



Archbishop's Vision and Priorities for the Archdiocese of Perth

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

*St Mary's Cathedral
Thursday 10 September 2015*

In January of 2001, Pope John Paul II wrote a letter to the universal Church in which he proposed what we might call a “way forward” for the Church in the third millennium which was just beginning.

Tonight, on a less grand scale but still with high hopes, I want to speak to you about a “way forward” for our Archdiocese. In doing so, I do not want to suggest for a minute that we have lost our way or even that we have lost our focus. What I do want to do is to redirect our minds and hearts to the words of the Lord who says to us, as surely as he said to the first of his followers, that *“the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is close at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15).

As we prepare to enter into the Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis, and in the spirit of the Lord's call to repentance, it seems very clear to me that this is a time for us, as a local Church, to pause and consider where we have come from as a diocese, where we are at present, and where we must go in the future.

In his letter fifteen years ago, Pope John Paul stated very clearly that in proposing a way forward he was not in any sense inventing a *‘new programme’*. *The programme, he said, already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated... This is a programme which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication. This programme for all times is our programme for the Third Millennium.*

In echoing Pope John Paul's words tonight I want to say the same. Our way forward, our vision, our plan for the future is nothing other than that Jesus should be known, loved and imitated. It is nothing other than that the Gospel, lived in our community of faith, should be our rule of life.

At the heart of this gospel, as Pope John Paul reminds us, stands Jesus. We know and profess him to be the way to the Father, the face of the Father's mercy, the truth that sets us free. This is why Pope John Paul can say that all our plans and programmes will come to nothing unless we



have first contemplated the face of Christ and learnt once again to begin everything afresh from him.

And this is why, in my homily at my installation Mass three and a half years ago, and so often since, I have insisted that the great challenge we face is to return the Church in our Archdiocese to Christ, and return Christ to the Church.

This is of course already true in principle: the Church is the living body of Christ – we are already inseparably united with him. But our urgent task is to make this true not just in principle but also in practice so that no-one, including we ourselves, can be in any doubt that we are, first and foremost, a community of disciples of Christ, committed to walking in his way, living by his truth, and drawing our life from him.

When in his turn Pope Benedict took up the ministry of Peter from Pope John Paul in 2005, he made an important commitment which I would like us all to try and make together this evening. Speaking of his plans for his pontificate he said: *“My real programme of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history.”*

Tonight I am inviting the whole Archdiocese to join with me in a moment of discernment, prayer, reflection, and discussion about our life together as the Catholic Church present in our city of Perth and in our suburbs and our country towns. All those who wish to will be able to share their hopes and dreams for the Archdiocese through the consultation process we are inaugurating tonight. But the real discernment we need is not so much a discernment of what we want the Church to be, but rather a discernment of the Lord’s will for us. They may of course be exactly the same thing – but we should not presume this too easily. As individuals, as communities and as the local Church here in our place, we are immersed in a society which does not always see things through the Lord’s eyes.

For this reason, even as we seek to recognise the voice of the Lord in what the Second Vatican Council called the ‘signs of the times’, we need to take to heart the words of St Paul to the Thessalonians:

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test everything. Hold on to what is good, and abstain from every kind of evil (1 Thess 5:16-22).

As you know I have been Archbishop here in Perth for three and a half years. It has been a busy and challenging time as I have tried to understand the complex nature, structure and history of the Archdiocese and to deal with the many issues which have arisen.



For many of you, who have grown up with and in the Archdiocese, this will all come as second nature, but for someone from outside this is not the case. In my time here so far I have tried to encounter people, to listen to them, and to give myself time to both hear and see what lies below the surface.

I have of course also brought with me my own story, my own background and my own experience. It is in the meeting of my own story and the story of the Archdiocese that I have begun to see some areas which I believe the Lord is inviting us to focus on at this time in our history. The message I have prepared for the people of our Archdiocese, which I am prefiguring tonight, sets out these areas. They do not in any way exhaust the areas which we as a community of disciples might feel ourselves called to address. What they do offer us, however, is a focused consideration of some of the things we might be able to engage with now, in the hope that in doing so we will see more clearly what else the Lord might be asking of us in the future.

So tonight, with this liturgy here in the Mother Church of our Archdiocese, I am genuinely asking all the people of our Church to join with me in considering how we might best begin to move forward in certain areas of our life. The advice and counsel I am looking for in my role as the servant leader of this Archdiocese is being sincerely sought and will be deeply appreciated.

This is not an empty gesture: it is one I offer to you all with a sense of hope. Nor is it an exercise in simply seeking to determine the majority view on the challenges and issues we face. As I indicated before it is very important to me that we, together, discern what the Lord is asking of us rather than what we ourselves might be prepared to accept or offer. It is after all His Church, before it is ours.

And so, I want to say tonight that as a Church here in this Archdiocese we must continue to explore every avenue for assisting those who have been so deeply wounded by sexual abuse, while at the same time putting in place whatever measures will ensure that this terrible scourge and searing suffering is removed from the life of our Church.

We must urgently turn our attention to the parishes of our Archdiocese which are the settings where our lives as Catholics are lived out in the concrete. We must help each other, and all our people, to see more deeply the privilege and responsibility which is ours as members of the Catholic community and members of our own parishes. Most of all we must take to heart Pope John Paul's invitation to make our parishes homes and schools of communion – communion with God and communion among ourselves.

In focusing on our parishes as the skeletal structure of our Archdiocese we must recognise the vital and indispensable role which our priests, together with our deacons, play in our lives of faith.



As more and more is demanded of our clergy, so our support for, and encouragement and understanding of, our clergy must be renewed and deepened. We must become healers, not hurters, of our clergy, just as they must become healers, and not hurters, of God's people.

As a community of disciples following Jesus, we must also ensure that we become an ever more outward looking community. We have an extraordinary gift of faith and life to offer. We must redouble our efforts at bringing the compassion, hope and generosity of God to those who in any way are disadvantaged, marginalised, despised or forgotten.

For this to happen we must also invest in the ongoing formation of our people. We are experts at the education of our children and young people. We must also become experts in the ongoing formation of our people in the faith. As St Paul would remind us "*no-one can hear the message if there are not messengers to proclaim it*". (cf Rom 10:14-15). We must help each other become convincing messengers of the faith.

As people of faith we are also people of hope. We must never resign ourselves to diminishment or failure. The Lord promises to be with us till the end of time. And so we must plan for the future, seeking creative and faithful ways to meet the growing demands as our city and suburbs change and develop. We must take the extraordinary richness of our faith to the people rather than simply wait for them to come to us.

And precisely because we are people of hope, who believe we have been given this extraordinary gift of faith and life, we must renew our efforts to proclaim the message in every way we can, making full and creative use of all the possibilities the new technologies and modern means of communication offer us.

In all of this I have one overarching hope, one overarching dream, for our Archdiocese. It is this: that we begin to see ourselves, and conduct ourselves, as ***a people called to walk together in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd.***

As we do this, faithfully following him with courage, with enthusiasm and with hope, all the while encouraging and supporting each other, we will find that others will join us and we will be that one flock following that one shepherd who carries us on his shoulders, who leads us to still waters, and who lays down his life for us.

Join with me, brothers and sisters, in this journey of faith. Let us open our hearts and our lives to Jesus. Let us follow his way, entrust ourselves to his truth, and embrace the fullness of life he holds out to us.

Let us walk together in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd.