



St Mary's Community

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Most Rev John A Bathersby DD
Archbishop of Brisbane
790 Brunswick St
NEW FARM Q 4005

Dear Archbishop Bathersby,

We hope this letter finds you well and refreshed after your time away in January. Thank you for your letter addressed to Fr Peter Kennedy dated 22 December and received on 31 December 2008.

Before addressing your five areas of concern, we wish to reply to your opening comment about the media. Respectfully, we have no control over how the media treats any issue including its coverage or lack of coverage of your second letter to Fr Kennedy. Events at St Mary's are not always reported accurately or in a balanced manner. But we endeavour to respond to appropriate media requests because to remain closed to public scrutiny would beg more questions than it answers. We note you have direct access to the pages of the Catholic Leader, something which has been denied to the St Mary's community.

In relation to the five points you raise:

1. Fr Kennedy advises us that he told you in person that the formula now being used for Baptisms at St Mary's is:

"I Baptise you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the God of love who is creator, liberator and sustainer of life".

Fr Kennedy said that, at the time, you said you had no problem with those words. Those are the words now used in our Baptism rites.

2. Since Baptism is the primary sacrament that initiates us into the priesthood of all the faithful, we contend our form of Eucharist is valid. It is underpinned by proper Eucharistic theology and respects the nature and tradition of the Catholic Church's belief that the Eucharist is a sacramental expression and commemoration of Christ's last supper. It is celebrated by all at St Mary's in this vein. Whilst all the community saying the Eucharist prayer is not common practice, it is hardly invalid because the prayer is said with the ordained priest.
3. The homilies that refer to Peter Dresser's theology are part of the spirit that binds St Mary's – one of informed, educated and questioning faith. Not blind faith, but authentic faith. We do not deny the Trinity and neither did Fr Kennedy's homily, to which you referred. Dresser's article was offered as part of an exchange of ideas to enrich rather than threaten our faith. Like many Catholic parishes, St Mary's is a theologically aware community. Refusal or denial of ideas or banning of books is about fear, not faith. True faith is able to survive all manner of tests, including intellectual challenge.

"A Catholic Community of Brisbane People"



4. You questioned our use of Pope Benedict's words "Everyone has a place in the church. Every person without exception should be able to feel at home and never rejected." We are well aware this quote was written in the context of reinstating the once-banned Latin mass. It was chosen specifically for this reason.

The Pope rightly used limitless language – 'Everyone without exception' and 'never rejected'. As one would expect from the Pope, his language reflects the limitless nature of God's love and acceptance. As a matter of logic, theology and scriptural foundation, these words cannot be used for one group (Latin Mass adherents) without equally applying to another group (St Mary's community). The words literally relate to all people. The words are as limitless as God's love and acceptance.

5. Again, with respect, we express our disappointment that you find it "frightening" that 700-900 people attend St Mary's. Your worry that we are not instructed in Trinitarian theology is unfounded. Surely 900 people praying, reflecting and thinking about theological issues at St Mary's is not *frightening*. Arguably the word *frightening* is better reserved for describing situations such as the present conflict in Gaza.

In your conclusion you say that the Church, the Pope and you have been attacked. We do not attack the Church – we are a part of it. We do not attack the Pope or you – we may question some teachings and test them against Christ's teachings, but we do not attack.

Furthermore, you blame the St Mary's community for personal abuse directed to you from the gates of your house. For the record, the priests, the Council, the Steering Committee and anyone we have talked to has never encouraged, approved, requested or instigated this behaviour. Indeed, we were not aware of it until receipt of your letter.

We are surprised that you would blame the community for this unacceptable behaviour. It has nothing to do with us. Similarly we do not blame you or anyone other than the individuals concerned for the disgraceful intrusions into our community and the personal attacks we have endured from those with extreme views (via phone calls and face to face encounters).

Finally, we reiterate our invitation for you to meet with us to resolve any misconceptions you have about our community. We respectfully remind you that our letter of 30 November was endorsed by the St Mary's Community following weeks of discussion and a four-hour facilitated workshop. The community is therefore disappointed your response failed to acknowledge them or our repeated invitations for you to meet with us and the Council to discuss a way forward.

We remain hopeful that as our Archbishop you will yet agree to meet with us while you are considering the very future of our community. In the end, we believe we want the same thing – an active, vibrant, engaged faith community. We hope there is more that binds us than divides us. We remain willing to meet at a time of your convenience.

Yours faithfully,



St Mary's Steering Committee

Peter Kennedy, Terry Fitzpatrick, Karen Walsh, Kate Flamsteed, John Fitzwalter, Jemma Taylor, Tony Pressland, Tricia Cook and Chris Perkins