

Bishop's Pastoral Letter, following the terrorist attacks in Christchurch

Dear Family,

Grace and Peace to you from God

In the aftermath of the attacks in Christchurch, in what has been called our country's darkest day, we as people of faith, and a community of transforming love, respond. We respond in the way of Jesus; as the great prayer of St Francis urges:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is discord, union;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

Our thanks to all who have found tangible ways to be bearers of these words in our various communities across our Diocese and this land. Early Friday evening, I (Eleanor) and senior members of our Wellington clergy, went with Fr Bennett, Christian Co-chair of the Abrahamic Faiths Council of Wellington to the Headquarters of the Federations of Islamic Associations of New Zealand at the Kilbirnie mosque. We offered our condolences and we prayed together. We were all deeply moved by the steady stream of people from the streets bringing flowers, candles and messages of sympathy and love. We share with you the words of Sultan Eusoff (chair of FIANZ), "we want to thank you all for your prayers and coming here today. It is important we stay together at this time of sadness. It's good to know we have friends supporting us in all of this. Most importantly we must remain united and are glad of people of other faith groups coming together with us and praying for us, which brings us great solace and comfort at the time."

We will remain in close contact with our inter-faith partners over these days as we discern how best to continue to support one another. All of us will be asking, "what should we do, how do we respond?" We want to suggest three things.

Firstly, we want to encourage all of you to be active in friendships and partnerships on the ground in your communities. In particular, where you have grass-roots connections with our Muslim brothers and sisters and our refugee communities, please extend the hand of friendship.

Secondly, these are days when people need tangible expressions of peace, hope and love. Get together in your communities, host meals for neighbours, be organised in our non-violent revolution of love, embark on co-ordinated random acts of kindness.

In both of these things, never underestimate the testimony of such humble action of friendship and love. As Dostoyevsky powerfully expresses in *The Brothers Karamazov*:

At some ideas you stand perplexed, especially at the sight of human sins, uncertain whether to combat it by force or by humble love. Always decide, "I will combat it with humble love." If you make up your mind about that once and for all, you can conquer the whole world. Loving humility is a terrible force; it is the strongest of all things and there is nothing like it.

Thirdly, and above all, as a people of prayer, in solidarity with people who died whilst at prayer, we call you to pray. Our determination to pray is our defiance against the un-Godly hatred and violence witnessed in this land. Pray to roll back the powers of darkness. Pray with faith. Pray with hope, Pray with love. Pray publicly. Pray consistently. Pray in solitude. Pray in solidarity with all of humanity who humble themselves in acts of prayer. Where you are gathering to host public prayer, please let Duncan know, so that we can publicise and share those opportunities.

And so, together we pray:

O God, who would fold both heaven and earth in a single peace:

Let the design of your great love

Lighten upon the waste ground of our anger and sorrow:

And give peace to, and through, your church,

Peace among nations,

Peace in our dwellings,

And peace in our hearts;

Through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Yours in Christ,

+Justin and +Eleanor