



Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv DD STL
Bishop of Parramatta

Bethany Centre, 470 Church St, Parramatta NSW 2150, Australia
PO Box 3066, North Parramatta, NSW 1750

☎ 02 8838 3400 📠 02 9630 4813

✉ bishop@parracatholic.org

🌐 parracatholic.org

Response to the Review of Governance (June 2020 – February 2021) for the Diocese of Parramatta

It is with much gratitude, joy, and optimism that I receive the official governance review report today. I thank Susan Pascoe AM and Murray Baird who have carried out the review with utmost professionalism, outstanding expertise, and tremendous dedication.

It is not only their exceptional CVs that give them a great advantage in conducting a review of this kind. Their experience in the areas of civil and ecclesial governance, review, strategic planning, and leadership makes them uniquely qualified for the task at hand.

Their work as you know was made more challenging by the pandemic and by its unpredictable nature. Border closures and other restrictions were like moving targets. Yet they were undeterred either by the external or internal pressures.

St Paul has a dictum “So long as in every way, the Gospel is preached”. For Susan and Murray, storm, flood or COVID rules, so long their task was accomplished. This task was formidable. The long list of entities and individuals with whom they interviewed was only one part of it. The more difficult part was the human dynamics behind it. Susan and Murray though rose to the challenge magnificently.

I want to thank also the many people involved in the governance review process. My closest collaborators at the Curia and the Chancery played a vital part from beginning till end. Then there are my co-leaders who head various departments and councils, many of whom are here today, out of their own time and expenses.

My fellow clergy, religious and others who have generously contributed to the process. It is without exaggeration that this work is unprecedented in scope and importance. It will provide the impetus and the launchpad for an extensive and in-depth response. The Church in Parramatta thanks to this review report and its commitment to reform has an opportunity to be the pioneer in how the Church of the 21st century should be and how it should conduct its mission.

You have heard me say that we cannot conduct “business as usual” because the ground under our feet has shifted. The Holy Spirit is speaking to us as Church through the challenges and signs of our times. The signs of our times demand a Gospel-inspired response.

We need to work in partnership and embed the values and principles we want to embrace into the structures and practices of our Diocese. We must not be afraid to embrace new fresh creative ways of embodying and conveying effectively the message of the Gospel to the culture in which we live.

The time has come for us to implement decisively the ecclesiological model articulated by the Second Vatican Council - one that is based on partnership, collaboration, participation and empowerment as

opposed to the old way of a perfect society, typified by clerical dominance and lay “pray, pay and obey”.

We need to create a Church more humble, transparent, and accountable to the faithful and the community at large. The time has come for us here in Parramatta to be truly the Church of the baptised and together all the People of God can create a new culture of humility, accountability, and service.

It seems to me that the Church cannot have a better future if it persists in the old paradigm. She will not be fully energised while the faithful are still unable to participate with full citizenship in its life, governance structures and decision-making processes.

I welcome the final report with its commendations and recommendations. As affirming and also challenging as they are, they will only remain a written report. We will need to make it into a living document. Therefore, I trust that we together will work together in turning the report into a fertile ground into which new seeds of hope, life and love will grow.

Let us continue to follow the ‘Parramatta Way’ of clergy and laity walking together and exercising our baptismal responsibility for the building up of the Kingdom.



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Given at Parramatta on 26 March 2021