

**BEFORE THE PALMERSTON NORTH CITY COUNCIL**

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*IN THE MATTER OF the Resource Management Act 1991*

*AND*

*IN THE MATTER OF an application by the Anglican Diocese of Wellington for the refurbishment, strengthening and extension to the heritage-listed building known as All Saints Church, 338 Church Street, Palmerston North*

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**STATEMENT OF EVIDENCE OF SUZANNE MARGARET FORDYCE**

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## **Introduction**

- [1] My name is the Reverend Suzanne Margaret Fordyce, LLB, B Theol.
- [2] I am a member of the Diocesan Council of the Diocese of Wellington. I also hold the role of Deputy Chancellor of the Diocese, and I am an Archdeacon holding responsibility for governance in the Diocese. I also have a special responsibility as an Archdeacon for oversight of parishes in the North of the Diocese, of which All Saints is one.
- [3] I have worshipped at All Saints, Palmerston North since 2000. I was ordained to the Anglican priesthood in 2015. Since ordination, I have been the congregational leader of one of the congregations of the parish. My congregation currently meets weekly on a Sunday at St Oswald's church in Takaro. We meet there because the heritage-listed building on Church Street was closed due to seismic risk. The remaining worshipping space in Church Street available to the parish is no longer large enough to accommodate all of its various congregational groupings on a Sunday.
- [4] I have lived in Palmerston North for over 27 years.
- [5] I am also a currently practising solicitor and have had a practice which goes by my name in Palmerston North for over 25 years.

## **Church Structure**

- [6] The Anglican Church in New Zealand is not a legal entity in and of itself. Its fundamental legal character is that it is a voluntary compact of individuals who gather together as part of the overall body of believers in Jesus Christ worldwide. The Anglican Church, as a denomination spans the globe and its leadership and asset-holding structures, comprise a widely distributed network of interlinked bodies. In Aotearoa, New Zealand and the Pacific that structure is primarily expressed as a network of Diocese and Hui Amorangi. A Bishop leads each Diocese or Hui Amorangi, via a governing body known as Synod, which largely determines its governance structure. Each Diocese also forms its own legal body to hold any land and

buildings utilized by the worshipping communities and other missional bodies of the Diocese.

- [7] In the case of the Wellington Diocese, that body is the Diocese of Wellington Board of Trustees which is a registered Board under the Charities Act. (Number CC27159) That Board of Trustees is the registered proprietor of the land and buildings known as All Saints Palmerston North situated on Church Street, being the property which is the subject of this application.
- [8] That Board holds all land and buildings on trust for the mission and ministry of the Diocese as a whole. As it makes any major decisions concerning land and buildings, it consults with and is guided by the views of the Diocesan Council of the Diocese. The Diocesan Council is the body within the Diocese that is responsible for oversight of the mission and ministry of the Diocese. Diocesan Council holds synodical authority in the Diocese when Synod is not formally in session.
- [9] I have been appointed by both the Wellington Diocese Council and the Wellington Anglican Board of Trustees to make submissions on behalf of the Diocesan Council and the Board of Trustees in respect of this application.
- [10] It is both of these bodies, The Diocesan Board of Trustees and the Diocesan Council, which will jointly exercise final decision-making responsibility in respect of any steps to strengthen and develop the All Saints heritage-listed building.

### **Systematic Values Assessment**

- [11] In approaching its submissions on this application, the applicant has adopted a systematic values assessment methodology which I will refer to in making my submissions.
- [12] The values we have identified as essential to be considered in any assessment of this application are not regarded by the applicant as being of

equal weight but instead have been ordered according to the priorities and values of the Diocese.

- [13] I will be first addressing the spiritual, theological and liturgical imperatives that inform the applicant concerning this application. I will then, secondly, address matters which relate to the impact of this application on the community life of the All Saints parish and the people it serves. Thirdly, I will discuss matters of financial viability. Fourthly, I will address the alternative proposals as to development suggested by other parties. Finally, I will address, from the perspective of the Diocesan Council and the Board of Trustees, the likely outcomes if this application is not granted as sought.

### **Spiritual, Theological and Liturgical Imperatives**

- [14] As a starting point, it is essential that it is understood that from the perspective of the Anglican Diocese of Wellington buildings are not artifacts that are significant in and of themselves. That is true not only of the most modest buildings currently held by the Board of Trustees on behalf of the Diocese but also of its most economically valuable and its most beautiful.
- [15] Within the life of the Diocese, the value, efficacy and utility of its buildings are measured solely by the question of the extent to which they assist the ministry and mission of the church, which is to enable people to come to know and worship God and to serve our communities in the name of Jesus Christ.
- [16] Accordingly, the Anglican Diocese of Wellington places no inherent value on any building as a historical object. The narrative and traditions of the Diocese are, of course important to any family and the Diocese is the same.
- [17] Pre-eminently, however, the Diocese considers that without connection to and use as a home for a living community of faith, any building would be a completely meaningless symbol.

- [18] Such a building would also hold no valid educative purpose in informing any present or future generation in any meaningful way about the life and work of the Anglican Church in New Zealand.
- [19] Worse, mere preservation of any building shorn from any connection to the lived faith and community life of its members would result in a fatally misleading declaration as to the values and life of the Anglican Church in this Diocese.
- [20] The primary values of this Diocese are these: we are family, we are disciples, we care for the lost the last and the least.
- [21] In the light of those primary values, any over-attachment to the mere form of a building is a form of idolatry.
- [22] The notion of preservation of something as a merely aesthetically pleasing material object amounts to a violation of the Church's spiritual values of placing people and their spiritual and social needs far above any other consideration.
- [23] It is also essential to the life of any Anglican Church that its buildings serve the life of its faith community in both liturgical and practical ways. Others will address issues of liturgical efficacy in their submissions, and the Board and the Diocesan Council support those views wholeheartedly. However, in this submission, I want to emphasise the call upon the church, which is inherent in the values I have already referred to, namely the call of God upon the church to radical hospitality.
- [24] One of the significant ways in which the parish has experienced the limitations of the historically listed building has been concerning hospitality both within the life of the congregation and to those it is seeking to reach out to. The building as currently configured has no gathering space available adjacent to, and, crucially, at the entrance to its liturgical spaces. Accordingly, the building now does not support the expression of openness, welcome or hospitality.

- [25] That is a significant barrier to effective ministry in the context of the current community of Palmerston North. As churchgoing generally, as well as a celebration of significant events such as weddings and funerals within church environments more particularly, has declined dramatically in New Zealand since the middle of last century, fewer and fewer people are either familiar with or comfortable in approaching liturgical spaces.
- [26] In that light, it is a hospitable imperative in any church building which is intended to serve a local community to create liminal welcoming spaces which do not intimidate or overwhelm people entering into the building. That is the community and hospitality value that has informed the proposal to both open up the frontage to the church not only visually but also in deeply practical ways. That will enable a welcome to be extended without any insistence that people enter immediately into the relatively foreign territory of liturgical space.
- [27] From the perspective of both the Board of Trustees and Diocesan Council, the missional imperatives of welcome and hospitality which guide the life of the Diocese will require any development of any building in the Diocese to have attended to these needs as primary considerations driving design and development.
- [28] Similarly, in the life of its own worshipping community, hospitable space is of great importance. The ability to gather before and after services, to share refreshments and conversation, is one of the prime ways in which a congregation welcomes newcomers, deepens existing relationships within the church family, and lays a foundation upon which to nurture inter-generational connections between older members of the congregation, young families and children.
- [29] We know from experience that engagement in *pre* and *post* service hospitality declines in proportion to the degree that places, where hospitality is offered, are physically removed from the location of the service itself.
- [30] Finally, the visibility of the Church to the outside world is part of its apostolic mission. The current church has a strong sense of enclosure

which does not manifest Christian fellowship in action to the broader community. It is central to the mission of the Church that people passing the place of worship can look in and gain a sense of what the community is about and what its values are. These are only tangibly done through a building that displays not only internal elements of the Church but allows visibility of the activities that actually take place there, and the vitality of the people involved.

### **Community values**

- [31] As well as the deeply held spiritual values referred to so far, the Church is called by God to a profound and enduring relationship with the communities within which it is placed. We are called to love our neighbours.
- [32] The All Saints land and buildings lie in the heart of Palmerston North. The All Saints Church community has a powerful tradition as one of the first occupants of a centrally located allotment in Palmerston North. The parish has faithfully served the Palmerston community in a staggeringly diverse range of ways and from a variety of buildings on this site for over a hundred years. There is a strong wish to remain there and to continue to serve the city and its people from that central location.
- [33] The Parish of All Saints wants to continue to be able to serve effectively as a community gathering place for the wider city, a place for larger-scale ceremonies and other gatherings to be possible for a variety of civic and other purposes.
- [34] The same values of welcome, hospitality and open accessibility which the Church seeks for its own family life align too with that outward-facing, missional objective of enabling its buildings to serve the whole city.

### **Financial Viability**

- [35] The Board and the Diocesan Council are committed to following principles of good stewardship in all of their decisions relating to property within the Diocese. Prudence dictates that whatever work is undertaken in respect of

the All Saints land and buildings is financially viable for present and future generations.

[36] The Board and Diocesan Council are fully aware of the magnitude of the financial commitment that the All Saints parish will need to make for any strengthening and development proposal to proceed. The Board and the Council must therefore be mindful of the capacity of the parish congregation within the medium term to raise funds and in the longer term, if necessary, to service any borrowing undertaken to complete this project and to continue to maintain the building.

[37] Accordingly, any proposal which is to be approved by the Board and the Council must represent the least financial risk for the All Saints Church congregation and have the greatest potential to maintain and enhance the vitality and strength of the congregational life of the parish. That ongoing life of the parish community lies at the core of its financial ability not only to carry out the project but maintain the buildings into the future. The Diocese does not have external financial resources to apply towards either of those financial needs.

[38] The Board and the Council fully support the parish's view that this proposal provides for a contemporary church and meets ongoing foreseeable needs. Therefore, the proposal represents the best option for maintaining the strength of the All Saints Church congregation and is consequently the most financially prudent course of action.

### **Counter Proposals**

[39] The Board and the Council are aware that other submitters have suggested alternative entrances to the building on the side of the building.

[40] It is the view of the Board and Diocesan Council that such proposals effectively contradict every missional imperative the plans submitted are intended to achieve.

[41] Welcome is compromised, openness and visibility are lost and hospitality is made significantly more difficult. Virtually all of the limitations of the current building from the perspective of effective mission and ministry remain, with utterly insufficient mitigation.

### **Conclusion**

[42] The Diocese has neither the will nor resources to support initiatives that do not support and further the fundamental mission of the Church.

[43] Both the Board and the Diocesan Council have made it plain to the All Saints Parish, as it has consistently to other parishes in the Diocese, that it will not approve significant expenditure on a building that is not fit for purpose and does not align with the fundamental mission and values of the Diocese.

[44] I am therefore here to be clear that it is not the view of the Board or the Diocesan Council that this application represents a proposal that would be merely nice to have but that other possibilities for development, strengthening and modernization could also meet with its approval.

[45] At this stage, the Board and Diocesan Council will only approve the work proposed by the current application.

[46] There is no plan B for All Saints Parish for the heritage-listed building.

[47] As the owner of that building, the Board would have to consider relinquishment as the most likely alternative outcome and pursue the ministry and mission of the All Saints parish by other means.



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Suzanne Margaret Fordyce