

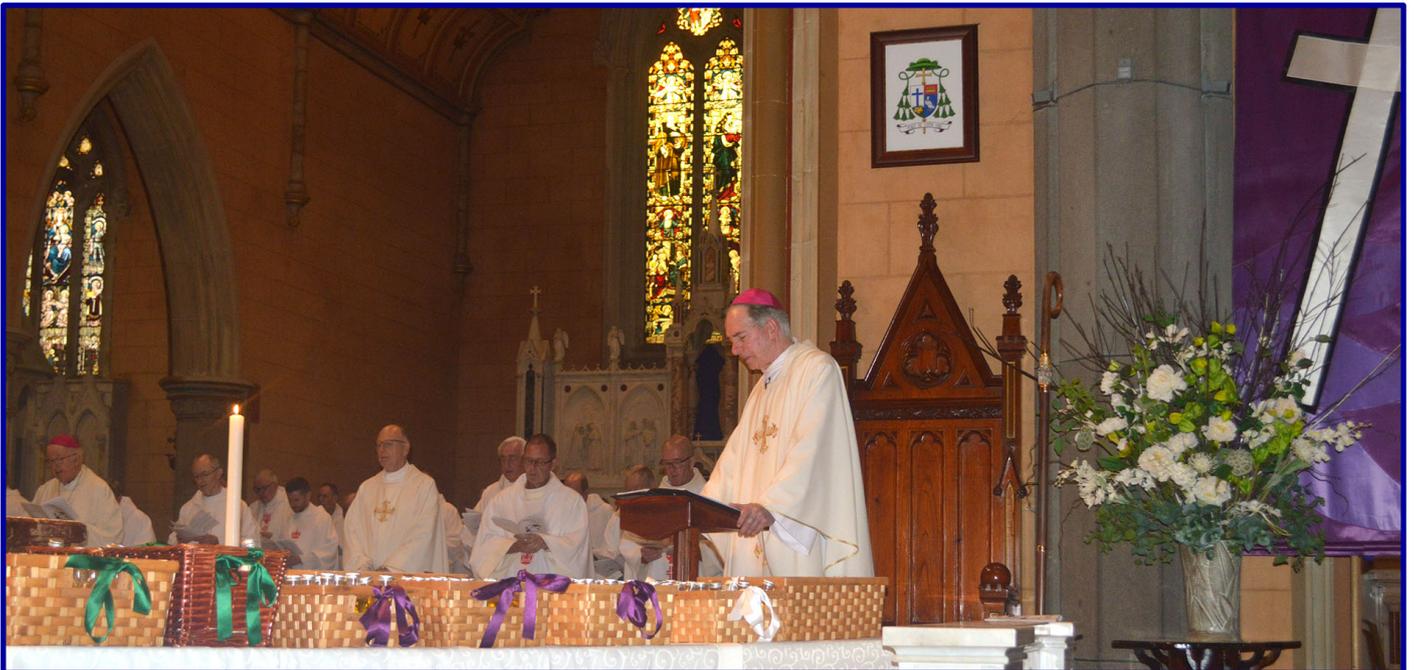


Bishop Paul Bird's Easter Message:

Earlier this month, Pope Francis was in Iraq. The Christian communities there have suffered persecution for many years and Pope Francis went there to offer them a message of encouragement. He also offered a message to the whole nation. He called on all the people of Iraq to put aside violence and put their efforts into building peace. He called on them to see one another as brothers and sisters. This was a big challenge in a country that has endured bitter divisions between various groups. Yet Pope Francis presented a message of hope. He assured them that it is possible to move beyond such divisions. It's possible by the power of God. Pope Francis described himself as a pilgrim of peace. He went to Iraq to share a vision of peace.

His message to the people of Iraq was like the message that he had written to people all around the world a few months before in the encyclical "Fratelli tutti", "Brothers and Sisters All". In that encyclical, Pope Francis presented a vision of community in which people put aside the bitterness of divisions and violence and learn to live in kindness. He invited us to look to such a vision. He invited us to dream together about how we might live a life of peace. This was his call to dream together. "Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travellers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all." (par 8)

In presenting a vision and inviting us to dream together, Pope Francis was echoing the words of the first Pope, St Peter. In the Acts of the Apostles, St Peter speaks of young people having visions and old people dreaming dreams. We might sometimes think of visions and dreams as impractical. And of course, visions or dreams by themselves don't bring about practical improvements to people's lives. For that we need action. But visions and dreams can inspire action. A vision of peace in Iraq can inspire people to turn from violence and work to build the peace. A dream that people throughout the world could really live as one human family, as brothers and sisters – such a dream can inspire people to work together to build up a truly caring human community.



The same is true for our life as a diocese. A vision of living as a diocesan community can inspire us to do what we can to build up that community. A dream that we can live as a truly Christian family can inspire us to work together to build up a genuine community of care in our parishes and in our whole diocese. Over the past couple of years I've

invited people around our diocese to offer suggestions to develop our diocesan vision statement. As it has developed, our vision is very much in tune with the vision of Pope Francis – a vision of a community of brothers and sisters. Our diocese is made up of local communities. All together, our diocese is a community of communities. This is how we're expressing our diocesan vision at the moment:

**We are a community of communities from the Murray to the sea.
Inspired by the Gospel and nourished by the Eucharist,
we follow the example of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
reaching out in joyful and humble service,
caring for all of God's creation,
growing in love day by day
and looking forward to life with God forever.**

At our Chrism Mass, we had people from many communities around the diocese. We also linked with those who joined with us online. As we celebrate Easter, we are indeed a community of communities from the Murray to the sea. May our vision inspire us to live as a truly Christian community. May we continue to dream together and may our dreaming inspire our living, that we might really be a single human family, brothers and sisters all.

Bishop Paul Bird CSSR