

As Vicar of the Parish of Waiwhetu I speak to you this morning, I speak with the full support of Wardens, Vestry and as someone who has made a commitment to open, honest communication from the Leadership of this Church.

Two weeks ago, I mentioned the great work being achieved, on our behalf, by our own Seismic Review Committee; as they work with NZCEL (the Engineering Company reviewing our Church) towards providing an assessment. I want to reiterate that this process is still happening, and I am getting regular updates, and there is momentum!

I stood in the spirit of the Gospel reading, and I stood as the Vicar called to lead this Parish. I mentioned that Hutt City Council had become involved, officially in our EQ Strengthening Journey. I said that HCC were supportive of where we were heading, but we were waiting for further comment/action from them.

On Tuesday I received official notification that they had rated this building at 10% of the National Building Standard. This is based on the advice they received from the independent engineering firm they contract to assess buildings in Lower Hutt; this is a nationally known firm, who have a strong reputation in their chosen field. The official notice was affixed to our building on Thursday, when I met with the Seismic Engineer from Hutt City Council.

This development now means that Hutt City Council are a key player in our EQ Strengthening process. This also means that, myself and the Wardens had to respond, not only to the ongoing safety to you, our church family, but also to the other users of this space on Tues, Wed, and Friday nights, as well as the Tuesday and Wednesday morning, and Sunday afternoon congregations.

It is not just the users of this building that have a responsibility for, but for your families and those that care for you; knowing that, as a son, I would be the first to raise a concern with my parents if they were faced with a similar situation.

We also acknowledge that our building rating will be listed on the national register of Earthquake Prone Buildings, so we acknowledge the responsibility to Christian Witness at this level as well.

Health and Safety is a topic that is open to interpretation and politics, and eyebrow raising in NZ; yet when faced with the legal rating we now have, we must, as a leadership, respond in an ethically and morally responsible way.

I speak to you now, as someone who is sleep deprived, someone who has spent the last few days feeling physically sick as I have wrestled with this. I have spoken to engineers, Diocese staff, I have communicated with the Arch Deacon, and fellow clergy; I have read the experiences of other churches across the country, and I have talked at length with the Wardens.

Yesterday I informed our Bishops and Diocese Manager, that until we receive the results of the review from NZCEL, and their subsequent negotiations with Hutt City Council; we will temporarily cease using the church for our services. Our last service, in the meantime will be Easter Sunday. We will not be holding the Easter Brunch, as it was felt that we should instead, gather as Church Family over Morning Tea.

There will be regular updates regarding the practical aspects of our temporary move; and myself and the Wardens have started working on these. There will be questions, confusion, anger, uncertainty and conversations. There will be those of you who strongly disagree with this decision, and those who will agree.

Please know that this decision has not been an easy one to reach. Myself and the Wardens knew, that to do nothing and continue, was not an option. It would have been irresponsible and show a lack of care and concern for our sisters and brothers here, and all who use the church.

Practically, the rating of 10% will remain until Hutt City Council decides, acting on professional and peer reviewed information, otherwise. I reinforce my respect for the HCC staff and their professional expertise and integrity.

I will be honest with you, there is nothing we could do to prepare for this news, and some would say that it has the worst timing in the world, as Holy Week is next week. While, as we know, there is never a good time to receive this news; I want to say, that the start of Holy Week is possibly the best time to receive this news.

I say this seriously, and in Gods Spirit.

In the reading today, we mark the welcoming of Jesus, yet we know what lays in store. We know that Holy Week is a journey that we must take; we know that it is a journey of uncertainty, confusion and loss. That will be our journey as a church, I will not try and deny that.

As with other years, from Tuesday to Thursday, we will offer Eucharist in the Side Chapel. I choose to do this, as it is a fitting way to start each morning of Holy Week. There will be no reflection or homily offered, rather we will gather in silence, and prepare ourselves for the week ahead. We will gather to seek Gods peace in the midst of this transition- not to smother our feelings.

On Thursday we will gather to prepare ourselves for Good Friday. We will not be washing feet this year, rather we gather to wash hands. An act that has more cultural relevance to us, and an act that is not limited by mobility; an act that embodies the command that we serve one another. We strip the altar and remove the cross so that the altar reflects the barrenness and desolation of Good Friday. This service is more poignant than other years, and I invite you to come and wash and lament with us.

On Friday, I invite you to join me at 12, as we gather for a Service of reflection, and where we can mark what we shed during our Lenten journey. This service will be 40-45 minutes at the most, with the opportunity to remain in silence if you wish. I mention this service, as it is vital that we mark the letting go of those things that have arisen during Lent. In the lighting of Candles, we signify, that in our fragility we leave them at the cross.

I can think of no other place to be, to be honest, than with my church family and the cross. The candles that we light on Good Friday, will remind us that Light, Warmth, Healing, Grace, Peace and Joy come again will come.

Easter Sunday will come.

On Easter Sunday, we will gather to celebrate the Risen Christ amongst us, and we will renew our Baptism Vows. Let the cross you pick up today, be a reminder of the hope we have in Jesus. I can think of no greater way to start this new season ahead of us.

I shared the following Psalm with Vestry on Thursday-It was the Psalm set aside for Morning Prayer- the same day that I met with the Seismic Engineer

Look to the Lord and his strength;
seek his face always.
Remember the wonders he has done,

his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,

you his servants, the descendants of Abraham,
his chosen ones, the children of Jacob.

He is the Lord our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.

He remembers his covenant forever,
the promise he made, for a thousand generations,

the covenant he made with Abraham,
the oath he swore to Isaac.

Psalm 105: 4-9