



BISHOP'S CHARGE TO THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY SIXTH SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF AUCKLAND

Tēnā koutou katoa.

We make history today as we gather in a virtual forum to convene the Synod of the Diocese. I recognise the restrictions that this form of gathering places on us, and the challenges it creates for engaging in effective debate. With the uncertainty created by the recent lockdown and our remaining in higher alert levels, I decided that we could not confidently plan for a postponed Synod and that we should meet in order to attend to business of necessity. The Synod Statute requires that we hold an annual meeting and, though I think we could have been forgiven this year if we had not met, it seemed important to me that we do more urgent work together and not risk having to find other mechanisms for it.

Hence, in addition to normal procedural matters, we will attend to the City Mission Bill which will allow their Board to appoint additional members to manage an enhanced workload through the HomeGround project, and we will elect members to vacancies on Diocesan Council. I consider these various matters to be non-controversial and thus not significantly affected by the inevitable constraints on debate.

At the same time, I am sorry that we are not able to do other work that people had taken time to prepare for our consideration. It may yet be that we could hold a special session of Synod before the end of the year and undertake some of that, but time and circumstances will tell. In the hope that we can do so, we have set Friday 20th and Saturday 21st November aside in the Cathedral.

You may be interested to know that apart from Waiapu, who will meet in person at the end of October, each of the other Synods of the New Zealand Dioceses will meet virtually this year.

This year's Charge will focus mostly on COVID-19, our experience and response to it. But although it has dominated our lives this year, we have not allowed it to control us, so I will also attend briefly to a number of other things. The Charge will be available both in written form and as a video from later today on the Diocesan website.

IN MEMORIAM

As is our custom, we pause to give thanks for former members of the Synod who have died since we last gathered.

House of Clergy

The Reverend Philip Sallis
The Reverend Terry Molloy
The Reverend Christopher Ison
The Reverend Jill Renner
The Reverend Phyllis Tailby
The Reverend Peter Davie

House of Laity

John Allen	Parish of Pukekohe
George Palmer	Parish of Devonport / Waimate North
Alistair Parke	Parish of Pukekohe / Diocesan Secretary
David Juby	Parish of Thames
Ian Wilson	Parish of One Tree Hill
Helen MacCormick	Parish of Clevedon
Dorothy Wood	Beachlands Maraetai Mission Venture
Collen O'Brien	Beachlands Maraetai Mission Venture
Dee McOnie	Parish of Royal Oak
Brother Damian Kenneth, SSF	First Director of Vaughan Park

Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord,
And let light perpetual shine upon them.

COVID-19

I am not telling you anything that you don't know when I say that the onset of this global pandemic has had an incredible impact on every aspect of life and well-being: physical health, economic security, mental health, and organisational capacity to name a few categories.

We are aware of how well we have fared in Aotearoa New Zealand in terms of containing the disease and thus minimising illness and death. What none of us know for sure is the impact that this will have on people's lives in the medium to long-term. Support provided by the Government has assisted many businesses to retain staff in the meantime, and for people to manage financial commitments to housing. But there is a limit to this and the latest experience of lockdown, especially in the Auckland Council area, has further deepened the economic uncertainty which has flow-ons into the lives of people and households.

Church life has not been immune to this. On the whole most of our ministry units are weathering it well with their own careful financial controls along with initial support from the Government wage subsidy and Diocesan quota relief. We are thankful that a larger than expected end of year surplus from Trust Management provided the Diocesan Council with additional reserve funds to allocate to this kind of support.

Of more significance to us has been the impact on the expression of our life through not being able to physically gather for worship, fellowship, and pastoral care. It has reinforced for me what an incarnational Church we are, and the extent to which we experience and express the love of God through our corporate life.

Not that our corporate life has been suspended, however. Clergy and other leaders in our ministry units responded immediately to the challenges presented by the March lockdown and found ways to keep worshipping communities connected together through the 9 Sundays of that first period. Clergy quickly adapted to that challenge, decided on a strategy, and learned the new skills they needed to implement it. For many this was a first step into using digital technology to gather for worship. For others it was an enhancement of work with which they had already experimented.

By whatever means people maintained contact and led worship, from the simplest means to the most high-tech, I have heard nothing but thanks from people that an effort was made and that they were able to still feel part of their community of faith and worship, connected to one another in it. The old-fashioned telephone tree had its power as well, and lots of people I have spoken to have told me how much they appreciated a call from someone else to check on how they were doing.

The Archdeacons tell me that there was a very high attendance in virtual cluster meetings of clergy and that colleagues have found great support and encouragement from one another as they have shared ideas and resources. It is moments like these that we realise the great value of being a diocesan church with these connections innately part of us. Quite a few clergy have told me about those working in other more congregational traditions where those networks of support have been largely absent.

I know how hard people have been working, and the frustration of constant rescheduling or the cancelling of plans, and the loss of momentum that results. Kindness has been the virtue that we have been encouraged to exercise and I tautoko that, along with an encouragement to be patient with one another as we make our way through this. I am very aware of the levels of tiredness and stress that people are feeling and hope that we can show deep and genuine care for one another.

I must pay great credit to the Episcopal Team and to the Neligan House team as a whole, who together have maintained our corporate diocesan life well through these months. We have tried to pitch our comms as well as we can, providing the best advice and information that we could while trying not to impose particular mechanisms for implementing it so that you had the freedom to adapt in your own place. I am so grateful to work as part of such a skilled, committed and supportive team.

There is much for us to learn from what we are experiencing, especially about what it means to exist as an online Church, what community means, implications for sacramental life, and so on. The Reverend Dion Blundell has agreed to convene a working group that will gather up those learnings so that we do not lose them, and to see what part they should play in our ongoing ministry. Many people have spoken about the different people they realised they were reaching in an online way who would not normally come to church.

I believe that this crisis has further emphasised what was already a societal trend, and that is that people are moving away from global and are looking for a genuine experience of what it means to live connected into a local community. At our best, we know a lot about that and how to do it well.

As I said at the start of my address, there is so much more to our life apart from COVID response, and so let me give you a taste of that in a few areas.

SUSTAINABILITY

One of the ways in which greater interest in local is being seen is a desire by people to live more sustainably. We have been pushing into this area more in recent years, and beginning to make more tangible commitments to what it means as a church. We were shocked and saddened by the sudden death of John Allen, the Diocesan Sustainability Fieldworker, not long after Synod last year. John was a champion and a prophet for sustainable living.

Cathy Bi-Riley has stepped brilliantly into that space for us and is providing excellent leadership. Diocesan Council has approved work proceeding on the Auckland Anglican Response to Climate Change plan and we are taking steps to implement that at Neligan House with our Going Green strategy, starting with improved recycling, bike stands and a food waste composting system.

ADJust have a particular focus on climate justice and they, Cathy and the Climate Change Working Group are collaborating well together to advance this work.

We are currently in the Season of Creation, and I am glad to know that quite a few ministry units are theming worship around that aspect of mission and ministry during these weeks.

AUCKLAND CITY MISSION

The Mission came to birth in the wake of a global pandemic, and it now celebrates its centenary in the midst of another. It was one of the agencies that was able to carry on its services to the community right through Level 4, to ensure that the homeless were given shelter and that the hungry were fed. This was at some cost to staff, a number of whom had to isolate from their families in order to provide support to others in need. I was impressed by the collaboration between the Mission and the Anglican Trust for Women and Children at that time. While some of ATWC's social workers could not do their normal work, they jumped in with the Mission team to support them.

We congratulate the City Mission on 100 years of service to the people of Auckland and beyond. We are excited by progress on the Mission HomeGround project and look forward to that opening and the enhancement of services it will provide. During the debate on the City Mission Bill later on, Chris Farrelly will be able to tell us a little more about all of that.

ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY

In 2018 the Government announced that it was establishing a Royal Commission to enquire into the experience of people who had suffered abuse in care. Originally intended as a state inquiry, the Church lobbied to be included as a significant provider of institutional care through the period under examination, the 1950s onward.

Among the churches, the Anglican Church is one focus for the Commission, along with the Catholic Church and Salvation Army. We will appear at hearings early next year as part of an examination into processes of redress and the experience of those who have brought complaints to us. The Church has a commitment to facing our past, responding well to what we hear, and improving our actions for the future.

TIKANGA RELATIONSHIPS

We remain committed to good engagement with our Tikanga partners, especially Te Tai Tokerau with whom we have the most significant share of life in the Diocese. Diocesan Council was able to offer an additional gift to Tai Tokerau this year beyond our usual partnership contribution. We have established a new Partnership Commission to maintain better connections and build mutual support across the Three Tikanga within the Diocese.

Over the past year we have been working with Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei to seek to resolve an historic issue relating to the sale of land at Ōrākei by the Church which should have been returned to Ngāti Whātua. This is unrelated to our former site at St James' Church. We have made good progress in our discussion with their Trust Board representatives and hope that we can bring this to a conclusion in coming months.

MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT

This year's Ministry Conference could not be held in person and so we gathered online for two sessions over two days. This has been followed up by "Rev Talks" which are short professional development presentations online which licensed ministers are able to watch in their own time and then discuss in corporate forum.

Suicide Awareness training has begun with good numbers attending and very positive feedback from participants about the quality of resourcing that has been provided.

A new strategy for Lay Training is needed and work on that is underway so that we can provide a programme that equips lay people well for the exercise of their ministry within the church and beyond.

At Glen Innes we are about to embark on a new ministry venture that will provide for full-time ministry in the parish for the first time in many years. A partnership between the parish, the diocese, and the ATWC will make this possible. Joel and Hinemoa Carpenter will get underway there later in the year.

A long hope of mine has been to establish some Young Adult Intentional Communities, and we are working with Northwest Anglican Parish to partner on this. My hope is that we will be able to replicate this model in other places.

The diocesan website is undergoing a major overhaul to make it a more useful and accessible resource for us all, and to offer a fresh image to visitors. The existing content has been shifted to a new and more flexible platform, and we are now working on reorganising the content to be able to relaunch it.

St John's College Trust Board has made a fund available for new ministry that responds to the changed environment resulting from COVID-19 and we will be submitting an application for significant funding to allow for enhanced digital presence in our ministry units.

The Diocesan Development Fund has been rebuilt in recent years and is making funds available for new projects which allow ministry to be established and grow in new ways. Beyond building projects there is an emphasis on innovation that will enable the church to respond to changing contexts and reach new groups of people.

IN CONCLUSION

I thank you for your commitment to the life of the Church in this Diocese. We have much to be thankful for and much to look forward to which gives us hope. But most of all we celebrate the privilege that it is to be called in the service of the Gospel and to proclaim and uncover the Kingdom of God in our midst.

Bishop Ross Bay
5th September 2020