

Synod Charge 2018

Introduction

Sisters and brothers in Christ

I begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land upon which we gather and in so doing honour the elders past and present. We thank God for the safety and security of living in this country and pray that we will all live together in peace and harmony.

It is my privilege to warmly welcome you to this Third Session of the 46th Synod of the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, where it is my unexpected duty to deliver my first and probably only, Presidential Address. It is unexpected because I had seriously thought Bishop Stuart would still be in office after I had reached the statutory retirement age for full-time stipendiary ministry, but the circumstances of the past year have reminded me again that the concept of 'retirement' is both flexible and perhaps, illusory. Rather than slowing down gracefully for the next period of life and ministry, God obviously wanted me to keep running given that at the same time we received the news of the forthcoming resignation of Bishop Stuart, God also orchestrated the transfer of Bishop Matt Brain from our midst to more southern climes.

Keep Calm and Carry On

God has his own mysterious purposes which we often don't understand at the time when unexpected things happen, but we do know that he promises to providentially order all things for the ultimate good of his people (Romans 8:28). We can therefore be confident he has our best interests at heart in the difficult things we experience in our Diocesan or personal life journeys. We also know that he will also generously give his help, wisdom and strength for any challenges we face. With this theological basis in mind, but stripped of its very British stoic connotations, I have deliberately adopted as our Diocesan theme in this potentially unsettling year, the Second World War slogan: *keep calm and carry on*. As a result I have deliberately called us to sustained prayer in this season, so that by casting all our anxieties on God we might know his all surpassing peace as we await his answers to our requests (Philippians 4:6-7). I have further deliberately called us to continue to be absolutely focused on furthering the mission of God and living for him in the places where he has put us, knowing that if we seek first his kingdom he will supply all we need (Matthew 6:33).

At a Diocesan level, as far as I am concerned, we are calmly pursuing our current agreed Mission Plan objectives as best as we are able. We do face however a number of interim challenges at a senior leadership level due to the loss of key people and the need for others to try to compensate for that loss. Although as the Vicar General in the Diocese I had been briefed about many things, I have been learning new things most days. Fortunately, as a former archivist, I have kept significant documents stored on my computer in case they were needed and which I have been consulting assiduously. However, I must confess that, after the initial handover to this role, I felt somewhat like the little Dutch boy with his finger in the dike trying to save his town but desperately trying to plug new leaks with my other fingers! I acknowledge with thanks the superb support of our Diocesan senior clerical and lay leadership team and those who assist us in our responsibilities. I assure you that we are working well together as a team to care for the continuing needs of ministry in this Diocese in this transitional season.

Managing Transition Well

We need to keep managing this time of transition well. In my experience, times of change in our lives are times to pause and reflect on what is really important to us as we wait for a new future to be unveiled. They are times to give thanks and celebrate what God has done in the past; to identify what we treasure and to articulate what needs to be preserved as inherently valuable to our identity and purpose, as we embark on the next anticipated stage in our life's journey. This is also very true in our corporate life as the people of God in this Diocese as we transition to new episcopal leadership. In fact, that is what we have done and are doing. To that end we have experienced an extensive and thorough consultation process to listen to each other's insights and concerns about our Diocese and its leadership.

The fruit of that listening is now embedded in the frank and comprehensive *Diocesan Profile* produced by our hardworking Episcopal Election Nominations Committee, to whom we extend our profound thanks, even though their work is not yet finished. It would however be remiss of me not to also publicly pay tribute to the Reverend Sandy Jones who so ably helped to facilitate the consultation process, and to also thank Trevor Ament and Emma Body who have provided invaluable behind the scenes assistance and support on top of already demanding workloads. We are in debt to all of you. It was a mammoth undertaking in a short period of time to faithfully represent the varied perceptions of our people about our strengths and work areas, our opportunities and challenges, and also the qualities desired in a new Diocesan Bishop. As I indicated in the Foreword to that document –

It is a mutual discernment tool designed to assist both potential candidates and members of the Synod as together we seek the mind of God about the identity of the person called to be our next chief missionary, pastor and teacher.

It is now incumbent on all of us to read, mark and inwardly digest what is written in the Scriptures, the Ordinal, and the Diocesan Profile, so that our future judgements and decisions about our next Diocesan Bishop may be prayerfully shaped by both our prescribed formularies and our present needs. There are at least three things we need to do in this season on which I will now briefly reflect.

Celebrate Past Achievements

We need to celebrate past achievements and really thank God for all he has done in the past mission and ministry in this Diocese. I cannot, and will not, rehearse the distinguished 155 year history of this rural Diocese, which later had Australia's capital city inserted into its midst. Some of that story has been related very well in Tom Frame's excellent book *A Church for A Nation*. As one of my episcopal colleagues has also observed, this Diocese has regularly punched above its weight in the Australian church. While the pugilistic imagery may unfortunately convey the wrong picture, this Diocese has indeed made a huge contribution for Christ both within, and beyond, its geographical borders in a variety of ways.

I want to highlight a few things I have personally experienced in the last 15 years in senior leadership in this Diocese. I arrived in 2003 at the specific invitation of Bishop George Browning to become Rector of Wanniassa and Archdeacon of South Canberra when there was a good deal of suspicion about the city from which I came and the 'church tribe' in which my faith had been nurtured. However, to your credit, I was genuinely welcomed and accepted here for who I am in Christ, rather than being judged on the basis of mere labels, which are always dangerous because they are so often caricatures and distortions of the truth. I thank God for this wonderful inclusive Diocese which is marked by respect for, and

acceptance of, differences in Christian expression, while holding firmly to central credal beliefs.

In my judgement this acceptance of diversity is a real benefit for our mission because I have long held the view that no one church tradition is able to access contemporary Australia for Christ by itself. My belief is encapsulated in a quote drawn from a November 2003 report to Bishop in Council to which I contributed and which stated -

We need to develop and own a Diocesan Mission Plan to establish and multiply new communities of faith, with a rigorous commitment to diversity if we are to access the complex social mosaic of contemporary Australia for Christ. The need is so urgent that this task must not be the exclusive preserve of just one tradition in our Church

To that end this Diocese was one of the first in the Anglican Church of Australia to pioneer and embrace an intentional mission action plan (incidentally utilising the skills of a consultant named Stuart Robinson). Our initial vision to *grow communities confident in Christ* was warmly and widely embraced as what was needed at the time. Subsequently after his election as our Diocesan, Bishop Stuart presided over a revised plan which built on the former but was couched in terms of a dream to see both *lives and communities transformed by the love of Jesus*. This likewise captured our people's imagination. Significantly it has been these shared visions, willingly endorsed by the Synod, which have been the necessary glue in uniting our diverse expressions of the Christian faith, and also our different parishes and agencies, under a common missional purpose and goal. Therefore I give thanks to God that people from all traditions have grown in their confidence in Christ and have been united in their commitment to sharing the love of Jesus in word and deed to transform individuals and communities. In the past 15 years I have seen many examples of ordinary Christians stepping much more confidently out of their comfort zones to show the love of Jesus in their settings and so bear witness to Christ.

Another cause for celebration is that we are a Diocese which no longer believes one size fits all. There has been deliberate episcopal permission to experiment as we have intentionally pursued what Archbishop Rowan Williams called a 'mixed economy' church. This 'both/and' strategy wants to see our inherited traditional churches healthy and outwardly focused in mission, while also fostering the emergence of new expressions of church to connect meaningfully with those in our networks who are not-yet Christian, so that in both cases the good news of Jesus and following him becomes the focus of all we do. Once again I have been privileged to see many impressive examples in this Diocese of both approaches in the past decade and a half. Some of the stories have been shared in this Synod each year and others have been told in the monthly *Anglican News*. We need to continue to tell these stories about what God has been doing for our mutual encouragement, edification and rejoicing. I would therefore encourage you all to submit articles to Alison Payne who has so helpfully revamped our monthly publication and Diocesan website.

Face Present Challenges

As we rightly give thanks for our past achievements, we also continue to resolutely face our present challenges in our largely post-Christian culture, which has either forgotten or rejected or never known its Christian roots. On this occasion I want to mention just two challenges to which I briefly alluded in the foreword to the Diocesan Profile.

As you are aware one particular challenge has been a massive own goal caused by clergy and lay leaders who in the past sadly used their positions of trust to harm people in their care for their own self-interest. Furthermore, the evil of historic child sexual abuse is a blight on the cause of Christ, which has severely compromised the witness of the

institutional church in many places in this land. This Diocese is not immune, but has been, and will continue to be, proactive in recognising and properly responding to the matters uncovered by the recent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We remain thoroughly committed to calling to account those who have failed to protect children and vulnerable people in this Diocese, while also compassionately caring for the survivors of that abuse wherever that is possible. In that respect the Bishop in Council has recently unanimously agreed in principle to join the Federal Government's National Redress Scheme which commenced on 1 July 2018. This scheme is particularly designed to allow those who were so hurt and damaged by past abuse that they have found it impossible to approach the offending institution for recognition or assistance. The Royal Commission estimated that there are 60000 such persons across Australia. We, therefore, do not really know how many folk will be referred to us by the Department of Human Services through the National Anglican body which has been created by the General Synod to be the one port of call for Anglican victims. But we are intent on meeting our obligations, and that is why we have embarked on our present 3D strategy to *develop* our assets, to pay our *debts* and continue to *deploy* suitably gifted gospel ministers. In fact, we have resolved that 50% of the proceeds of our development projects will be allocated to a corpus of funds to ensure we are able to meet our historic obligations to victims of child sexual abuse. We can never repay them for what they have experienced, but in the name of Jesus we can seek to contribute to their future long term well-being.

A second cultural challenge that we are determined to continue to confront is maintaining a relevant communal presence for Jesus in all parts of our Diocese, and particularly in our rural areas which have been experiencing substantial demographic change. While parishes have been our core business for generations, the traditional model of ministry involving a full-time stipendiary priest has been under stress for a very long time and is no longer sustainable in many places. The reality is that about 33% of our ministry units can now only afford a part-time priest. I pay tribute to those clergy who are now either bi-vocational or honorary, and therefore self-supporting, for their commitment to faithfully serve Christ and his people. The bi-vocational model of course has distinguished apostolic precedents and, if recent Alban Institute research is prophetic, it will be increasingly the way of the future. However, I also want to particularly thank our hard working lay people in these places who have been the backbone of these faith communities for many years and have borne the heat and burden of the day to maintain the witness of our church. Nonetheless, despite what I have said, I don't want you to feel gloomy or disheartened about future prospects. After all, Jesus himself promised to build his church, though I hasten to add, he did not guarantee the form it would take! As I have travelled extensively around this Diocese, I have indeed seen the problems but also the green shoots of hope, as clergy and congregations creatively engage in the 'both/and' mission I mentioned earlier in this address. There are no slick or easy answers in this intense season of change and we will need to continue to experiment with a variety of approaches. The missional challenges we face across the Diocese require wisdom, flexibility and a collaborative spirit, as we seek to discover models of mission and ministry apt for each particular context.

Move Forward Together

As we move forward together to elect a new Diocesan Bishop in two months' time, we need a leader who will rejoice in our past achievements and be willing to build on them, and who will gladly embrace our ethos and values as together we face our challenges. We have now articulated extensively our hopes for the person who will hold this office, but I want to remind you again what our new Bishop **must** do by quoting from our Prayer Book. I was consecrated a bishop in St Saviour's Cathedral here in Goulburn on a

freezing cold St Barnabas' Day in 2004. I still also vividly remember the weight of the responsibilities being entrusted to me as outlined in the solemn exhortation from the Ordinal. These are the words I have weighed carefully ever since -

*A bishop is called to maintain the Church's witness
to the resurrection of Christ from the dead,
to protect the purity of the gospel,
and to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord.*

*As a chief minister and pastor in Christ's Church,
you are to guard its faith, unity and discipline,
and promote its mission in the world.*

*You are to ensure that God's word is faithfully proclaimed,
Christ's sacraments duly administered,
and Christ's discipline applied justly, with mercy.*

*You are to lead and guide the priests and deacons under your care,
and be faithful in the choosing and ordaining of ministers.*

*You are to watch over, protect and serve the people of God,
to teach and govern them, and to be hospitable.*

*You must, therefore, know and be known by them,
and be a good example to all.*

*These are the duties of a bishop, and they are weighty.
Are you willing to perform them?*

This is the 1995 Australian iteration of the ordination theology enshrined in Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*. This exhortation contains the marching orders for every bishop in this church. These can be summarised under two broad headings. In the *first* place, in our polity, a bishop is the Chief Missioner who will proclaim the good news of the risen Jesus; giving an active personal lead by reaching out in intelligent, credible and persuasive ways to those who are not-yet Christian as an apologist for the faith. The bishop will also make it a first priority to guide, encourage and seek to ensure that the mission of God remains on the top of the agenda of every parish, congregation and agency in the Diocese. In the *second* place, the bishop is the Chief Pastor and Teacher in our Church or, if you prefer, the chief teaching shepherd of the people committed to his or her care. This familiar pastoral picture from the Bible means above all ensuring the flock is properly fed by both Word and Sacrament. It also means an active, constant watchfulness for the ultimate welfare of the people of God by wisely ordering their common life; deploying faithful co-workers; sensibly guarding their unity; vigilantly protecting them from dangerous error; and mercifully correcting or disciplining them when needed.

These are indeed weighty responsibilities and many an episcopal candidate's first thought has been to quote the Apostle Paul *who is sufficient for these things?* In fact, I understand Lancelot Andrewes, a famous scholar bishop in early seventeenth century England, had these words engraved on his episcopal seal! But of course bishops are not alone and left to their own resources. They have God and his indwelling Spirit to make them sufficient for their tasks and the challenges they face. Furthermore, in our polity episcopal ministry is not meant to be hierarchical but instead collaborative. The bishop may indeed be the chief missioner, pastor and teacher but is not the only one. The bishop has a particular, but not exclusive, responsibility for key areas of the life and mission of the church. The very fact that we gather regularly in Synod as bishop, clergy and lay people is evidence of this conciliar reality which is at the heart of Anglicanism. In other words, oversight is shared by bishop, clergy and laypeople, each with their own distinctive contributions to make. Healthy oversight therefore requires intentional cooperation, genuine team work, and real delegation.

Finally, it will be really helpful if we all now jettison any unrealistic expectations of the person God eventually appoints. After Bishop Stuart was elected in 2008 I rang him privately to congratulate him, but, in view of things reported to me about what was said about him at the electoral Synod, I encouraged him, tongue in cheek, to practise his walking on water skills! Human beings long for messiah figures as political processes all around the globe currently reveal. This disease is rampant in the revolving door of Prime Ministers in this country, but our real Messiah is in heaven and besides, if he was available in person, no election would be necessary. Well might we pray 'our Lord come' (1 Corinthians 16:21)! At clergy inductions in parishes I have sometimes used the following story about Super Pastor from a brochure I once acquired to make the point that expectations need to be realistic. This document made the following points -

The ideal priest never speaks for more than 10 minutes, is able to relate the gospel to our daily lives, boldly condemning sin and lawlessness, while never hurting anyone's feelings. They work from 7.00AM to 10.00PM six days a week and are available at other times. They have a natural ability to work with children and teenagers, but will spend most of their time caring for the elderly. They make fifteen calls a day on church members but spend a greater proportion of their time evangelising the unchurched, and are never out of their office. They smile a lot with the straight face because they have a sense of humour along with a serious and sober outlook on life.

This list can be expanded, but of course the Super Pastor, or the Super Bishop, does not exist except in people's imaginations. We will in due course elect a fellow fallible disciple of Jesus, who will satisfy some, perhaps even many, but not all of our selection criteria, and who will need to work collaboratively in a team with the complementary gifts and experiences needed for the ultimate good of mission and ministry in this Diocese to the glory of God.

Conclusion

I now, therefore, commit you all to God's grace, as empowered by His Spirit, we calmly keep serving and living for Jesus. Let us keep thanking God for all he has done and is doing in our Diocese. Let us face all our challenges prayerfully trusting in His good provision. Let us go forward collaboratively to, in time, elect our next bishop and together be resolved to continue to be absolutely focused on advancing God's kingdom at all times in everything we do.

Prayerfully yours

+ Trevor Edwards