



***BISHOPS' CHARGE TO THE FIRST SESSION
OF THE FIFTY FIFTH SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF AUCKLAND***

We greet you in the name of Christ at the opening of a new triennial Synod. Special greetings to those who are at their first Session of Synod. Could you please stand so that we can welcome you.

Having seen the safety briefing video, we feel sure that you will be more than ready to tackle anything that the synod throws at you.

Greetings also to Bishop Kito and Bishop Kelvin, and thank you for joining us for the opening worship and for this first sitting tonight.

In memoriam

Please stand as we acknowledge the following people who have died in the past year and who were members of this Synod.

HOUSE OF CLERGY

The Reverend Margaret Lowry
The Reverend David Holt
The Reverend Peter Davis
The Reverend Cyril Cooze
The Reverend Nick Schoombee
The Venerable Bruce Dale
The Reverend Jean McBurney

HOUSE OF LAITY

Kevin Third, Diocesan Manager
Barbara Duder, Pakuranga Parish
David Bremner, Papatoetoe Parish
Sir Graham Latimer
Mr Roger Allely, St Paul's, Te Atatu

Rest eternal grant unto them O Lord. And let light perpetual shine upon them.
May they rest in peace. And rise in glory.

Life and Ministry in the Diocese

One of the joys of being a bishop is to move about the whole diocese, and to observe and be part of great things that are happening. Wherever we go from the smallest to the largest communities, we find very committed people working hard and doing great things.

The people of Northern Wairoa have laboured hard together over the past few years. When Brendon Wilkinson went there as priest in February 2014, there was only a 2/3 stipend available. Over the next year that was built up to 75%, and this year it has returned to full, with deferred maintenance being managed, and a quota contribution budgeted for 2017. The people of that community of faith are to be congratulated for their hard work and vision. It was a joy at this month's Diocesan Council meeting to respond positively to a petition that their status of mission district be changed to that of a parish.

The Cathedral community is arriving at the end of an 8 year journey of visioning, planning and building that brings about the physical completion of this cathedral. A fortnight ago a great crowd gathered to celebrate the opening of the Bishop Selwyn Chapel, and to dedicate it to God's glory and for God's purposes. We hope you will take the chance to visit the chapel over the next couple of days. The cathedral community themselves have given 10% of the almost \$15m raised for the whole project. We look forward to a report from the Cathedral on Saturday as we prepare for a year of consecration in preparation for the consecration service in October next year.

It is not all about stipends and buildings, though they are among the signs of a healthy church community. Of equal importance is the sense of purpose of a worshipping community and its connection with the wider community in which it is set, which is its context of mission.

So it is heartening to see the growth of SPACE and of Seasons, to hear of local foodbanks assisting families in need, the hospitality and faith nurturing of Alpha programmes, English for Speakers of other Languages programmes, and many more ways in which worshipping communities are identifying the particular needs of their local communities, and realising their mission opportunities as they connect their gifts and talents in ways that serve others and demonstrate the love of God.

A new initiative in diocesan youth ministry has been the BOLD programme. BOLD stands for Building Outstanding Leaders and Disciples. Emily Paterson has led this programme for young people in their later teen years. It involves monthly gatherings, one-on-one mentoring through the year, and two mission encounters (one local and one overseas). The programme has just started with its second cohort after a highly successful first year.

We have continued to seek opportunities to support the arrival of refugees in our nation. The initial groups have been settled in Dunedin and Wellington, and we still await information about when a group will be resettled in Auckland, so that we can offer assistance. The Anglican and Catholic churches are working together nationally on this with the Red Cross which is the lead agency for resettlement work.

Meantime, we have been working with Refugees as Survivors to support them in their service delivery. RAS is the lead mental health agency for all incoming United Nations quota refugees entering New Zealand. Their Clinical Team additionally delivers specialist mental health services for convention refugees and asylum seekers either in detention or with cases before the Refugee Appeals Authority. This multi-disciplinary team assesses and treats refugees who are suffering the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder, grief, depression, anxiety and complex mental health issues as a result of their experiences.

Although their work begins when refugees arrive at the Mangere Refugee Reception Centre, they continue to provide follow-up services once people are settled in the wider community. One of their challenges is reaching clients spread around the city, where the cost and difficulties of transport can make it very challenging for clients to come to the agency offices, and when mobile teams can waste a lot of time traveling from one part of Auckland to another. So we are working with RAS to establish some local community centres based in local churches where they can more easily and effectively reach clients in a safe environment.

The Syrian war is in its sixth year with no sign of abating. A quarter of a million people have died, with a further one and a half million injured. The UNHCR has registered 4.8 million Syrians as refugees, and there are now 8 million people displaced inside Syria. We continue to hope and pray that our government may yet do more to increase the quota welcomed to this country.

We continue to develop our relationship with the Church of Melanesia. Auckland and Melanesia share historic links which date from Selwyn's first visits to those islands, the founding of the Melanesian Mission here in Auckland, the creation of Melanesia as a separate diocese, and the appointment of Patteson as its first bishop. Melanesia became a separate province 40 years ago and as time has gone by our links have become less relational and have continued through the Melanesian Mission Trust Board's funding and the students who come to study at St John's College.

Our efforts over the last couple of years to re-establish that relationship have been positively received. Both of us were able to be present at the installation of Archbishop George Takeli in April. Along with Bishop Kito, Bishop Robert Fitzpatrick from Hawaii, Lyn Stevens, and other members of the Melanesian Mission Trust Board, we ran a Bishops' School for the Melanesian bishops in August. This was the first time that their House of Bishops had undertaken such training, and they were enthusiastic for the opportunity. From our perspective it also provided the chance to develop more personal relationships with the bishops of their nine dioceses.

We wish to continue to build on this beginning and find ways to extend this relationship building more widely in the diocese. We will be looking to our own Diocesan Committee for Overseas Mission to be part of promoting this.

Looking to our future

During this First Session of this Synod we have set sometime to discuss a process of Rationalisation of Ministry Units and the Closure of Churches. It is a discussion that we anticipate will take us into

following Sessions of this Synod. This may seem an odd discussion to initiate at the beginning of the Decade of Mission but we believe that it is actually vital if we are going to engage in Mission. We know we must reach out in Mission but we also need to preserve, and make safe those good things we already have that we believe we will also need to serve God well in the future.

It is interesting and salutary to hear these words from Kevin Ward in an article he produced just over a decade ago entitled “Towards 2015: the future of mainline Protestantism in New Zealand:”

Numbers overall are likely to continue to decline, perhaps at an even faster rate than the previous two decades, as the remaining generation raised and socialised into the church by baptism as infants, confirmation as teenagers and membership as adults dies out. This will mean that by 2015 a considerable number of existing parishes will not have sufficient numbers to continue to maintain any form of meaningful life as faith communities. It will also lead to the necessity for considerable reorganisation of the parish structure of those churches, as well as their forms of regional and national organisation, which goes considerably beyond the current tinkering taking place.¹

Ward continues:

Many existing congregations are too aged for these people to ever make a connection with them and rather than pouring most of their time, energy and resources into continuing to keep these going, churches need to focus energy and resources on helping those congregations which exhibit life and health. Further to this, new faith communities need to be developed which have forms of belonging that can connect in meaningful ways with the lives of the still considerable number of young New Zealanders who still have at least the vestiges of Christian faith, but have been raised without any connection to the church.²

Ward’s piece is not all gloom and doom (and he is positive about some aspects), but if what he said was true a decade ago it is even more true today.

Professor Peter Lineham, a member of this Synod, in a recent unpublished presentation “Will Christianity survive in Christchurch beyond 2020?” notes that the “speed of the decline in the church is very evident when we compare the 2006 with the 2013 census figures.” That presentation points to the fact that, in so many ways, Christianity in Christchurch is heading towards a demographic cliff. We should probably ask Peter to do a similar study on Auckland. He would probably tell us that factors of immigration mean we face a slightly different reality. However, we would venture that we too are heading towards a similar kind of demographic cliff. Of course, it is not just people challenges. We are also facing very significant material and financial challenges. Hardly a month goes by when we don’t learn of a significant building issue in the Diocese and then there is the underlying risk we face with earthquake prone buildings.

¹ Ward, Kevin, “Towards 2015: the future of mainline Protestantism in New Zealand.” *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, Vol. 27, No. 1, April 2006, pp. 13–23

² *ibid.*

We are not alone or that unique. We are very grateful for the presence and contribution of the Rt Reverend Kelvin Wright to our opening worship this evening. The Dunedin Diocese is facing the same fundamental issues. Bishop Kelvin has acknowledged those in his blog post:

The simple truth is, we, in the Diocese of Dunedin can no longer afford a full time bishop. This year we are balancing the budget because the St. John's College Trust Board has recognised my role as a ministry educator and has allowed us to use some of the funding we use for educational work to be applied to the episcopate. ... At our peak, back in the early 1970's there were about 10,000 people worshipping in Anglican Churches in Otago and Southland every week. Last year there were around 2,000. In other words, there has been an 80% decline over the last 40 years. The infrastructure of our church was developed to serve a spiritual environment which has changed beyond recognition, and now we cannot sustain it.³

The first question is whether we can respond corporately and strategically together to this changing reality. At risk of being accused of using someone else's speech notes, we will use our own speech from 2014 when we attempted to point out to the Auckland Diocesan Synod that the deepest issue is shifting our individualistic congregational culture to a "we" culture. We said the following:

How we approach this and, indeed, how we approach all the challenges of being church assumes a "we" or and "us." ...

We are a Diocesan Church but we are more often simply a collection of congregations that, frankly, can apparently take or leave our belonging to one another. ...

It is possible to argue that in recent decades the Diocese has embraced its own version of 'Rogernomics.' The 'free market approach' has been such that if a particular Anglican Church faced challenges then it is largely up to them to solve them. If they can't make 'their little bit of the vineyard pay its way,' then the Diocesan Office has told them that might be terribly sad but that as a Diocese we have no real ways, particularly material and monetary ways, of supporting them.⁴ This approach has hit rural parts of the Diocese harder than it has hit urban parts of the Diocese but there is question that in a rapidly changing world we are failing in metropolitan Auckland too. If one were to look at a map, we are shrinking back to the centre (and the sharp minded will note that our centre is with a very particular social demographic). Overall, the "you sink or swim on your own" has meant that people have been very innovative and worked incredibly hard to "save themselves," but [it can lead to a 'localized tunnel vision' and congregational protectionism and]⁵ many good Anglican folk question how much time and effort is spent on keeping the 'roof over our head' and the 'show on the road' versus the time and effort spent on discipleship and mission in the world.

³ Kelvin Wright blog, "The long slow goodbye", 6 July 2016 Available Light Blog, <http://vendr.blogspot.co.nz/2016/07/the-long-slow-goodbye.html>

⁴ As we noted in 2014: "This is not entirely true. The Diocese has supported the likes of the East Tamaki Mission Venture, it has also supported some significant building projects such as at Birkdale and Whangaparaoa. But resources have been severely limited since the Global Financial Crisis and a drop in return in the various Diocesan investments. It is worth noting that in these cases "we" are not supporting this work, rather "we" are living off our forebears' good judgement and generosity."

⁵ Added in 2016

...

The prior question to much of what we hope to do and be in ministry is: is this about “us”? In other words, are these things “we” want to face together? – both the joys and the challenges.

There is so much more that could be said and we certainly need to understand further the complex issues we face. However, we do want you to hear the fundamental challenge we are facing. We think many of us know that we cannot continue to act in the same ways we have always done. Unfortunately though, we are showing very little capacity or willingness to engage together with these deep issues, and it is a simple reality that as bishops we can only lead and point the way. We cannot compel or dictate change. We believe that over the next three years this Synod must help the Diocese seize this nettle.

Other matters before us

Thank you to those who have brought business before us that turns our focus beyond the needs of the Church and looks to the needs of the wider world. Housing and homelessness are critical issues for Auckland. The growth of the city with its increased population outstripping the supply of housing has led to a growing unaffordability and to situations of overcrowding, poor standards, or complete homelessness. The numbers of people living on the streets around the CBD have doubled over the past couple of years. The City Mission continues to play a vital role with this community of people, and are looked to by civic leaders for their expertise and advice in responding well to rough sleepers. Chris Farrelly took up his role as City Missioner earlier this year, and we look forward to hearing from him during the Synod.

The question of income levels and income disparity are not unrelated to this. Local body elections are often poorly supported by voters, but this year it seems to us that it is extremely important to establish a good Council that can work well with Central Government in addressing these issues of well-being for Auckland.

The increased concentration of people and resources in Auckland has implications for the wider region and the rural areas of the Diocese. Jobs get harder to find, the population base decreases, and generations of welfare dependence emerge with the sense of hopelessness that can attach itself to that. This sadly contributes to a growth in crime, and especially crimes of violence, some of which have the most damaging impacts hidden in the home. We note that a challenge for us as the Church is to maintain our presence in these communities in effective ways that offer hope and help.

The Episcopal Team

Change is a constant, as the saying goes, and that has been true for us as an Episcopal Team. It is now five years since the team first formed and we have placed a good deal of emphasis on being present in ministry units, bringing support especially to clergy and leadership teams as you seek to undertake mission and ministry. We believe that has borne good fruit. As we have said before, it is

our view that God's mission works itself out in our Church through the people of God as they are at work in local worshipping communities. It is our hope and desire to do what we can to challenge, encourage and resource the people of God in this diocese to fulfil that calling.

The changes we have made in the structure of the Episcopal Team reflect this increased focus on presence with purpose; that is, we will continue to be present among you, bringing the life and ministry of the Episcopate to you through our Team, and will be working with you to engender new ways of responding to the changing context of mission, so that we remain fresh and effective.

We are very grateful for the work of every member of the Episcopal Team, and for their commitment to the good of this Diocese. In particular we wish to acknowledge the ministry offered by Archdeacons Sue McCafferty and John Blundell whose work with us has now concluded. It has been good tonight to welcome and commission new Archdeacons Sarah Moss and Michael Berry. Please pray for us all as we seek to serve you well.

On with the work

As always there is much to do over a relatively short period of time. Thank you for your willingness to be part of this work. We proceed with hope and joy, and seek to know the guiding presence and wisdom of the Spirit of God among us.

Bishop Ross Bay
Bishop Jim White

1st September 2016