



## The Holy See

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**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO H.E. MONS. DENIS BROWNE, BISHOP OF AUCKLAND**

*To my venerable and dear Brother  
Denis Browne  
Bishop of Auckland*

Through you I wish to extend my warm greetings to all who have gathered in Auckland for the fifth in a series of continental meetings sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the Laity. As your meeting begins I shall be preparing to depart for my Pastoral Visit to India, and while I ask your prayers that this visit may be blessed by God's grace I assure you that I also look with love and hope towards you as you gather to discuss the theme: "The vocation of the laity in the Church's life and mission in Oceania: preparing for the 1987 Synod".

Your meeting comes at a providential moment in the life of the Church in this century. Twenty years after the close of the Second Vatican Council representatives of the College of Bishops, gathered together around the Successor of Peter, have expressed their unanimous conviction that the Second Vatican Council was a gift of God to the Church and to the world. I therefore invite you, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, to renew in these days your own adherence to the Council and to recognise in it a wellspring offered by the Holy Spirit to the Church, for the present and for the future.

We must be aware of what the Lord wishes to give us at this particular time. The Council was a gift and we are called at this moment in the life of the Church to intensify our efforts to know and understand the Council better, to assimilate its orientations and directives, and to respond to the challenge it offers. It is a challenge to each baptised man and woman, to every local Church, to play their full part in the mission entrusted to the whole Church of announcing the Good News of salvation to the world. This requires a special response on the part of the laity in our day.

We must not fall into the temptation of identifying a Christian way of life with the customs generally

accepted in modern society. In the words of St. Paul: "Do not be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect".

Likewise, it is for each local Church to seek to respond to the action of the Holy Spirit, striving to translate the Council into ways which make Christ and his Gospel present in the social and cultural context of every country and region. Each people has its own riches of history and heritage and the Gospel must take root within that context.

Your meeting, drawing together Bishops, priests and lay men and women from every part of Oceania, is truly an expression of that variety in unity which is a characteristic of the Church as a mystery and as a communion. Each culture, each region brings something precious and unique to the family of the People of God, the Body of Christ. During these days in Auckland you will be able to learn from one another, in that mutual respect and love which must always characterise the disciples of Christ.

Your meeting will include reflection on the experience of that "diversity of ministry but unity of mission" of which the Decree on the Lay Apostolate spoke twenty years ago. It will also give careful attention to what the Constitution on the Church described as the secular character proper and particular to the laity, the specific vocation to give Christian witness in the midst of temporal activities. Particular attention will also be placed on another major emphasis of the Council, namely the call to holiness and Christian formation.

All of these themes are of importance as the Church looks towards the third millennium of Christianity and, in particular as we direct our gaze towards the Synod of 1987 on "The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and the World, twenty years after Vatican II". This Synod concerns the whole Church: Bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious, the laity. It should also mark a decisive stage towards the reception of the grace of the Second Vatican Council on the part of all Catholics.

We invite you to prepare yourselves in your particular Churches. In this way we will all live our Christian vocation and our common mission according to the dynamism of the Council.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: your meeting is an excellent example of the way in which this invitation may find a response. In the time of preparation that remains before the 1987 Synod, I urge you to intensify the dialogue between the ordained ministers and lay men and women at all levels, bringing to this dialogue your experience of what has been positives as well as the difficulties encountered. This dialogue is something that must involve all members of the ecclesial community without exception. May this be a time of more intense collaboration in the mission of the Church, a time to reflect on the word of God and in particular on the mystery of Baptism and Confirmation. Above all, may this be a time for prayer and personal conversion in which you will

open your hearts ever more to the renewing action of the Holy Spirit, so as to be brought into greater union with Christ. The Church recalls with profound conviction the Council's teaching that "the success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity's living union with Christ".

I thank you for all you are doing for the Church, and as I look forward with joy to my Pastoral Visit to Oceania in the last months of this year I commend you and all the participants to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church. Like the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room you are called to pray together with Mary for the gift of the Holy Spirit Through her intercession may your meeting be the occasion of abundant graces for the Church and for all the people of the vast continent of Oceania. Upon all present I invoke the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with deep affection impart my Apostolic Blessing.

*From the Vatican, 20 January 1986.*

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