



## ARCHBISHOP OF WELLINGTON

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### **DECREE OF DECONSECRATION AND REDUCTION TO PROFANE BUT NOT SORDID USE OF SAINT MARTIN DE PORRES CHURCH, AVALON**

The Parish of St Martin de Porres was established on 3 January 1960, having previously been part of St Peter and Paul's Parish, Lower Hutt. In 1940 Fr Leo Daly, then parish priest of Saints Peter and Paul's Parish, purchased the property at 8 Park Avenue, Avalon, where the church of Saint Martin de Porres now stands. Work on designing and building the church began in 1958 and on 14 October 1959 the Sacred Congregation of Rites approved the dedication of the new church to Blessed Martin de Porres.

Saint Martin de Porres Church was opened on 1 May 1960 by Most Rev J P Kavanagh, Bishop of Dunedin, who had previously been a much-revered curate in St Peter and Paul's Parish.

The merger of parishes which took place from 2014-2016 in the Archdiocese of Wellington reduced the number of parishes in the Archdiocese from 47 to 22. In 2015, as part of this process, the parishes of Saint Michael Taita, Saint Bernadette Naenae, Saints Peter and Paul Lower Hutt and Saint Martin de Porres Avalon, merged to form the Catholic Parish of Te Awakairangi.

The new parishes established by the merger process in the Archdiocese have between two and six churches, with many churches in urban areas being geographically close together. In the Catholic Parish of Te Awakairangi St Martin de Porres Church is 1.5km from St Bernadette's Church in Naenae, 3.1km from St Peter and Paul's Church in Lower Hutt and 3.2km from St Michael's Church in Taita. It would not be difficult for most people from Saint Martin de Porres Church to attend Mass in the other churches in the parish. The capacity of Saint Martin de Porres Church is 290 people and the Mass count in recent years has been between 120 and 160. There is one Sunday Mass in the church each week.

Wellington is an area of high seismic risk, and until recently the government had an earthquake code (the National Building Standards or NBS) for public buildings. 67% NBS was the minimum level recommended by the New Zealand Society of Earthquake Engineers for occupancy of a building. A building with a rating of less than 67% NBS was deemed to be an "earthquake risk". A rating less than 34% NBS meant the building was "earthquake prone". St Martin de Porres church was assessed as being between 34% and 67% NBS. The recently introduced replacement standards, called the Earthquake Prone Building system, have removed the NBS classification system but this does not alter the need for work on St Martin de Porres church.

In 2019 my predecessor Cardinal John Dew directed parishes in the Archdiocese to review their properties, particularly churches and presbyteries, taking into account earthquake resilience issues, the reduced number of priests, changing Mass counts, the parish merger process, and the outcomes of the 2017 Archdiocesan Synod. The Catholic Parish of Te Awakairangi carried out this process with parishioners during 2019 and provided its proposals to Cardinal Dew in November 2019. These proposals included the closure of Saint Martin de Porres Church. The closure of the church will allow the sale of the property which will assist with maintenance and development work in other churches in the parish and provide more funds for ministry.

Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington

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The Archdiocese is not in a position to assist parishes financially with maintaining buildings or insuring them. Many parishes in the Archdiocese have one or more churches which are deemed to be an earthquake risk.

The Parish Priest and the Parish Finance Committee of the Catholic Parish of Te Awakairangi have asked that St Martin de Porres Church, Avalon, be relegated to profane but not sordid use.

There are grave causes for the relegation of St Martin de Porres Church, Avalon, to profane but not sordid use:

1. The resources of the Catholic Parish of Te Awakairangi are insufficient for maintaining four churches, and other sources of revenue are not available.
2. The best use of available priests in the Archdiocese further promotes this decision.
3. The parish will have a closing Mass on 2 November 2025.
4. The good of souls and the spiritual welfare of the faithful will not be detrimentally affected by the church being relegated. The spiritual welfare of the faithful is now being provided for primarily in St Bernadette's Church Naenae, Saints Peter and Paul's Church, Lower Hutt, and Saint Michael's Church Taita, all of which are between 1.5km and 3.2km from St Martin de Porres Church. It is not an undue burden for parishioners to travel to these churches.

I have carefully considered the law and the facts concerning St Martin de Porres Church, Avalon. A period of ten useful days from notification of the decree to parishioners (canons 1734, 1735, 1737) was allowed and I have considered the objection received from a parishioner. In accord with canon 1222 §2 I consulted with the Council of Priests on 20 November 2024. Having heard the Council's deliberations and vote of 9 to 0 in favour of relegating Saint Martin de Porres Church, Avalon, to profane but not sordid use, and satisfying myself that the good of souls will suffer no detriment, I, the undersigned Archbishop of Wellington, now decree the following:

1. From 3 November 2025, Saint Martin de Porres Church, Avalon, in the Catholic Parish of Te Awakairangi in the Archdiocese of Wellington, is relegated to profane but not sordid use. It is no longer a sacred place for divine worship and has herewith lost its blessing and consecration (canon 1222 §2).
2. The Parish Priest and Chair of the Parish Finance Committee have ensured that that there are no original deeds and other documents on the parish file indicating that there are donors or heirs who need to be consulted.
3. The Parish Priest and Chair of the Parish Finance Committee have ensured that the altar, sacred objects, and religious artefacts will be removed from the church.
4. Any proceeds from the sale of Saint Martin de Porres Church, or income from its rental or lease, belong to the Catholic Parish of Te Awakairangi.
5. Notification of this decree is to be made to the Parish Priest, Father Raja Kommareddy SVD and he is to notify it to parishioners through the parish's usual means of communication.

Given at Wellington on this 30<sup>th</sup> day of September 2025



✠ Paul Martin SM  
Archbishop of Wellington

Notary: Jude McKee