



**2019 Mayoral Prayer Breakfast
City of Joondalup
*Diversity in Communities***

Speech

**The Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

**Wednesday 30 October 2019 at 7.15 am
Lakeview Ballroom, Joondalup Resort
Country Club Blvd, Connolly**

Good morning everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to be with you and share some thoughts with you on what is a very important event in the life of the City of Joondalup. I am particularly grateful to the Mayor of the City of Joondalup, Albert Jacob, for his invitation.

Perhaps I could begin by just briefly explain my role as the Catholic Archbishop of Perth. The Archdiocese of Perth is one of four Catholic dioceses in Western Australia. The others are Bunbury, Geraldton and Broome. Catholic bishops, albeit after an often long and complex consultation process, are appointed directly by the Pope and are subject immediately to him. For that reason, each Catholic diocese is quite independent. As the Archbishop, I have some very limited responsibilities in relation to the other three Catholic dioceses in WA – together we form what is called an ecclesiastical Province - but I am not in any significant way the leader of the Catholic Church in Western Australia, just as no Catholic bishop in Australia is in any sense the leader of the Catholic Church in Australia. This differs a little, I think, from the Anglican Church, which has a Primate, presently the Archbishop of Brisbane. The Catholic Church in Australia has no primate and no one bishop has jurisdiction over any other.

In that sense, I cannot speak this morning on behalf of the other Catholic bishops of WA. Having said that, however, our Catholic tradition is that each Catholic bishop understands himself to be in communion with every other Catholic bishop around the world, and all of us together understand ourselves to be in communion with the bishop of Rome, the Pope.

The theme of this morning's prayer breakfast is Diversity in Communities which is particularly important given that almost 40 per cent of the people of the City of Joondalup were born overseas. I would assume that this level of diversity, while not matched everywhere else in Perth or in Australia, is a good representation of what we now call the multi-cultural nature of Australia. It is common to say that Australia is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world, and equally one of the most successful and harmonious multicultural societies in the world. This is something



to be proud of, grateful for, but never complacent about. Multi-culturalism brings enormous richness to our society but its success in my view depends on the willingness of all of us to genuinely make room for each other. In this regard, I remember very well a comment made by a good friend of mine, Rabbi David Freilich, the Emeritus Chief Rabbi of the Orthodox Jewish community here in Perth, who once spoke about his belief that in Australia we should not content ourselves with being a tolerant community. Rather we should have the aspiration of being a respectful community. In other words we don't simply tolerate each other in our differences – we respect each other.

I want to return to this notion of respect a little later but first let me share some experiences of my own with you. They relate to the question of the relationship between the different faith communities we have here in Perth, and no doubt also here in Joondalup.

I grew up in Melbourne in the 1950s and 1960s. Whenever we had to walk to the train station, we passed a Jewish Synagogue which is still there. I drove past it just a few weeks ago. I do remember that the walls of the synagogue were often daubed with graffiti, although at the time I didn't really understand the depth of hatred and resentment which was represented by that graffiti. What I do remember more clearly is my sense of curiosity about what went on inside the synagogue – and my very clear understanding that it would be completely inappropriate, to say the least, for me to even venture up to the glass entrance door to peer inside, let alone go in. Fast forward to my time here in Perth and one of my most cherished experiences was being invited by Rabbi David to be the guest speaker at the Orthodox Synagogue in Perth to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of a landmark Vatican statement on Jewish-Catholic relations. How things have changed!

Whenever we did walk to the train station when I was a boy it was normally to catch the train into the city. When you come out of Flinders Street Station in Melbourne, the first thing you see is Saint Paul's Anglican Cathedral. It never occurred to me, and certainly not to mum and dad, that we could pay a visit to Saint Paul's. It was Anglican and we were Catholic. I don't recall any animosity in my family towards other Christians, but there was certainly not much sense that we could learn from each other let alone work together. Fast forward to my time here in Perth and I remember with gratitude, receiving a hand-written note from the new Anglican Archbishop, Archbishop Kay Goldsworthy, to attend her formal installation in St George's Cathedral and offer some words of greeting and welcome on behalf of the other Christian churches. How things have changed!

I also want to mention briefly a very important event that has happened for the last three years at Notre Dame University in Fremantle. Each year the University organises what it calls "Abraham Day". Leaders from the three main monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – share some thoughts on a topic which is related in one way or another to our common inheritance in the figure of Abraham whom we all think of in some way as the father of our faith. How things have changed!



Learning to be together, celebrating together, acknowledging the richness and beauty of our various traditions and, without ignoring our differences, in a sense going beyond them, or beneath them, to discover all that we have in common – this is the pathway which respect for each other would invite us to travel. It is good that we tolerate each other – that we “live and let live” as the saying goes - but it is better if we respect each other and allow ourselves to be enriched by each other. And this is true of religions, and of cultures, and of what I might call “world views”.

It seems to me that we are living through a moment, probably not unique, in the history of our country in which the clash of “world views” is becoming a significant challenge. What do I mean by this phrase “world view”? Perhaps an example might help.

Many of us, from a variety of religious traditions, are very invested in the present attempts of the Federal Government to find a way to ensure freedom of religious belief and practice in our country. As you would probably know the Catholic Church in Australia is a very significant contributor to the educational endeavour of our nation. Catholic schools educate approximately one in five Australian children, many though not all coming from Catholic families. When the question of freedom of religion comes up, most people would be prepared to accept that teachers of religious education in Catholic schools should be Catholics, or at least supportive of and understanding of the Catholic faith. What many people don't understand is just why the Catholic Church continues to maintain that it needs the freedom to determine who it employs in any capacity in the school and that everyone who works in a Catholic school can be properly expected to support the Catholic ethos of the school or, at the very least, not to undermine it in any way. This firm position of the Church can be best understood, it seems to me, by reflecting on the difference between formal religious doctrines, which are an essential part of many religions and certainly of Catholicism, and the much broader and more encompassing concept of religion as a way of life, as a way of understanding and making sense of the world and of my, and our, place within that world. Just near where I live there is a government school with the motto “*learn to live*”. It can be interpreted in a number of ways, which are not contradictory. It can mean, for example, “*learn in order to live*” but it can equally mean “*learn how to live*”. For those who believe in God, and certainly in the God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, a God, in other words, intimately involved in the lives of his people, it is impossible to think that you can give children and young people a truly rounded education, an adequate preparation for the full and fruitful living of their lives, by ignoring or sidelining the God question. Those who choose government schools understand that if the “God question” is important for them and their children it will have to be addressed in the family and, for some, at their local Church: it won't and can't be addressed in the school, at least not in a confessional way, because a government school is, by very definition, “free, compulsory and secular”. I am not suggesting for a moment that this is a bad thing: indeed in a secular society such as ours it would be considered by many to be an absolutely necessary option.

Catholic schools, and they are not alone here, adopt a different world view and therefore continue to advocate for the right to determine the ethos, the atmosphere, the context, of their school



precisely because they are grounded in the conviction that the “God question” matters, and that belief in God changes everything.

I have used the example of education because it is what I know best – I was a teacher before I became a priest and a bishop – and I have used the situation of Catholic schools because they are the schools with which I am familiar. But I think the principle applies across many other fields of endeavour and engagement in our society and certainly beyond the Catholic and more broadly Christian institutions. Respect for the world views held by individuals and communities, world views which touch on the deepest questions of what it means to be a human being in relationship with self, others, the world, and God, is a foundation for our society which I believe we can all seek to develop.

I don't want to pretend that this is or will be easy or that difficult issues will not continue to arise which will really test our commitment to respect. Certainly for those of us who hold strong religious convictions the challenges of the present time and those which lie ahead are, I think, particularly acute.

I mentioned before that I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s. I am in fact 65, having been born in 1954. I am perhaps oversimplifying a little, but it occurs to me that the values my mum and dad were committed to, and the values which were the foundation of my education in Catholic primary and secondary schools in Melbourne in the 1960s, were very largely the same values which were commonly accepted by the wider society in which I grew up. It is true, as I indicated earlier, that in terms of our understanding and acceptance of faiths other than our own, much was left to be desired, but the basic moral convictions of society were, I think, still quite firmly based on the Judaeo-Christian tradition. I would judge that this is no longer the case to the same extent. Some would hold that the “unshackling” of what is regarded as acceptable behaviour from its religious foundations is a good thing. Others would disagree. Be that as it may, it seems to me to be the case that it is the reality. Another way of saying this is that the Judaeo-Christian world view is no longer the world view which informs the decision-making of growing numbers of people.

How are people with strongly-held religious views, and the institutions to which they look to uphold and defend the values which they hold dear, meant to live and function within this changed environment?

For myself as the leader of one of these institutions this is one of those questions which keeps me away at night. In general I try to follow a suggestion which the last three popes have made. It is a suggestion that might ring true to many of you here this morning. Pope Francis's predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, expressed it most clearly. It is the task of the Church, he said, to “*propose endlessly but never to impose*”. This sounds simple enough but it is not as easy as we might think. Certainly in our long history we in the Catholic Church have fallen often into the temptation of trying to force people to accept what we believe or live according to the values we hold. That we have done so in the past partly explains, I suspect, why any intervention by people



like me into the public debate is often attacked as an attempt to force my beliefs, or the beliefs of the Church, on to others. This is not what I am trying to do and indeed it would be useless to attempt it even if I wanted to. The standing of the Catholic Church in our community has been seriously compromised by our failures as a Church to respond adequately in the past, and some would say still in the present, to the horrors of sexual abuse within our communities. But our failures, dreadful though they have been, cannot diminish the beauty of the gospel message we have been entrusted with and which we share with our brothers and sisters in other Christian churches and communities. It is this which we propose, ceaselessly as Pope Benedict encourages, but without ever seeking to impose. We do so because we believe that the way of life traced out in the gospel by Jesus, the attitudes of mind and heart which Jesus embodies, and the unfolding of the richness of the gospel message through the centuries of the Church's life, hold out the best way forward for our society. We seek to convince, by word and more so by example, that this is so but we know we cannot impose and should not seek to do so.

I believe we can and should speak boldly but humbly of what we believe. I equally believe that we must endeavour always to be faithful to what we believe. If our values prove in the end to be baseless then we will fade away. If they prove to be enduring then it is important that we live in fidelity to them even in the face of indifference and even hostility. For myself I am convinced that we must keep these values alive for a society which may well eventually need and want to return to them or at least reconsider them. In this way those of us who have religious faith and practice as an essential part of our lives can find our place in a world view which celebrates and seeks to embrace the value of diversity in our communities.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to share these few thoughts with you. And while it is still a long way away, and given that our shops are already on the ball in this regard, may I wish you all a very happy Christmas!