of children by priests and the hurt is even deeper.

While some might rejoice that the church has been found wanting, for many it is a crisis of faith. It is certainly an occasion of deep sadness for all of us. With the world media claiming that the church has lost credibility and some calling for the Pope to be held personally responsible, and even to resign, I believe it is my duty to reach out to you as your bishop and as your brother within the family of the Catholic community.

Following the example of Jesus the Good Shepherd, bishops and priests are called to protect and nourish those entrusted to their care, seeking out the lost, binding the wounded, making the weak strong. This means giving their lives in the service of God's people, and like Jesus 'paying the exorbitant price'. This is what priests commit themselves to at ordination and renew at every Christ Mass. Priests have a privileged responsibility and one, which you honour with your loving and generous support.

Some of those called to be shepherds have been found wanting through their abuse of the sacred trust placed in them. Though these are few in number, the entire church leadership must accept responsibility for their failure.

There have been priests in New Zealand who have abused children and young adults, so we do not claim to be guilt free. However our protocols are very strict and the church openly collaborates with civil authorities. The protocol document *Te Houhango Rongo – A Path to Healing* was developed in the 1990s and has been reviewed several times to ensure that the best is done for those that have been abused. We offer support to victims and do everything possible to ensure that their dignity and self-esteem are not further eroded.

I have apologised to victims of abuse; I do so again in the face of the present crisis engulfing the church. I also apologise to you, the people of the archdiocese, for the humiliation, embarrassment and disappointment you feel. I know that an apology on its own is not sufficient. It is necessary that we, the shepherds, look closely at our own actions and life style, deepen our prayer life and consider anew the meaning of our commitment to living the 'self-renunciation of Christ'. This Year of the Priest and the dignity of our calling demand that we do that. This week is called "Holy" because of the self-offering of Jesus ("the exorbitant price paid by his life") because of his death and his life-giving resurrection. In Holy Week there is also betrayal and denial. Peter, chosen as shepherd, denied he knew Jesus. His weakness crippled his commitment. He was restored by the loving forgiveness of Jesus and charged to strengthen his brothers. I look for that

same strength for myself, and for all of us; shepherds and you, sisters and brothers. We ask for that strength through the prayers of St Peter. The church will come through this difficult time only when all priests live the life of Christ, which includes suffering, carrying the cross, paying the 'exorbitant price'. It is then that we will know the new life of Easter.

I pray that we may all be lifted up in renewal of heart through the power of the One who makes all things new. As we come through this Holy Week may Easter dawn within us, bringing hope and joy and life.

John A Dew

Archbishop of Wellington

March 31, 2010