

# **Presidential Address to Synod 2017**

# President's Address to the 142<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Synod of the Diocese of Rockhampton

## Introduction

Sisters and brothers in Christ, welcome to the 142<sup>nd</sup> session of the Synod of the Diocese of Rockhampton. As we gather in the presence of God, I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners, the Darumbal people upon whose land we meet. As we continue to learn to live together on these ancestral lands, we acknowledge and pay our respects to their elders, past and present, and we pray that God will unite us all in a knowledge of his Son, in whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth, whether visible or invisible – all things have been created through him and for him.

I begin, tonight, by saying how privileged I feel to be your Bishop. This diocese is filled with amazing people dedicated to loving and serving Jesus in their communities. Over the past year I have heard stories of parishes establishing shelters for those in need, providing breakfasts for school students, lunches and evening meals to those less fortunate in their communities. There are stories about Religious Education in schools, Mainly Music and Messy Church, of Alpha courses and Bible Study groups; there are people enrolling in the Ridley Certificate of Theology, and everywhere an enthusiasm to see God's church grow.

These are wonderful signs of the kingdom of God being lived out in parishes across the Diocese. Signs of growth and change that build upon the faithful work of many people over many years. For some of us, the going is hard. Regional communities are shrinking, there are fewer and fewer resources to meet the needs, and there is a loss of our place in the community. The church has been pushed to the margins.

This means that, sometimes, it can seem as if all our efforts are in vain, particularly when our congregations remain small, with the same faithful few trying to manage everything. There can be many temptations to give up. It is important, at times like this, to remind ourselves that we are in a marathon and not a sprint. As the author of Hebrews states *we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, and so we lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely, and run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God* (Heb. 12:1ff).

In a world filled with the desire for instant gratification, we can easily forget that ministry and mission take time. Time to build relationships, time to understand the culture. When missionaries are trained to serve overseas, they are taught to go slow, to learn the language and the culture, build relationships with people; this is the focus for most of the first three years. We would do well to learn from this experience and not fall into

the trap of thinking that a new clergy person, a new programme, a new worship style will have instant results; this is seldom the case. The reality is, churches change and grow through patient and faithful proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is this proclamation, this focus upon Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, that equips, empowers and encourages the people of God to keep going in mission. In a society that is often negative towards the church and its structures, we are called to speak of Jesus, of his death and resurrection, and of the transformation that we experience through belief in him. We speak of reconciliation, of forgiveness and of the hope we have in Christ, of an assurance sealed within our hearts by the power and presence of God's Holy Spirit.

As we consider some of the challenges we face let us remember we are to run with perseverance the race set before us. May we remain focused upon Jesus and the joy and hope set he brings.

### **Safe Ministry and the Royal Commission**

The Royal Commission wrap-up hearing, into the Anglican Church, took place in March. The final report of the Commission will recommend a national scheme for dealing with claims of child abuse and redress. General Synod, which will meet in September this year, will almost certainly consider recommendations and options for a national scheme. I expect legislation will be presented that will establish a more uniform approach to dealing with complaints about child abuse and redress.

In this diocese ten complaints concerning child sexual abuse were reported between 1980 and 2015. It is important to note that many complaints do not surface until nearly thirty years after the offence occurred. The majority of claims, to date, made against this diocese relate to incidents in the 1960s and 1970s. The diocese continues to receive complaints and there are, at this point in time, outstanding allegations that have been lodged against the diocese. I am sure I speak for everyone here when I say we are profoundly and deeply sorry that people who came to the church seeking care and compassion were not treated with the dignity and respect that was their due as persons bearing the image of God.

The whole church has responded strongly to reports of past failures and made very significant changes, not just to child protection policies and screening, but to a whole range of issues where the church has, perhaps, lagged behind the rest of society.

Faithfulness in Service, the Anglican Church's code of conduct for all clergy and church workers in this Diocese, has recently been updated to include grooming behaviours, changes to the definitions of sexual abuse of a child, of sexual assault and harassment. There has been the addition of a clause about domestic and family violence, and changes to the definition of bullying. All of these have been made to recognise changes in societal expectations and law.

The most recent copy of Faithfulness in Service has been sent to all parishes and to clergy, and is available on the Diocesan website. I encourage you to read it carefully and to encourage others to do the same.

As a Diocese, we have revised our screening processes and the training of clergy and volunteers to ensure the safety of all who attend our churches. Some people found this process tedious. However, I am sure you would agree that we must do everything in our power to ensure that any abuse, be it sexual, physical, psychological or emotional, does not occur in our churches and ministries. To that end, we will continue to work on improving our processes and, in conjunction with the other Dioceses in the Province, have recently conducted an audit of our professional standards practices. The consultant's report will help us to discern where we can do better both as a Diocese and as a Province.

### **St Paul's Cathedral**

On Sunday morning our Synod Eucharist will be held in the Cathedral Parish Hall - The Pavilion.

This is due to the closure of St Paul's while investigative works are carried out on the structural integrity of the building. There is not time to go into a lot detail and at this point - that would be a premature. I do want you to know that there has been some movement in the front wall of the Cathedral. Engineers have been conducting various tests and are preparing a report to go to our insurers. It is not clear, at this time, if they will accept liability.

Initial cost estimates, to brace and underpin the front wall making the Cathedral safe for use, are in the order of three quarters of a million to a million dollars. However, if this work goes ahead, we will be committing the Diocese to a very lengthy programme of restoration and further expenditure in the order of five million dollars or more. This is money the Diocese simply does not have.

Without committing to any option and, while recognising the heritage and historic significance of St Paul's, I want to note some of the possible options that have been suggested to me as a way forward:

1. Restoration – apart from the cost, this will take a number of years and will require a very significant fundraising campaign.
2. Leave the cathedral closed and do nothing.
3. Demolish the existing building and replace it with something modern and more cost efficient. This will still cost in the region of two to three million dollars.

I suspect there are as many different viewpoints about what to do with the cathedral as there are people here tonight. I want to assure you that we are still some considerable way from making any decision. Once we have the final reports and insurance assessment we will begin a conversation about the future of the Cathedral and its environs. Whatever decision is made, it will be difficult and very time

consuming. I offer this information so that it may inform our prayers. Please give thoughtful and prayerful consideration to the future of this building, its role in the Diocese, and to the future ministry of the Cathedral Parish. While we may think we don't have the resources, God does. God has a plan and purpose in all of this, even though we may not yet see it. As we pray together may we discern God's plan.

### **Parish and Diocesan Finances**

As we have heard, an enormous amount of work has been done on the Diocesan budget, deficits have been reduced and more money made available for ministry. But recent events with the Cathedral and the lodgement of abuse claims against the diocese create a significant risk to our financial security. Be assured that we will continue to work hard to operate within our means and continue to invest wisely for the future while meeting our commitments.

Later in this Synod we will discuss the report on Parish Contributions. I am sure many views will be expressed as Synod seeks to come to a decision about how, and how much, parishes should contribute.

As the Diocesan contact on Stewardship in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, I discovered a number of misconceptions about how the church is funded. I offer the following points:

The Diocese and Parishes receive no government funding to help pay for the running of churches or the payment of clergy. If we can't raise the money ourselves there is no magic pot of gold we can dip into. The Diocese cannot support parishes that are not self sufficient indefinitely.

Parishes are supported by the giving of their members. If that giving is insufficient, then there comes a time when there is no option but to close a parish down. In parts of this Diocese, as in many other regional dioceses, we have been blessed by the generosity of others: the Bush Brotherhood and Bush Church Aid Society for example. Both of these organisations have had a significant impact on the Church, for without them there would be no witness to Jesus Christ in many parts of regional Australia. The Bush Brotherhood has gone and BCA has limited financial resources to meet the many needs of regional dioceses like ours. It is imperative that we continue to work together to establish sustainable ministry in the outback, but, let's be quite clear, that ministry will not look the same as what has happened in the past.

Giving is a foundational part of the Christian faith and spirituality. I think it was Martin Luther who first said there are three conversions necessary, the head, the heart and the purse, noting that, of the three, the conversion of the purse was the most difficult!

The idea that giving has nothing to do with faith and spirituality is unbiblical and wrong. Sixteen of the thirty eight parables that Jesus told are about money. There are roughly four times as many verses in the scriptures that deal with wealth and money than there

are dealing with prayer or faith. All through the bible there is an intimate correlation between the development of godly character and people's attitudes towards wealth. Christian teachers, leaders and preachers have a responsibility to speak about giving as an act of faith and spiritual development.

Jesus never asks us to tithe. In all the passages that Jesus talks about giving, the tithe is assumed, it was a foundational part of the life and culture of the society within which he lived and taught. But note this, Jesus' own teaching about giving goes much further than giving one tenth.

<sup>33</sup> *"Sell what you have and give to those in need. This will store up treasure for you in heaven! And the purses of heaven have no holes in them. Your treasure will be safe—no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. <sup>34</sup> Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be. (Luke 12:33-34)*

<sup>22</sup> *"There is still one thing you lack," Jesus said. "Sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." <sup>23</sup> But when the man heard this, he became sad because he was very rich. (Luke 18:22-23)*

Basic to this understanding, is the recognition of God's ownership of all that exists. Everything that we have, we have received from God. Understanding this makes a significant impact on our response to giving – it's not about our giving 10% of what is ours to God – it's not we who are being generous. God lets us use 90% of what is his – it is God who is being incredibly generous and we, in our giving, are merely returning to God a small portion of what he has given us.

Finally, fund-raising is only ever a stop gap measure. What is needed is a full time stewardship programme that aims to convert all people into disciples of Christ. Making disciples – people so committed to the life and ideals that Jesus taught – is essential for a healthy church. A church that is growing, spiritually and numerically is likely to be growing financially too.

If you have not run a giving program in your patch for a few years perhaps it's time you did. Time you took up the challenge for yourself and for your people – to grow in generosity, in faith and in spirit.

### **Mission Action Plan**

Many of you will have already seen the Diocesan Mission Action Plan, and some, I know, have begun to look at the challenges before us and to develop your own plans for your ministry area. This is exciting, because many of us are beginning to explore ways of connecting and reaching out in our communities – not that this was not happening before – but it is important that parishes and the Diocese set some goals and has a clear sense of vision.

Bob Jackson writing in his book **Hope for the Church**, (London, Church House Publishing 2003) states that:

*“The evidence and arguments so far suggest that dioceses are key units for determining the future decline or growth of local churches, and that the ethos, culture, structure and policies of a diocese will partly determine its own future growth or demise”* (p. 168).

The Mission Action Plan is formulated not to have all the answers, but to guide us as we start a journey, as we seek to restructure and set priorities that will ensure the continued provision of ministry to Central Queensland. The Mission Action Plan is put forward in the prayerful hope that it will guide the conversation of Bishop in Council and help in the development of a diocesan strategy and priorities for the future of the Anglican Church in Central Queensland.

### **Ministry Hubs**

If dioceses are the key units for growth or decline, it is essential that the diocese have a plan and provide as many resources as it can to enable local congregations to engage in mission for ministry. Two key facets of the diocesan mission action plan are the establishment of Regional Hubs and the Ridley Certificate as a means of providing encouragement training and support for ministry. This year we will be holding two hubs in Emerald, Barcaldine, Rockhampton and Biloela. Everyone is invited to attend these sessions which will consist of:

- a time of gathering and prayer
- a study session on a Biblical or Theological topic
- a session on practical aspects of mission and ministry
- a time for sharing ideas/challenges and hearing from others
- a time to pray for, and encourage, one another.

I have also begun to give some thought to a Bishop’s Certificate of Ministry for the training of Lay Ministers and to encourage further study towards ministry. The Bishop’s Certificate will be a three year program which includes the completion of the Ridley Certificate (or an equivalent and acceptable course of theological study) and a further six units of coursework which will be offered through the Regional Hubs.

The six units will cover the following themes

- Preaching – giving a talk, bible basics, the lectionary, themed talks, how to prepare.
- Pastoral Care – what is it? Pastoral Care and mission, listening skills, asking questions, safe ministry, where can I get help?
- Mission – Why do mission? The Bible and mission, personal evangelism, Alpha, Messy Church, Mainly Music, other mission activities.
- Leadership – Models of leadership, Jesus and leadership, the Parish Canon, the role of wardens, parish council and lay leaders, workplace/safe ministry issues, synod and bishop.
- Liturgy – the prayer book, morning and evening prayer, occasional services, holy communion, leading a service, intercessions, music, reading in church.
- Christian Ethics – the Bible, Faithfulness in Service, leading with integrity.

There will be a presentation at the Synod about the Ridley Certificate and I encourage you to speak to Jan Robinson or to Kel Morris, Justine Crous or Sue Witten, if you would like to find out more.

### **125 years and still going.**

In November this year the Diocese will celebrate 125 years of ministry in Central Queensland. It is time to celebrate the many wonderful events of our past and present, and to look forward to our future. We will plan something to mark the commencement of our anniversary year and I encourage parishes to look at different activities that you could run throughout 2018 that will draw attention to this milestone. I hope that, at the end of 2018, we will be able to gather as a diocese and celebrate together the results of our anniversary year.

Finally, I want to bring us back to the earlier words from Hebrews: *we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, and so we lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely, and run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God* (Heb. 12:1ff). As God's people we rest on the shoulders of many who have gone before. Like them, we will need to be alert to all those things that might hinder our ability to love and serve Christ. We will need to persevere, to keep our focus upon Jesus – for it is in Jesus' power and not ours that the Church will grow.

And so, focused upon Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip us with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.