



## Letter to the people of the Diocese of Parramatta

Dear brothers and sisters of the Church in Parramatta,

It has been a little over one year since I was installed as the fourth Bishop of Parramatta. In that time, I have met many of you, visited a majority of our parishes, toured our schools and seen the work you do with those in need in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains.

I am grateful for the work you do and the way I was welcomed into this Diocese by you, my brothers and sisters who are the Church in Parramatta. One thing that has been clear during my time visiting all corners of this Diocese is that we are growing. Be it growth in seminarian numbers, the establishment of new schools or the sheer number of new people who now call Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains home.

In fact, since 2006, our population has grown from 1,100,000 to a record 1,500,000 people now calling this area home. In the Parramatta region alone, it is estimated an additional 70,000 new homes will be built in the next 20 years. This growth is evident across the Diocese. Building cranes dot the skyline. Paddocks have been turned into new housing estates. New motorways and train lines are under construction.

The 2016 Census also clearly highlighted Catholicism as the leading religion of Western Sydney and across many Local Government Areas (LGAs). Catholicism is the largest Christian group in Australia at 22.6% of the total population. Though, in our Diocese, this rises to over 30% in some LGAs. In the next 20 years, the population in this region is expected to grow further by a staggering 600,000 people. This means in Blacktown, Penrith and Parramatta LGAs alone, hundreds of thousands of new people will call this area home.

As your bishop, I am committed to following the lead of Pope Francis in making the Church in Parramatta the Church of the poor and the Church for the poor. Meeting the needs of our growing family and planning for future generations are two of my main priorities.

As the local, state and federal governments are already investing heavily in this region by building motorways, light rail, train lines and new airports, we too, as the Church in Parramatta need to invest in physical infrastructure to meet the need. Our mission, modelled on the servant leadership of Christ, will be better served if we have the physical infrastructure in place to meet that need. For us to be like Christ, the Good Shepherd, and to spread the message of Our Lord, we must also look at how the message of Christ can reach all, especially those on the margins and fringes of our society.

In the years ahead there will be several new building and expansion projects undertaken by our Diocese. This will include Westmead, Marsden Park, Box Hill, school science park at Luddenham, new churches like Kenthurst, and other major projects that will be announced in due course.

It is clear, that we are 'not living in an era of change, but change of an era'. In much the same way the Universal Catholic Church has changed since Second Vatican Council, we too, as the Diocese of Parramatta, will now be entering a change of era. Like any phase of growth, there will be challenges. Funding will be an issue, so too will the availability of land and the burden growth places on already stretched resources.

Another challenge will be the uncertainty this change of era brings. All change, brings a level of anxiety and a sense of loss. I understand how leaving behind the familiar and the comfortable and embarking on a new path can create worries and feelings of helplessness and unease.

We have nothing to fear.

As our faith teaches us, we must know when to let go of the old ways and old habits and embark on the new. The renewal of the Church in this era, is not only a spiritual renewal, but also a physical renewal that must be embarked upon if we are to meet the need and spread the word of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

As such, I ask that we all work together to ensure we can continue to be the face of Christ in order to meet that need that we are now facing. I ask you work to with me as your servant leader, to overcome the challenges we will face so that we are able to be the face of Christ to the people of the Diocese of Parramatta.

The population will boom and this region will grow. May the Holy Spirit forever guide us so that we are able to meet these new challenges and embrace this new era with faith, hope and love in the promise of Christ to be with us.

On this feast day of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, Patroness of the Diocese of Parramatta, we pray that her patronage remains over us and that she will continue to intercede on our behalf as we embark on this new era in the life of our Diocese.

Yours sincerely in Christ,



**Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv**  
**Bishop of Parramatta**

*Given at Parramatta on 8 August A.D. 2017,  
Solemnity of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, Patroness of the Diocese of Parramatta.*

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