



BISHOP'S CHARGE TO THE FIRST ORDINARY SESSION OF THE FIFTY SEVENTH SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF AUCKLAND

Tēnā koutou katoa.

It is very good to be gathered in person in the Cathedral for this First Session of the Fifty Seventh Synod of the Diocese. Online tools have been great to help us keep the wheels turning, but there is nothing like being together in one place.

For those new to this body, a Synod is a three-year affair held across three ordinary meetings which are called Sessions. The most significant refreshment of membership therefore happens in this first year, though from year to year there are inevitable changes due to other commitments that people take up.

Could those who are joining the Synod for the first time please stand so that we can welcome and acknowledge you.

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

Bishop Bruce Moore

Bishop Peter Atkins

The Reverend Herb Simmonds

The Reverend Roger Couper

The Reverend Jennifer Blood

The Reverend Pat Adams

The Reverend Eleanor Battley

The Reverend Russell Cook

The Reverend Jim Pascoe

The Reverend Ross McDougall

The Reverend Anthony Mundell

The Reverend Cathie Rogers

The Reverend Dennis Urquhart

House of Laity

Bruce Davidson, former Chancellor of the Diocese
Lorraine Hatfull, Parish of Warkworth

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

COVID-19

In common with other organisations and churches, we continue to work to recover from the impacts of COVID-19. The period when Delta and Omicron reached our shores, from August last year through to Easter this year, some 8 months, imposed significant restrictions on gatherings. This is the area of the COVID response strategy in which the churches are included. Services of worship and other activities were once again either suspended or curtailed for long periods. Churches in the Auckland Council area were closed for a full 4 months.

Our situation was then compounded by the introduction of vaccine mandates. Once gatherings were able to take place again in a limited way, there were very restricted numbers for non-vaccine pass gatherings. This meant that our churches found themselves having to require the production of a pass to allow people to attend services. In some places dispensations were sought to hold non-pass services and events to offer ministry to those who were not vaccinated. All of this was the source of some distress to people as it sat in contra-distinction to our ethos of welcome to all. We had to walk a very careful line between that and our responsibility to the health of the community as a whole.

During the first half of last year, before all of this, I was hearing of a renewed momentum and hope returning to ministry units with lots of activity underway again. But the extended period since last August has taken a heavy toll on our life with most congregations reporting a return of only 70-80% of people to worship. Some are still cautious about returning. For others it is a case of new habits being formed and so a drifting away from active church life. It is too easy for us not to immediately miss those who are absent and to lose the relational connections. I think this is often the way people leave churches, and the COVID response has created a pressure cooker for that dynamic.

There is a big task to achieve a regathering of people. I was really glad to hold some half-day regional gatherings of clergy in the middle of the year to talk about our experiences of working through this and about how we see the way ahead. It is not the task of the clergy alone, but needs the whole people of God to attend to it. Good programmes and vibrant worship will be part of it, but I think that the relational aspect is critical, that is we need to be personally in touch with people to invite and encourage them to return.

Everyone is feeling the impacts of two and a half years of COVID. We see the signs of stress being worked out in society in all sorts of ways. There is an opportunity in this for the church. People are looking for connection, belonging, care, community. At our best we know how to do that really well and the brilliance of our local presence in local communities is a natural springboard to help people find these things. I believe very much that believing comes as a result of belonging. So let us help people to belong among us, and in doing so let us help them come to know the one who gathers us, Jesus Christ.

LAMBETH CONFERENCE

I have had the privilege of attending the 15th Lambeth Conference held in Canterbury, England over 12 days in July/August. Bishops gathered around the theme of God's Church for God's World. Being there was quite an experience, a little bit like a Guide or Scout Jamboree, but without the flying fox and the mud slide. There were around 660 bishops, 400 spouses, and a myriad of officials. It was hard to make new friends because there were so many people that you would meet once and have a conversation and then be lucky to actually see again.

That was compensated for in the opportunity to meet in small groups most days where we did bible study and where we had discussions on the various presentations. We met in this way from across the Provinces and my group included bishops from South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Canada, Kenya, South Africa and England. We parted company at the end of the Conference with a sense that we had each gained from this interaction and from the insights and understandings that we had of our different contexts where we are each working out what it means to be faithful Anglican Christians in our stewardship of the Gospel.

There is no question that there were tensions in coming together. Bishops from some parts of the world had chosen not to attend because of our continuing divisions over human sexuality. In particular the Provinces of Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda were not there. Prior to the Conference starting there was concern about the draft Lambeth Call on Human Dignity and its affirmation of the 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10. I think there was a risk of people walking away from the Conference over this. Archbishop Justin Welby worked hard to avoid this, and the Conference held together with a respectful spirit across those differences.

When it came to discussing the Call on Human Dignity, Archbishop Justin had this to say to capture the reality of the current situation in the Communion with respect to human sexuality and marriage:

As we discuss this, we are all vulnerable.

For the large majority of the Anglican Communion the traditional understanding of marriage is something that is understood, accepted and without question, not only by Bishops but their entire Church, and the societies in which they live. For them, to question this teaching is unthinkable, and in many countries would make the church a victim of derision, contempt and even attack. For many churches to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence.

For a minority, we can say almost the same. They have not arrived lightly at their ideas that traditional teaching needs to change. They are not careless about scripture. They do not reject Christ. But they have come to a different view on sexuality after long prayer, deep study and reflection on understandings of human nature. For them, to question this different teaching is unthinkable, and in many countries is making the church a victim of derision, contempt and even attack. For these churches not to change traditional teaching challenges their very existence.

So let us not treat each other lightly or carelessly. We are deeply divided. That will not end soon. We are called by Christ himself both to truth and unity.¹

¹ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/speeches/lambeth-call-human-dignity-read-archbishop-justins-remarks>

The Lambeth Calls as a whole were presented to the Conference and discussed by bishops in small groups. Feedback from those discussions has been provided to the drafting group which will now do further work on them before they are ultimately offered to each Province for consideration. The process for that has not yet been determined.

The whole notion of a Lambeth Call was an important change at this Conference. Prior Conferences have passed Resolutions. They were resolutions with no authority. They simply recorded a majority view of a gathering of bishops at a moment in time. There is no corpus of international Anglican law, and even if there was one, it would not be for bishops to add or subtract from it. We are a synodically-governed Church. So the idea of a Call from Lambeth to the Communion is a much healthier notion and allows the synodical gatherings of each member Church of the Communion to determine what to do with those Calls once they are presented to us.

I have been appointed as the lead bishop for our Province on the new Anglican Communion Science Commission. This may come as a surprise to anyone who knows that I didn't do any science beyond Year 11 at school. But I have an interest in science and in the relationship between science and faith. The role of the lead bishop will be to encourage each Province to learn from the work of the Commission and to develop thought leadership on issues of science and faith.

There is much that can be said about the Conference and the matters that were presented and discussed. I encourage those who are interested to look at the Conference website where there is a huge amount of information.²

VOCATIONS TO ORDAINED MINISTRY

Such a vocation is an invitation into a lifestyle even more than it is a call to fulfil certain functions of ministry. Those who have responded to this call understand both the privileges and responsibilities, both the joys and demands, that come from ordained service. Together with my Ministry Advisors, I seek to attend well to the work of discerning those whom God is calling to this life and work.

The number of people who are offering for ordained ministry is low and there is an overall shortage of clergy within the Church. We share this in common with many other Provinces of the Communion. In the coming years I want to more actively address that issue and encourage more vocations. The Reverend Brenda Rockell has accepted my invitation to the Diocesan Vocations Chaplain and will fulfil that role alongside her ministry as Vicar of Royal Oak. As well as meeting with those who enquire about the possibility of ordained ministry, and being chaplain to the discernment residential event, Brenda will also work with me on strategies for promoting vocations.

SELWYN FOUNDATION AND AUCKLAND CITY MISSION

Two of our partner social service agencies have made significant developments this year. At the beginning of 2022, the City Mission staff were able to establish themselves in the new Hobson Street HomeGround building and open for business. It is a remarkable place of welcome, hospitality and care. The building of it and the fundraising for it has been a wonderful sign of God's grace and of vision offered to God's people. Many in this Diocese were part of that work. Bishop Jim White gave

² <https://www.lambethconference.org/>

exceptional leadership to the project as Chair of the Mission's Board. It is sad that Jim did not live to see the completion of it. His name is memorialised in HomeGround's board room.

Thank you to Helen Robinson for your leadership of the City Mission and for being our preacher tonight. I look forward to joining you for the official opening of HomeGround later this month.

Late last year the Selwyn Foundation announced the sale of many of its retirement village sites to Metlifecare. This is a bold move and has not been without controversy. For many years the Foundation has been both questioned and itself actively concerned about what it is doing to assist vulnerable older people in the community. For various good reasons over the decades, the majority of its work and resources was within its residential sites. The Foundation wished to have a much more significant impact in the wider community, and to partner with the Church and others to provide community-based care. The sale will provide investment funds that are expected to see \$100m applied to this charitable purpose over the next 10 years.

The Selwyn Foundation continues to hold Selwyn Village as its flagship site and a place where best practice elder care is aspired to and can be modelled. Continued hands-on involvement in residential care is an essential part of Selwyn's overall mission to provide care to the wider elder community so as not simply to become a charitable funding body.

ATTENDING TO ABUSE IN THE CHURCH

The Anglican Church continues to be a participant in the work of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care, and seeks to learn from the Commission's findings. At the end of last year an interim report on Redress was published and this has helped to guide the Church's developing efforts to engage in effective redress with survivors of abuse.

During the past year, the Diocesan Council has supported financial redress to a number of survivors of abuse while in the care of the Church and our related bodies. I have been part of a number of apology meetings with survivors as we have faced up to our failures in the past to provide appropriate care and to allow environments to exist within which abuse could occur.

There has been significant interest in Dilworth School over the past two years since a number of former staff members were arrested on charges of sexual abuse. Among them was former Chaplain Ross Browne who was convicted on 16 such charges and is now serving a prison term of six and a half years.

In the first half of this year two important things have taken place. The first was a Ministry Standards Commission Tribunal which found Ross Browne guilty of misconduct as a result of these convictions and recommended to me the Outcome of Deposition. This is the highest penalty under our Canons and means the permanent removal of the rights of Holy Orders and the ability to hold any office in the Church.

The second thing was an enquiry into the circumstances of Ross Browne's appointment to ministry roles in the Church following his resignation from Dilworth School. This work was undertaken independently by retired High Court Judge Rodney Hansen QC. Two significant matters are highlighted in the report. One is the conflict that arose in a bishop's pastoral responsibilities towards clergy and a bishop's responsibility to hold clergy accountable to standards of ministry. This issue is being resolved through the changes made to the Canons on Ministry Standards in Title D.

The other matter is the importance of full disclosure of information to relevant parties during the process of making any appointments in the Church. This is an important learning of which bishops in particular must take heed.

The full report is available on the Diocesan website.

Further work needs to be undertaken to understand the nature of abuse in the Church and to ensure that appropriate accountabilities are put into effect. The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia has a commitment to continue this work.

I wish to reiterate the apology I have previously made to those who have been victims of abuse through the mechanisms of our Church and its people.

A BIG THANK YOU

I am so aware of how hard people are working – in our ministry units, our chaplaincies, in social services and the wider community, in the Diocesan Office. People are carrying great responsibilities and give beyond what could be expected. You are lay and ordained, paid and volunteers. You allow the work of the Church to continue in the face of many challenges, and so enable the good news of Jesus Christ to be made known. There is so much happening in the life of our worshipping and ministering communities that proclaims the hope we know in Christ. Thank you. I hope you find great satisfaction in what you do.

I want to offer particular thanks to those with whom I work most closely as members of the Episcopal Team. Your dedication to your ministry and to seeking the good of this Diocese and its people is exemplary and I am grateful for you beyond words.

THE WORK OF THIS SESSION

It is an unusual Session in that we have no Bills and a small number of motions. We therefore took the decision to shorten the Synod, saving us all time and cost by not gathering on Saturday. Though the Order Paper is short, it contains some important and weighty issues. Much of what is there is about review and change.

I have heard a lot over the last couple of years as to whether COVID is providing us with the opportunity to reconsider things and see what should be done differently. I think this is reflected in much of what will take our attention tomorrow as we meet. We have invitations to consider the structure and functioning of our Diocesan Synod, the Three Tikanga structure of the Church, the way we manage building maintenance, and our centralised accounting service.

We are not going to solve all of those things tomorrow, but we can listen to one another well and listen for the voice of God's Spirit, and work to ensure that what we do and way that we do it continues to be fit for purpose and to serve well a changing Church in a changing context of mission.

Thank you for your attention tonight. Let us attend well to our work as a whole.

Bishop Ross Bay
1ST September 2022