



**The Right Reverend
Stuart Robinson**

**President's Address:
'Developing the Dream'**

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**ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA
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Introduction

Beloved in Christ, welcome to Synod.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional Custodians of the land and country upon which we meet and in so doing honour the elders – past and present.

In 2009, I shared my dream for a *Diocese where the love of Jesus transforms people, communities and structures*. Thank you for embracing that dream and for allowing it to shape and order your lives.

You see, dreams are the fruit that grow from the soil of our hearts and reflect not only our deepest longings but our deepest fears too. Dreams reveal not only the quality of our heart; they oftentimes show us the depth of our faith and the measure of our confidence in Christ.

We might expect that dreams that chime in ‘sync’ with God’s heart-beat emerge from lives that put God’s kingdom first. Such dreams have the power to change lives for the better.

Dreams shaped by fear, anger and judgement do something different. They are apt to make us mean spirited and hard-hearted. We could become shirkers who look to blame others and use the church for our own benefit and advantage. Such dreams imprison the spirit and damage people deeply; wouldn’t you agree?

This is why Jesus points out that we will not harvest good grapes from woody brambles (Luke 6.44). In his sermon on the plain, Jesus encourages his disciples to seek his kingdom and not their own (Luke 6.20-26). He called the twelve to love deeply (Luke 6.27-36), believe the best about others (Luke 6.37-42), and to nurture a good heart that will produce fruit abundantly (Luke 6.43-45). In short, he encourages the twelve to dream big.

My dream – that we have embraced - to be a *Diocese where the love of Jesus transforms individuals and communities*, is a kingdom-sized dream, don’t you think? It calls us to look deeply at our own lives and it challenges us all to ask a big question: Is my life shaped by worry about the future? Is my life channelled by anxiety and fear? Does uncertainty keep me awake at night? Or is my confidence grounded in Christ’s abundant grace and inexhaustible mercy?

Ultimately, Jesus challenged the disciples not merely to be hearers, but to be the kind of people who put his call to love, be generous, and open to others, into action (Luke 6.46-49).

Our dream calls our Diocese to put Jesus’ words into action in at least three significant ways – you might have heard me speak of them as **the 3 ‘D’s’**:

- **debt,**
- **development, and**
- **deployment.**

Each in their own way challenges us to discover the call to love, to be generous, and to be open hearted towards others.

Let me speak to this '3 D' outline and I'll endeavour to demonstrate how they are making, *and will make*, our dream a reality.

Debt

A great many churches around Australia find themselves living off the legacy of past ministry and the memory of better times. Yes, it is far easier to take care of our friends than engage with or invest in 'outsiders' – especially those who present as demanding, wounded or 'different'.

And, all too often, our church has erroneously stood in the place of the Father – confidently meting out forgiveness. Today, we're more likely to find *ourselves* standing in the place of the sinner, 'missing our cloak' and begging for forgiveness. We must now address past injustices and make good our debts, especially where policies, procedures, and people, have failed people.

As a Diocese, we must remain open and transparent as to where we fall short. We need to trust in God's great grace and the Spirit's help to put things right. Such an appraisal enables us to learn, change course and move forward together.

Recently, I myself had to give account in a professional standards matter. As Diocesan Bishop, I had not acted in a timely manner in removing a clergy person from Holy Orders following a misconduct allegation six years ago. My hesitation was not from a sense of misplaced loyalty, but due to the complexities – and at that time – *infrequency*, of matters such as this. I was quite rightly called to account and the person concerned has been removed from ministry.

Our Diocese is now daily dealing with the legacy of past abuse by clergy, church workers and lay leaders. We have initiated 'redress' programmes with people but the long journey towards wholeness for them and us, has really just begun.

I am grateful that as a Diocese, we have consistently chosen to pursue the difficult course of putting the needs of survivors first. While no amount of money can wash away the shame experienced by many, the willingness to hear their stories and our resolve to prevent any further abuse, has brought healing to some. That said, funding such programmes and ministries is an immediate and ongoing challenge.

As a Diocese, we must give thanks to God for the work that each of you do to ensure that our activities are consistent with our safe ministry policies and procedures. We also give thanks for the work of the Reverend Peter Barnett, Mrs Celia Irving, Ms Alison Payne and all those who work on various professional standards committees as they assist us in serving those who need care, healing and a fresh start. Please keep them in your prayers.

An agency that is helping turn people's lives around is Anglicare. With the sale of the nursing homes complete, Anglicare is a healthy and growing agency that is making an inestimable contribution to our Diocese and its capacity for mission. This year, Anglicare introduces a new strategic plan outlining ways to invest in initiatives that align with the Diocese's mission. Their focus extends to providing advocacy and holistic care for children, young people, families, and adults in need across southern and western New South Wales and the ACT.

I am thankful that so many parishes and individuals support the work of Anglicare by giving financially, *and* of themselves. Mr Jeremy Halcrow, his management team, and the Anglicare Board, continue to be tireless advocates for overcoming poverty that erodes hope and confidence. Anglicare's programs designed to help youth find work, and families to look forward in hope rather than fear and worry, are effective, and well regarded by many. Anglicare's 'hands-on' approach to reconciliation is also assisting indigenous people.

The skills and talents of Anglicare within our Diocese, and from across the country, will be on display next week. Our own Anglicare, led by Mr Jeremy Halcrow and Professor Ingrid Moses, are hosting Anglicare's National Conference in Canberra exploring the theme, *leaving no one behind*. This is a vital conversation for our nation, and it all starts Sunday!

Another way in which our church is addressing the legacy of our past is through the Public Issues Commission, ably led by my colleague and our friend, Bishop Stephen Pickard. I am grateful for the support and encouragement provided by members of the Commission across a range of presenting issues, such as climate change, refugees, and asylum seekers.

On these and other matters that confront our community with difficult decisions, it is so easy to become disheartened. If we judge our effectiveness by the column inches we receive in the daily papers, we'd be very disappointed. However, be assured that many parishes are finding practical ways of helping new arrivals settle, and build a new life, in a strange land. It is a constant joy to have our Sudanese sisters and brothers with us and similarly those of the Karen community. Their strength of spirit, depth of faith, and commitment to helping each other, should inspire us all.

Let me add at this juncture that one of the most difficult decisions facing our nation is the legal status and community recognition of those in same-sex relationships. The pressure on our parliamentarians is intense, and is likely to grow further, with the public now expecting to express their views through the ballot box.

Many opine that it is right for the Synod to make our views about the nature of marriage known. Many have lamented that the fact that this matter has taken so long to come forward reflects a significant 'deficit' in our Synodical conversations. Nevertheless, our power as a diocese to resolve this matter to *everyone's* satisfaction is very limited. Lawful authority to change the definition of marriage lies with the federal parliament. As a church, our national General Synod set the liturgy for marriage, which is clearly and unequivocally between a man and woman.

That we don't have power, per se, isn't as important as the *influence* we share pastorally *through our life and example*. Our Diocese is known as a place where the passion for both Gospel convictions, and justice, for those experiencing discrimination run very deep. At the same time, some lesbian, gay, and transgendered people, have found sanctuary, welcome and friendship in our parishes and ministry units. No one should be surprised to know that faithful Anglicans hold a wide variety of views on this matter in any parish or agency in the diocese.

As I noted, people across our Diocese believe this conversation is overdue. Yet dialogue around such sensitive pastoral matters is practically, and relationally, difficult to have in a forum like this – due in the main to procedural mechanisms that don't often allow for the personal dimension *and* the repercussions of the arguments we make.

So beloved, my hope and prayer for us is that this synod might be a space where we may consider the issue 'christianly,' and thereby *be* a community of reconciliation. Let me be clear: reconciliation doesn't mean that our differences are swept aside or ignored. While our natural inclination is to express our considered views - and that is of course the point of the exercise - a reconciling spirit will foster friendship, and understanding, so that a just outcome for all might be *sought*. Jesus' call to love those who advocate opposing points of view – means we must find ways to listen and learn from sisters and brothers who embrace ideals that are profoundly different to our own.

Development

The lynchpin of our dream – apart from (and including) prayerfully and persistently petitioning our Heavenly Father, is development – by which *I* mean the intentional, wise, and timely use of the resources with which we have been entrusted by our Heavenly Father.

Business takes acumen, good judgement, and above all vision, not only to see the opportunities, but to implement a project well. Nothing good comes when we make decisions from fear, or the feeling that some things are beyond our reach or ability. Our Lord Jesus reminds us that the measure we give, is the measure we receive (Luke 6.38). If we're small hearted, fearful, and timid, then we shouldn't expect a bountiful harvest.

So, our challenge in this complex world is to live in such a way that our wealth serves God's purposes. Development means using our financial means wisely *today*, so that our future capacity to participate in God's mission can grow; so that women, men, girls and boys might experience the transforming love of God in Christ.

Effective development requires good administration. Administration is one of those gifts that only appears to draw attention to itself when it is not working! Thankfully, our Diocese is achieving much in a number of ways.

First - we took the step to form Anglican Diocesan Services over a year ago under the leadership of Mr Trevor Ament. Moving to a shared services approach was a big step for us

and Anglicare. The team has significant skills in HR, finance, property, insurance, fleet and risk management. Their professionalism and consistency is bearing fruit, as our agencies and ministry units find better ways of making ministry possible. Not perfect yet, but certainly making a difference.

Second – and connected with that has been the implementation of a new information system with help from the Diocese of Melbourne. The new system, in due course, will reduce the paper work and forms required of parishes.

Third - the formation of a new school commission, led by Chair and one-time Diocesan Registrar, Mr David Holmesby, will also bear fruit.

Fourth - Ms Heather Walsh who has helped to strengthen every aspect of our Diocesan schools operation – will now oversee property and business development. I have called for an audit of all our holdings and Ms Walsh and her team will work with external professionals in this exercise.

Having mentioned schools, I must add it was so pleasing to meet the first students at The Anglican School, Googong, a venture that will grow with that new town centre under the leadership and care of Head, Mr Ian Hewitt. Although conditions at our South Coast schools remain challenging, much work behind the scenes has enabled their principals and Board to focus on the main task, helping their students achieve and thereby make a strong and positive contribution to their towns and neighbourhoods. Please keep all school principals, Boards and staff in your prayers too.

Fifth - our Property Trust works quietly and diligently to identify ways to improve our asset base for mission and ministry. This is not only around making prudent investments; it also means ensuring that our land and property portfolios are well placed to serve our mission.

Thanks to the Trust's vision and guidance, 'The Jamieson' project is drawing to a successful conclusion. The building has been nominated for several architectural prizes and residents began to occupy their new homes last December. Most offerings have sold and commercial unit sales are in train. Mr Phil Davies' work with the project has been exemplary and tireless.

I am, in concert with my Archdeacons, Property Trust, ADS and BiC, seriously considering another round of projects that will seek to utilise a range of properties and holdings in different ways. This will help our Diocese develop a stronger, more sustainable revenue stream for deploying people in mission and ministry. As noted earlier, Ms Walsh and her team will facilitate much of this enterprise.

Sixth – another area of development concerns our diocese's communication strategy. It is one thing for us to engage in complicated development, it's another for us to understand and support it.

Mr Lew Hitchick has done a remarkable job with *Anglican News* for many years. He has kept us up to date with events and local stories from our parishes and agencies. While Lew's passion for mission has been enduring, he has decided to retire at the end of the year, and we shall miss his contribution greatly.

Our challenge is to use all the tools of contemporary technology more effectively. The shift from a hardcopy printed newspaper to an online edition has not been easy or popular. So, we will find new ways to weave our newspaper, website and social media presence together so that people can get the stories they want in a form that is most accessible to them. Consider this a work in progress, please.

Deployment

We are addressing our past debts and developing property projects for one simple reason: we're not doing it to make the Anglican Church grand, or to recapture faded glory; *we're doing it so that more people can be deployed with greater effectiveness into Jesus' mission.*

Jesus came to reconcile the world to God through his death on the cross. He called the disciples and told them, 'as the Father has sent me, so I send you' (John 20.22). He then gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit and the ability to release people from the pain of sin and death to discover new life in Christ.

As Christ's body, we share in Jesus' work of proclamation, nurture, service, advocacy, creation care and reconciliation.

In order to realise our dream of being a *diocese where the love of Jesus transforms individuals and communities* we need people to go out and do the kind of work that Jesus and the Father want to see happen. Jesus challenges us all not only to be hearers of the Gospel, but doers (Luke 6.47), to be good news people in all our villages, towns and suburbs.

Of course, participating in the proclamation of the kingdom and making and nurturing disciples is no easy task. But God's promise is that with grace as our foundation, we can withstand and overcome anything.

It has been a joy to share in the Walk of the Cross with so many of you these past three years. The opportunity to experience your ministry, most of which goes without praise or acknowledgment this side of heaven, was so very heartening and I am so thankful for the faithful service of our many talented lay people, deacons and priests.

Many of us are pleased and delighted that Bishop Trevor Edwards agreed to take on ministry with our western and coastal parishes following Bishop Genieve Blackwell's departure for Melbourne. Bishop Genieve started a process that encouraged Wagga Wagga based parishes to collaboratively dialogue around God's future for them. With parish vacancies, demographic shifts and the need to involve all Anglican agencies in the conversation, it hasn't been easy to bring the process to fruition. Bishop Trevor's

agreement to stay on until 2017 will give us the opportunity to strategize and find ways of making ministry in this significant region more sustainable.

It has also been a joy to welcome Bishop Matt Brain to the role of Director, Ministry Training and Development. His vision and calm presence is a great asset to our diocese. Of course, Bishop Matt builds on the foundation laid by Bishop Trevor who has developed a strong partnership with St Mark's National Theological Centre under the leadership of the Reverend Dr Andrew Cameron.

Two projects that Bishop Matt is leading will make a great difference to our Diocese.

First, is the development of a framework for Chaplaincy.

Ministry is never easy and chaplains can find it very difficult. They are often at the coal face of communities that are resistant and disinterested in the Gospel as people are preoccupied with matters in life like illness, surviving in prison, or just making it through school.

Chaplaincy is one of the hidden gems of our church and it is something our world is coming to value more and more. Community based Chaplaincy is important work and we need to find ways of developing it. Consequently, we're looking at ways to help people learn and grow as chaplains through peer support and training.

Second, we must enhance our capacity to support ministry 'pioneers'. Pioneers are people who like to start new things! They have an interest and a passion to push out beyond our congregational boundaries to start new Christian communities. We've done well to fund some initiatives through the Pelican Foundation over the years, but we need more.

To this end, I've asked Bishop Matt to identify pioneers in our Diocese, especially lay people, who have started ministries either alongside a parish, in the work place, or in the community generally. They are not simply talkers, but doers, and have a track record of positive engagement. Bishop Matt will ponder new and creative ways to support and encourage their ongoing development, with help from our newest Archdeacon, Dr Wayne Brighton.

Pioneers will need training and this learning process is likely to take place *in situ* as they are encouraged to reflect on their practice. I have expressed my desire to begin ordaining some pioneers as deacons in 2016.

This strategy demonstrates that our church is willing to recognise and find ways to support less-than-conventional forms of disciple making. Nor is our Diocese taking this road alone. We are developing a network with Dioceses like Melbourne, Adelaide and Newcastle to help us along the way. We are also finding ways to work with the Uniting Church in Victoria and South Australia who have begun to take this journey too.

These strategies will augment and enhance efforts to help develop our existing ministry units. Our neighbourhood parishes are central to helping people experience new life in

Christ. It is only when our relationship with God is life giving that we find the capacity to join with others in God's mission.

For the past three years I've been seeking to practice that which I've been espousing re good missional thinking with the 'F5' ministry in Goulburn. That congregation has grown and may 'plant' again. I am personally committed to making and growing disciples.

I am also deeply committed to helping existing parishes flourish and grow. To this end, the 'Bishop's Convention' plays a critical role. In May, over 1,000 people combined to attend the Barlow Lecture and Convention. Alison Morgan explored the theme of *being disciples that make disciples*. So many people were encouraged and hearted by this initiative. Our Lay Centre for Mission and Ministry, who orchestrated the event, will continue to provide training for lay people across our diocese. Planning for the 2016 Convention is already underway.

As alluded to earlier, I have invited my Archdeacons to identify opportunities for making disciples in new growth areas that include - but are not limited to – Googong, Marulan, West Belconnen and the new suburbs sprouting in Molonglo (South Canberra) or in Estella and Lake Albert (Wagga Wagga region) and the ever advancing Gungahlin (North Canberra).

I thank the Reverend Bronwyn Suptut who recently concluded her ministry as Archdeacon to focus on the many opportunities for growth that have emerged in her parish of Woden. She's been inspirational and our Diocese is much stronger for her leadership. I also welcome Archdeacon Brian Douglas and pray that his ministry for this important southern region will also prove fruitful. Do also continue in prayer for Archdeacon David Ruthven as he recuperates from cardiac irregularities.

Conclusion

None of this is easy. There will be false starts and discouragement. There will be opposition, and some initiatives won't last the distance. Jesus warned the disciples that storms will come, and rivers will rise.

But our foundation is Jesus.

Jesus is the good news that our world needs. His grace and work of redemption is what our church is built on. On that foundation we will stand.

And because it is not simply our dream, but God's dream - we will continue to grow as a diocese where the love of Jesus transforms individuals and communities.

Many thanks also to my Episcopal and Senior Leadership Team, Dean Phillip Saunders, Mr Trevor Ament and his ADS team, Ms Bev Forbes my E.O., my team of intercessors, and my dear wife, Jane.

In the Name of Christ. Amen.