

Diocese of Auckland

SUMMARY OF SYNOD 2016

The First Session of the 55th Synod of the Diocese of Auckland was held at Auckland Cathedral of the Holy Trinity from Thursday 1st to Saturday 3rd September 2016, commencing with the Synod Eucharist in St Mary's-in-Holy Trinity. The preacher was Bishop Kelvin Wright from Dunedin who used his personal experiences to highlight challenges facing the Church. His central theme was that although church structures may have been destroyed, Christ as the foundation of our faith can never be destroyed. His challenge to the Church was, "to look to the foundation of Christ and be born again". During the service, Sarah Moss and Michael Berry were commissioned as Archdeacons.

Bishops' Charge

The Bishops' Charge was presented jointly by Bishop Ross and Bishop Jim. Greetings were extended to all present, especially those new to Synod, while former members who had died in the past year were remembered. The death of Diocesan Manager, Kevin Third, during the year was also noted with sadness. On the positive side, growth had seen Northern Wairoa regain parish status, while the physical completion of the Cathedral was to be celebrated. Another positive was the real sense of purpose that was evident in many ministry units, particularly in the way they connected with their communities through both Diocesan and local programmes. At the same time, growing problems of homelessness and social inequality were noted, as was the vital contribution of the Auckland City Mission and others.

A major concern to be discussed during Synod was the effect of the continuing decline in church numbers. This was producing very significant material and financial challenges in supporting stipendiary ministry and meeting costs related to the maintenance and care of church buildings at a time when investment income was also reducing. It was acknowledged that rural parts of the Diocese were particularly affected. In exploring and finding possible solutions, they stressed it was important to retain a diocesan focus.

Copies of the Bishops' Charge can be found on the Diocesan website.

The Business of Synod

Following the service, Synod moved into the Cathedral to commence the business sessions. A tribute was paid to Matthew Ockleston who had stepped down from the positions of Lay Secretary and Deputy Chancellor. During his time in these positions (particularly the latter), he had made an outstanding contribution and a gift was made to him to recognise this. Synod warmly thanked him for his work.

Inspired by Air New Zealand's safety videos, the Diocesan staff had prepared a light-hearted, informative "Synod safety video" to explain the various procedures. The order paper consisted of two bills and sixteen motions (some forwarded by General Synod/Te Hinota Whanui as part of the assent process), while reports were to be presented by the Diocesan Council, the Auckland City Mission and the Cathedral. A conference session provided an opportunity to discuss issues relating to the viability of ministry units.

Diocesan Council & Quota

The Diocesan Council's presentation highlighted the extensive range of work undertaken over the past year. Attention was drawn to the establishment of the Finance and Audit committee to assist with finance related decisions.

It was noted that under the quota system, in the past year the actual amount received was significantly less than when the system was first made voluntary in 1983. As the quota provided 20% of the Diocese's income it was clear that several ministries could be at risk if funding remained at these levels. It was reported that a working group had been set up to consider funding options and to report back to Synod 2017. All ministry units will be invited to participate in consultation to develop a new scheme.

Housing and Homelessness

Two motions acknowledged issues relating to the shortage of affordable housing and homelessness. The first called on central and local government to provide affordable housing for low income New Zealanders, while the second challenged ministry units to take a proactive approach towards the homelessness. This included liaising with community-based organisations to seek solutions and providing assistance for the Auckland City Mission. It was also recommended that this matter be discussed in clergy cluster meetings over the coming year. Both motions were passed unanimously.

Equal Gender Representation & Inclusive Language

A motion from General Synod/Te Hinota Whanui sought support for both Synod and ministry units to work towards equal representation of women and men in decision-making at all levels and to encourage equality in involvement at diocesan events. Another sought to ensure the use of inclusive language in all areas, including liturgy, music, for people and for God. Both motions were passed without dissent.

Living Wage

A motion reminding members of Synod's commitment to the principle of a Living Wage, and encouraging all ministry units to join the Living Wage Movement Aotearoa New Zealand, was passed without dissent.

General Synod/Te Hinota Whanui: Motion 29

In May, General Synod/Te Hinota Whanui considered the report of the "A Way Forward – He Anga Whakamua – Na Sala Ki Liu" Working Group regarding the blessing of same gender relationships and decided the report and its recommendations should lie on the table until it next met in 2018. At that time, it was expected a decision would be made to move forward. A motion before Synod expressed gratitude for the commitment made but expressed regret for the delay caused. The debate covered several different views and the motion was passed with a majority in favour.

Synod Membership and Participation

The report of the Synod Arrangements Task Group provided the basis for a motion seeking to examine the composition of Synod. Part 2 of the report considered increasing youth representation and limiting the tenure of lay members. This topic was also the subject of one of the bills, although this did not proceed beyond discussion in principle. The debate, while supporting the motion, was wide-ranging and included discussion of both clerical and lay membership as well as the format of Synod's business. The Task Group will report back in 2017 when it is likely legislation will be presented to implement its recommendations. Part 3 made suggestions about the format of Synod for the Synod Arrangements Committee to consider.

Mission and Ministry Oversight Group

A paper entitled "Discussion of Rationalisation of Ministry Units and a Process for the Closure of Churches" prepared by the Group was considered in a conference session. The paper built on issues raised both in Bishop Kelvin's sermon and the Bishops' Charge. Working in small groups, members were asked to consider what made a ministry unit "missionally viable", including signs this was not happening. Responses would be collated by the Group, and further consultation will occur with ministry units, with the intention that Synod 2017 will further discuss these issues.

Other motions

Other motions called on the Government to hold a binding referendum before ratifying the Trans-Pacific Partnership (carried) and considered assents required by General Synod to legislative changes (two agreed, one declined). A motion confirming support for overseas motions was unanimously agreed with a target of \$300,000 set.

Auckland City Mission - Report

The City Missioner, Chris Farrelly, spoke about the work being done by the Auckland City Mission, including some of the programmes currently in place to support those in need. Appreciation was expressed for the contribution made to the community by the Mission and for the work done by Mission staff.

Cathedral - Report

Dean Jo presented a report on the Cathedral, outlining the ministry work being done there. Recently the Bishop Selwyn Chapel had been dedicated, thus completing the building of the Cathedral. She drew attention to the Consecration Year planned from Advent 2016 to Consecration on 28 October 2017. A motion of appreciation and congratulations was moved noting the special contribution made by Dean Jo.

Bills

Although two bills were on the order paper, only one proceeded to be considered. This revised the parental leave provisions for clergy and was agreed without amendment.

Synod closed with a vote of thanks to all involved in the leadership and organisation of the Synod.