



# TE AWAKAIRANGI

A Catholic Parish of the Archdiocese of Wellington  
P.O Box 30079, Lower Hutt 5040, New Zealand  
Tel:04 566 3088

REG/01/06/26

19 June 2026

## **Response to the Proposed Merger of the Catholic Parish of Te Awakairangi and the Parish of the Holy Spirit Te Wairua Tapu**

Dear Archbishop Paul,

Thank you for your letter of 1 May 2026 inviting feedback on the proposed merger of the two neighbouring Parishes in Lower Hutt. This response is submitted on behalf of the Senior Leadership Team and Finance Committee of the Catholic Parish of Te Awakairangi and represents the consolidated voice of three conversations: Two synodal conversations held with parishioners on 1 June and 6 June 2026, and a further synodal conversation held with our Senior Leadership Team and Finance Committee.

Throughout this process, we used a single question to frame our discernment: ***“In view of the proposed Parish merger, what is the Holy Spirit calling us to?”*** That question shaped every conversation, and the themes in this response are the fruit of listening together to the answers our community gave.

We are grateful for your commitment to the process of listening and consultation. We wish to respond in that same spirit with honesty, care for our community, and openness to where the Holy Spirit is calling us to.

### **1. Our Overall Position**

Across all three conversations, a spirit of genuine openness emerged, even among those who expressed sadness or uncertainty. The parishioners of Te Awakairangi are not asking for the proposal to be set aside. There is an acceptance, even if a reluctant one, that the practical and pastoral realities facing both Parishes make the status quo unsustainable. Alongside that acceptance, there was a real sense of hope that change, approached faithfully, can be a time of renewal and mission with new energy.

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What our people are asking, strongly and consistently, is that the process of transition be handled with exceptional care, genuine transparency, and a pace that respects the human and spiritual dimensions of such a significant change.

*In short: we trust the direction. We ask that the “how” be given the same weight as the “what”.*

## **2. Key Themes from Our Discernment**

The following themes emerged with clarity and consistency across all three conversations. They are not peripheral concerns. They represent the core of what our people, in prayer and reflection, believe the Holy Spirit is calling this Parish to attend to.

### **2.1 The “Why” Must Be Clearly and Repeatedly Communicated**

The single most consistent concern across all groups was the absence of a clear, accessible explanation for why this merger is required. Parishioners are not resistant to the truth; they are asking for it. Without a candid account of the pastoral and practical pressures driving this decision, speculation and anxiety fill the gap. We ask that you or the Archdiocese provide a plain-language explanation of the reasons for the merger, communicated through multiple channels and revisited regularly throughout the process.

### **2.2 This Is a Transition, not a Transaction: It Will Take Time**

Our people are clear that this cannot be managed as an administrative event. Community, belonging, and identity are built over decades. Merger cannot be achieved through a series of announcements and Mass schedule changes. Parishioners spoke of the need for a multi-year, accompanied journey, one that moves at the pace of people rather than processes, and that is rooted in strong but fluid foundations that allow the new Parish to find its own shape over time.

The current timeline has felt rushed to many, particularly those who are not employed by the Church and who engage with Parish life primarily on Sundays. We ask that the transition plan explicitly acknowledge its multi-year nature and include structured waypoints for reflection, community input, and review.

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## 2.3 Learn from Experience and Understand the History

Parishioners called repeatedly for the wisdom of history to be brought to this process. Experience is available from church closures, including the recent closure of St Martin de Porres, and parish mergers that have already taken place within the Parish, Archdiocese and more broadly: what communication approaches work, what causes harm, how communities genuinely integrate rather than simply co-exist, and how vulnerable parishioners are best supported. Our people do not want this process to begin from scratch when lessons have already been learned elsewhere. We ask that the Archdiocese draw on that experience actively, share it with both Parish communities, and let it shape the transition plan from the outset.

## 2.4 People at the Centre, Especially the Vulnerable

Across all conversations, a consistent call emerged: people before buildings, people before processes. Parishioners spoke with particular concern for those who will bear the heaviest burden of change: the elderly, those with limited mobility or transport, young families, and communities whose primary language is not English. Increased travel distances, reduced familiarity, and larger gatherings all create real risks of isolation and disconnection.

There was also a strong desire to protect the faith experience of all parishioners through the transition, to ensure that no one falls away simply because the change was too abrupt or the new environment too unfamiliar. The transition plan must include specific, practical provision for vulnerable groups as a central priority, not an afterthought. This includes transport assistance, outreach, and ensuring continued access to the sacraments.

## 2.5 Unity in Diversity, Not Absorption

Parishioners were clear that the merger must feel like a genuine coming together of two communities, not the absorption of one by the other. The Catholic Parish of Te Awakairangi encompasses significant cultural diversity, with multiple language groups and Mass communities, each with distinct expressions of faith and belonging. Parishioners described the Parish as “a fabric of many textures” and as a result the goal of the merger should be to weave that fabric more richly, not to flatten it.

The new Parish will have a different feel and look from either of its predecessors, and that is not something to be feared.

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Our people expressed openness to moving around, attending different locations, encountering new communities, and being stretched in their faith. But this requires intentional community-building such as small faith and home groups, regular shared hospitality gatherings, and welcome teams at each location who ensure that everyone is known, wanted, and at home.

## **2.6 Leadership for the Transition Must Be Dedicated and Well-Resourced**

Parishioners recognised that the scale of this transition cannot be carried by already-stretched Parish leaders and priests. There was a clear call for dedicated, inspired leadership of the transition process. Someone with the mandate, time, and relational skills to walk alongside both communities through the change. We support the view from within our own discernment that a dedicated transition coordinator be considered, with representation drawn from across the cultural and community groups of both current Parishes.

## **2.7 Trust, Faith, and Openness: The Spiritual Foundation**

Perhaps the most striking aspect of our three conversations was the depth of spiritual generosity that emerged. Across parishioner sessions and the leadership group alike, people returned again and again to themes of trust:

- trust in the Holy Spirit;
- trust in the process; and
- trust in one another.

There was peace in our people's hearts, even amid uncertainty, and a genuine openness to welcoming others and to being changed by the encounter.

Parishioners spoke of this as a matter of faith, not merely a matter of management. They called for the process to be prayerful at every stage, rooted in discernment, accompanied by shared liturgy and prayer, and oriented toward renewal of mission with new hope. The Holy Spirit, they said, is already at work in this. Our task is to respond with openness, patience, and courage.

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## 3. Specific Requests

In light of the above, we respectfully put forward the following specific requests:

- That a clear, plain-language communication be issued by the Archdiocese explaining the pastoral and practical reasons for the merger, and that this be distributed through multiple channels and revisited regularly throughout the process.
- That the transition be formally planned as a multi-year journey, with a published framework that includes milestones, review points, and opportunities for ongoing community input.
- That the Archdiocese actively draw on experience from previous Parish mergers and consolidations, within our Parish, the Archdiocese and more broadly, and that these learnings be shared transparently with both Parish communities before the transition plan is finalised.
- That specific, practical provision be made for vulnerable parishioners, particularly the elderly, those with transport limitations, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, as a central priority of the transition plan.
- That a dedicated transition coordinator be appointed, with sufficient time and mandate to accompany both communities through the process, and that this role be representative of the diversity of both Parishes.
- That practical matters including Mass scheduling, parking, capacity, and accessibility across all sites be planned and communicated clearly and early in the process.
- That any further significant decisions affecting Parish communities be made only after meaningful consultation with those communities.
- That the transition process be grounded in regular shared prayer, liturgy, and faith formation across both communities, reflecting the spiritual foundation from which this discernment has been conducted.

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## 4. Closing Reflection

The parishioners of Te Awakairangi are people of faith and resilience. What has moved us most in this process is not the weight of the challenges ahead, though those are real, but the spirit in which our community has engaged with them. There is peace in our people's hearts. There is openness to welcoming others. There is a genuine desire to build something new together, rooted in shared mission and hope.

Our people believe that change can be good and that this moment, approached faithfully, is a time of renewal, a strengthening of our foundations, and an opportunity to become a more vibrant witness in the Lower Hutt Valley. They hold it as a matter of faith, trusting that the Holy Spirit is already moving in and through this process.

We offer this response in that same spirit, not as passive recipients of a decision but as active participants in the discernment, committed to walking this journey together with you, in unity, faith and hope.

Yours in Christ



**Fr Raja Kommareddy, SVD**

On behalf of the Senior Leadership Team and Finance Committee

The Catholic Parish of Te Awakairangi

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