

NZ Diocesan Priest Conference....Rotorua October 16th- October 21st 2023

At the week-long National Assembly of Diocesan Catholic Priests in Rotorua, Brisbane's [Archbishop Mark Coleridge](#) dropped a rock in the pond. Coleridge told the Catholic priests that changes were happening, that there would be more of them and that it was important to be prepared.

Coleridge suggested that ministry as a Catholic priest was not a case of 'goundhog day' nor an example of 'yesterday once more.'

Coleridge recommended that Catholic priests "fasten their seatbelts."

In his keynote speech to the nearly 200 Catholic priests at the Assembly, the archbishop said the Catholic Church is experiencing an "Abrahamic" moment.

Just like the biblical Abraham who set out on a journey for God without knowing where he was going, New Zealand's Catholic priests are also on a journey where the destination is unclear, Coleridge said.

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Spiritual vitality

"The spiritual vitality of the Church is found largely in our immigrant communities," the archbishop noted.

"The centre of gravity of the Church is passing to Africa, Asia and Latin America. We have a Pope from Argentina. It's fasten your seatbelts time, we are going somewhere and there is no way back."

Coleridge says that, while the shape the future will take is unclear, we can rely on faith.

"But the act of faith is that there is one who does know where it is all leading. We must keep our eyes and our ears on God. We have to be on the journey."

Diminishing numbers

Coleridge pointed out the logical consequences of the current situation for Catholics in New Zealand.

"We cannot sustain the current mode of provision of priests, with far fewer priests and fewer people," he said.

"The shortage of people is the real problem.

"There are far fewer people who identify with the Church or come to Mass.

"People like our schools. They ask why are our schools full and our churches empty?"

“Institutionally we are diminished.”

Coleridge described the problem as “corrosive in a unique way... we are almost afraid to look at the damage.”

Administrative changes

The priests at the Assembly heard that New Zealand’s Catholic priests’ administrative burden is also more complex than formerly.

Coleridge told the Diocesan priests at the Assembly they need to be like Abraham and turn wandering into journeys.

He acknowledged journeying is hard work – but also pointed out it goes somewhere.

“The priest as pilgrim is someone who can say to all the wanderers, come on a journey.

“The priest in a diocese is also a settler. The priest has a parish, and people are the community. We have to put down roots in a particular place, a parish.”

Source

- [New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference](#)