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Dear Peter and community,

Thank you for your letters. I have received a great deal of correspondence regarding St Mary's, requesting that the parish not be closed down. The question for me is not so much whether St Mary's should be closed down, but whether St Mary's will close itself down by practices that separate it from communion with the Roman Catholic Church.

There is much to admire at St Mary's, especially its passion about social justice. I find that inspiring. However the problems at St Mary's are not so much about social justice, important as it is, but about the communion of St Mary's with the Roman Catholic Church with which it is linked and for which it was founded. This problem of its communion has arisen only in more recent years. I spoke about it in a letter to the yourself on 19 July 2004. The controversy at that time was focused on St Mary's baptismal practice, later declared invalid in a decree from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the faith in 2008. Sadly my letter in 2004 about the question of its communion with the Archdiocese was largely dismissed by the parish and its leadership as unimportant, perhaps even ridiculed. The most recent complaint about St Mary's concerned the placement of a Buddhist statue in the Church, together with questions about the orthodoxy of its Eucharistic prayers and practice.

A Buddhist statue in a Catholic Church or sanctuary just does not make sense. Its presence however in no way justifies the use of violence to destroy such a statue. Nevertheless only extreme recklessness would place a Buddhist statue in a Christian Church. No matter where that takes place there is every possibility it would arouse angry feelings, particularly with Christians from different religious cultures.

However the incident of the statue is only one example of improper practice. St Mary's seems to be an authority to itself. Despite the good that it does, it places itself outside the practice of the Catholic Church. Therefore we might well ask is it a parish in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, or a community in schism? There is no doubt that St Mary's promotes a strong sense of community, but so does many other communities such as Hillsong in Sydney that welcomes all and reaches out to the poor, but understandably is not in communion with the Roman Catholic Church.

Once again I would like to indicate some matters that break communion with the Roman Catholic Church:

1. The matter of Faith:

Catholics believe in a Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Our God is a God of love. The persons of the Trinity exist in a communion of mutual love. So great is the love within the Trinity that it overflows in the second person of the Trinity who became man and lived among us as Jesus Christ, Son of God and Saviour, our one mediator of salvation. At St Mary's is Jesus Christ accepted as Lord and Saviour, Son of God, or is Jesus regarded as just another Holy person like Buddha or Mohammed? Certainly in such circumstances the placing of a Buddhist statue in a Christian Church is extremely confusing. At St Mary's there is a strong emphasis upon Jesus as prophet of social justice, as champion of the poor and needy, which is good. But is equal emphasis given to Jesus as lover of the Father and man of prayer, who in Luke 5:16 leaves sick and suffering people to go off and pray to his Father, so important is the "will of the Father"? Pope Benedict XVI wrote in 2004 "The primacy of worship is the fundamental prerequisite for the redemption of all people". Often nowadays too little attention is paid to God and worship, and too much attention to action, important in itself, but needing to be linked absolutely to prayer and worship. Today in our secular world there has never been a greater need to understand Jesus and His vision. Sadly, today the absolute excitement of the Christian vision is hardly understood by Christians. It is amazing the number of people who satisfy themselves by asking "What would Jesus do?" Only very humble and holy people would dare try to answer that question, and if they did they would do so with the greatest caution. It is amazing how some people feel certain that they know what Jesus would do, at the same time neglecting the 2000 year old wisdom of God's Holy Spirit available in the Church.

2. The matter of Liturgy:

Ad hoc decisions have been made by St Mary's about liturgy, certainly with the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Marriage, and especially the Sacrament of Eucharist. Regarding Baptism, I am still not certain that even now the valid rite is always used. It has been suggested that requests can still be made for the use of different formulas according to the wish of those involved. As well, the Sacrament of Marriage at times completely overlooks the Church's normal requirements for validity. Some marriages seem to take place without the slightest respect for Canon Law.

In the sacrament of Eucharist members of the congregation seem to recite the words of consecration, which within an orthodox Catholic rite should only be recited by the ordained minister. Eucharistic prayers approved by the Church are completely overlooked in favour of eucharistic prayers selected at random.

3. The matter of Governance:

Fr Peter Kennedy has been Administrator of South Brisbane now for many years. He was legitimately appointed by the Archdiocese. Fr Terry Fitzpatrick has never been appointed to St Mary's. He is a priest of the Diocese of Toowoomba who attached himself to the parish of St Mary's in the early nineties with the approval of the parishioners. No one denies that he has done good, but at no time has he been officially appointed to St Mary's by the Archdiocese of Brisbane. Despite his lack of authority, on numerous occasions he has spoken to the media about St Mary's as if he were the parish priest. As I said in my letter of 19 July 2004 St Mary's tends to be "congregational in governance and culture". It does not seem to be led by an officially appointed leader as Catholic parishes normally are. The reluctance of its priests to be seen as ordained ministers liturgically different from lay members of their congregation seems to be another indication of its refusal to acknowledge any difference between ordained and non-ordained membership. The Catholic Church's pastoral structure has been developed over thousands of years. It is most certainly not based on congregational leadership.

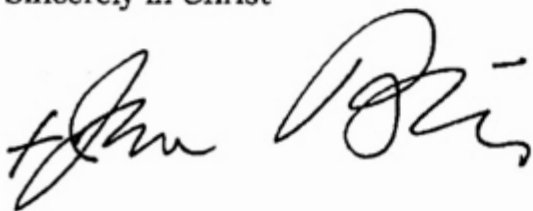
4. The matter of Authority:

The Roman Catholic Church has a certain structure that needs to be respected. Sometimes its power can be abused. At the same time a recognition of the Church's authority and Magisterium is needed for communion with the Church. The Church's authority finds its ultimate source in Jesus, the Word of God, who handed His authority on to the Apostles. The Apostolic tradition, which continues Jesus' authority is expressed through the Pope, together with the Bishops of the Church. To deliberately reject this apostolic authority is to put oneself out of communion with the Roman Catholic Church.

In reality St Mary's South Brisbane has taken a Roman Catholic parish and established its own brand of religion. Undoubtedly it does good, it promotes a strong sense of community, opens its doors to all who wish to come, but its own style of worship and sacramental practice can hardly be described as Roman Catholic. As such it is out of communion with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane and the Universal Roman Catholic Church under the leadership of the Bishop of Rome.

My authority as Archbishop in the Archdiocese of Brisbane is scarcely recognised by the parish of St Mary's. This is not unusual considering that criticism at St Mary's has even been directed against Pope John Paul II. Whether such criticism of Popes extends further I do not know. An underlying criticism of the Church still seems to flourish in its community. From the time of St Peter and Judas the Church has never disowned its humanity. Nevertheless despite the weakness of some of its membership and sometimes its leaders, there is no other way of finding Jesus except in the Church. The words of St Peter spoken to Jesus (Jn 6:68), when it seemed the apostles might abandon him, were "Lord to whom shall we go. You have the words of eternal life." Despite its faults and failings Catholics know that the supreme meeting place with Jesus is in the Church. Among the letters written to me this week one letter said quite definitely that St Mary's believes that "it is the institutional Church in the modern world, and not St Mary's, that is out of step with what Jesus taught and the example he set". It is precisely here that the problem lies. St Mary's seems to claim for itself alone an authority and authenticity that belongs only to the entire Roman Catholic Church. When the parish of St Mary's was originally established it was in communion with the Archdiocese, the Roman Catholic Church, and the multitude of parishes that together form the communion of this Archdiocese. Sadly that communion of St Mary's with the Church no longer seems to exist. St Mary's exists independently of the Archdiocese. My hope is that once again St Mary's will place itself back in communion with the Roman Catholic Church to which it was originally linked and in which it rejoiced. It is now up to St Mary's itself to make whatever decisions are needed about its future existence. I will pray that those decisions will be as wise in the present as they have been in the past. I also pray that Mary, the mother of Jesus, after whom St Mary's is named may pray that the wisdom of God's Holy Spirit will descend upon her parish.

Sincerely in Christ



ARCHBISHOP OF BRISBANE