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Thursday 21 March 2019

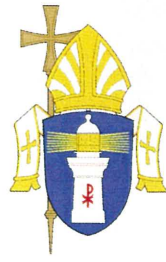
Your Excellency,

The events of 15 March 2019 in Christchurch are etched indelibly now in our minds and in our hearts. Through you, I extend the sympathy of the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay to the Muslim people of New Zealand (and Australia) who have been the target of this senseless brutality which we utterly reject and condemn. We stand with you in shock and in grief in the face of the evil that has been perpetrated.

As those who have died in such a callous way are now laid to their rest, we hear the cry of the agony of those who have survived, those who have lost their loved ones, those who have lost hope and now despair in the inhumanity that we have experienced. We hear the echoes of their distress and confusion in our own hearts as we remember in prayer all those whose lives will no longer be the same. We wish you to know that we are your brothers and sisters, and though our voice is feeble before such horrific events, we want to say to you that we stand with you in compassion and hope.

**Very Rev Dr David Ranson**

Diocesan Administrator



It has been my own privilege to be in personal dialogue with you on several occasions over the last years. On such occasions we have lamented together the emergence of a culture of suspicion and fear which can spawn the mindset that leads to last Friday's carnage. In no small way has this been fuelled by the demonisation of Islam. Again, I reiterate with you, at this sad time, the immorality and unacceptability of this. It creates ghettos of fear. It cuts us off from each other into networks of defences. It renders us less than the truth of ourselves about which the French writer Louis Massignon wrote, "Only in exercising hospitality towards another (instead of colonising him), in sharing the same work, the same bread, as honourable companions can one understand the Truth that unites us socially . . . One can only find truth through the practice of hospitality." (*Opera Minora* III, 608-9)

In the face of the terrorism we affirm the pathway of love, rather than the pathway of fear. This can present as naively ridiculous, yet its power is manifest in the stories of heroism and forgiveness in the mosques of last Friday that display a light stronger than the darkness. Genuine love primarily is the decision to listen to the other with the premise that I may have something to learn from them. The way of love is the commitment to see always the other precisely as 'person' and not through the lens of categorisation. It is the practice of an open conversation which seeks to understand the other, to feel with the other, to listen deeply to them. We love the stranger by listening to them, by learning their names, rather than their labels, and by entering their story, often of incalculable pain and dislocation. For the eminent philosophy of 'the other,' Emmanuel Levinas, the "presence of 'the other' announces, commands, perforates, ruptures, unsettles. And that is their gift to us."

This conversation has yet to begin in Australia. If there be an invitation at the heart of our distress about last Friday, it is the imperative to commit to the critical importance of such dialogue. Our future lies in the conversion of a conversation **about** the other in our midst to one **with** the other.

I express to you on behalf of the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay our readiness to work always with you in this endeavour. In the meantime, however, all of us in the Diocese reach out to embrace the pain you feel. May our solidarity and our shared hope for a better society represent a flicker of peace in the torment of this time.

With my sincere and personal wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David R". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "R" at the end.

Very Rev Dr David Ranson  
Diocesan Administrator