



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

Tēnā anō koutou katoa.

Sessions of Synod seem to come around more quickly these days and it seems no time since we last gathered here. It is the third session of this current Synod which means we conclude three years of work together and prepare to change membership prior to starting over again next September.

Nevertheless, there will be people who have joined us for the first time as members by way of filling vacancies that have arisen. It would be good if you could stand so that we can offer you a welcome.

2024 IN MEMORIAM

There are also those who have left us having served as members of the Synod in years gone by. I ask you all to now stand as we hold thankful memory for those who have died.

House of Bishops

The Right Reverend Bruce Gilberd

House of Clergy

The Reverend Judy Vause

The Reverend Boyd Wilson

The Reverend Paul Gravelle

The Reverend Martin Bridge

The Reverend Clay Nelson

The Reverend David Swann

The Reverend John Hewlett

The Reverend Samuel Prasad

The Reverend Jean Brookes

The Reverend Bob Neison

The Reverend Dr Calum Gilmour

The Reverend Neil Fuge

House of Laity

Rod Oram, Parish of St Andrew Epsom
 Heather Ayrton, Mission District of Waimate North
 Janice Cooper, Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
 Yvonne Coward, Parish of Pakuranga
 Ron Buckton, Parish of Warkworth
 Maggie Stansfield, Parish of Warkworth
 Peter Wreaks, Parish of Warkworth

Rest eternal grant unto them, O God, and let light perpetual shine upon them
 May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

KIINGI TŪHEITIA PŌTATAU TE WHEROWHERO VII

This last week has seen the unexpected death of Te Kiingi Tūheitia. So unexpected in fact that Bishop Kito was on his way to Geneva and had reached Dubai when he heard the news, so got on the next flight he could to return home. I had the amazing experience and privilege of being at Tūrangawaewae on Tuesday and joining with the Mihinare delegation at the morning pōwhiri to pay our respects.

Kiingi Tūheitia has been referred to as Te Kiingi o te kotahitanga, with his efforts and calls for unity among Māori and in the nation as a whole being the dominant theme of his leadership these 18 years. That was seen powerfully at the start of the year when 10,000 people gathered at Tūrangawaewae to attend a national hui on unity.

And then just a fortnight ago at the celebrations on the 18th anniversary of the coronation, a challenge was issued to the Government about the proposed Treaty Principles Bill, building on the many challenges that have been offered to it over past months, including from our Archbishops. At that hui the National Party and NZ First indicated that they would not support its progress through Parliament.

That's a relief for many of us, but it has been given a lot of political airtime and clearly still will be by it presumably getting as far as a first reading and perhaps a select committee. It does feel to me that coalition politics mean that the population is being played with through the uncertainty and anxiety that has been created by this issue, when other coalition partners clearly do not intend to support it. Let's hope and pray for good debates when that time comes, the honest facing of issues that are important to people about this, and a reassertion of a critical foundational element of our nationhood.

Let us pray for kotahitanga. Let us also welcome and acknowledge the new Māori monarch, Kuini Nga wai hono i te po, as she assumes leadership of the Kiingitanga.

PARTNERSHIP WITHIN THE CHURCH

Bishop Kito Pikaahu had hoped to be here tonight but his involvement in Kingi Tūheitia's funeral today has prevented that.

I look forward to being present at the opening of the Hui Amorangi of Te Tai Tokerau in a couple of weeks' time. Our partnership as Diocese and Amorangi has a strong history with our commitments to one another extending back before the structures of the Three Tikanga were implemented. Good intentions have not always evinced in ideal actions and so this is a relationship we must never take for granted, but must continue to work on actively. The Diocesan Council is committed to that and we will hear in their report tomorrow of current activity to achieve it.

We engage with Te Manawa o te Wheke in relation to the parts of the Diocese in the Northern Waikato and the Coromandel Peninsula. This is a less active partnership due to their relationships with several dioceses, but it does not go ignored.

There is work with Polynesia that Archbishop Sione and I would like to attend to which would clarify and hopefully strengthen ministry which the Diocese of Polynesia undertakes in Auckland. Some of your ministry units offer hospitality to congregations from Polynesia. The basis on which this occurs needs a much stronger foundation for it to be a more true partnership.

WHANAKETIA – THROUGH PAIN AND TRAUMA, FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care in State and Faith-based Institutions has completed its work and published its final report, Whanaketia. The Commission has been working since early 2018 and has heard from thousands of survivors, held numerous public hearings, examined countless documents, and published several interim reports. The final report is extensive and I encourage people to read it, at least its Executive Summary and Key Findings, to understand the extent and impact of abuse in institutional care through the second half of last century, and especially the Church's part in it.

It is not possible to adequately summarise the report, however it feels important that I record here some critical matters and especially some that relate to the Anglican Church. This is difficult material, and I want to acknowledge those among us tonight who may be the survivors of abuse themselves and for whom this could be difficult to hear.

The Commission estimates that 200,000 people were subject to abuse in the period 1950-1999 which it examined. The abuse was wide-ranging in its form, including psychological, emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual. The environment for making abuse possible was created through institutional structural failures, societal attitudes, poor practice, lack of accountability and a failure to respond to complaints when they were made.

Within faith-based institutions further factors were the moral authority held by representatives of faiths, the trustworthiness of clergy and leaders, and the misuse of beliefs to justify abuse.

The impacts on survivors through the trauma experienced has been on the quality of relationships, a confusion and distortion of issues of gender and sexuality, physical and mental health, and has led to antisocial behaviour, substance abuse and crime.

When commenting on the Anglican Church, the Report notes:

The Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia was at fault for:

- i. promoting corporal punishment, normalising bullying in schools, and suppressing Māori and Pacific Peoples' culture
- ii. failing to implement monitoring and leaving management to individual leaders
- iii. allowing complaints to be managed by those familiar with the alleged abusers, with some unwilling to accept a fellow clergy member could be an abuser
- iv. failing to protect people and hold abusers accountable by ignoring or covering up abuse. Perpetrators were shielded by the sanctity of their roles within the Church
- v. disbelieving survivors initially and labelling them as untrustworthy or deceitful.

The Anglican Church has sought to participate in all these proceedings in good faith and along the way in these past 6 years has learned an enormous amount about the appropriate trauma-informed response to survivors of abuse.

The Commission has called for actions to right the wrongs of the past and for public apologies to those harmed. This is work to which we are committed, and we have been working actively on redress with survivors of abuse within the Church and its related institutions.

Whanaketia has set out 138 recommendations to which faith-based institutions and the State must now respond as we establish a path forward and do our best to ensure that our churches, schools and other institutions are safe places where genuine care can be offered and received. The publication of the final report is not the end of the mahi required to achieve this. Our Church is working across the Tikanga on a whole of Church response to the Recommendations so that we can respond with one voice.

MISSION AND MINISTRY

As a Church we are facing big issues about our purpose and structure to be able to offer good pastoral ministry to those who are part of our gathered life, and to equip ourselves to participate well in the Mission of God as bearers of God's love and the gospel message.

Several items of business will give some focus to this. The proposed new parish statute is designed to allow for local church structures to more easily fit their capacity and context. The Conference session will allow us to have some theological conversations in small groups to set a wider context for our decision making. A number of motions invite us to put specific things in place to set a direction for how mission can occur.

Let me offer a few comments on what I see. We have known the pain and challenge of decline for a long time. At the moment that decline is being exacerbated by sudden rising costs, exemplified by insurance premium increases, and by an overall decrease of income. Decline in numbers also means a decline in people actively involved in our churches, which in turn means

many tasks that were once managed by volunteers fall to clergy to pick up because there is no one else. That leaves less time for pastoral ministry and for leading the people of God in the work of mission.

And then there's property, an amazing blessing and a huge challenge all at the same time. We have two centuries of accumulated wealth and property from which we benefit. We have churches that have absorbed the prayers of generations of believers, that have hosted times of great joy and deep sadness of the lives of families. They hold great meaning. They are our sacred spaces. That is significant not just for the current generation of worshippers, but for the life of the wider community who value the presence of those churches and what they symbolise and offer.

We also know that our buildings are places that exist to serve God's mission. They are to be places where we gather to worship and be equipped for that work. They are places from which we go to undertake that work, and in turn to be able to bring others. They stand as a sign in the community of God's presence.

So we live with this tension – the respect we have for our buildings and what they represent – whether they are a benefit to God's mission or become an end in themselves and thus an impediment to God's mission. We need to face the questions that arise from this very carefully.

We have been scaffolding towards these discussions. Recent synods have asked for particular work to be done. The Episcopal Team has done considerable thinking about these issues. The Diocesan Council has developed this within their strategy work. The Ministry Conference spent intensive time on questions about mission and the restraints we experience on it.

Challenge always offers opportunity, and our task gathered synodically is to discern those opportunities and set a path to make good use of our resources.

As an aside I would add that organisationally we do not face these issues alone. They are real right across the charitable and not for profit sector in our country. Compliance, cash flow, volunteers, asset maintenance, a perfect storm of issues that is preventing lots of organisations from fulfilling their core purposes.

I've thought a lot on the nature of the Jerusalem church that is described in Acts 2 – not in an idealised way as it wasn't without its own organisational challenges and disputes – but with a view to see what was the essence of its life. I see there: the gathering of people in personal encounter; reading the Scriptures together, interpreting them and understanding their meaning; celebrating the sacraments; praying together; caring for one another; making known the love of God and the good news of Jesus to others.

These are things we must ensure that we retain in our own life wherever our structures and the use of resources might take us. Our faithful God will help us do so.

OTHER MATTERS

The work of God's mission is undertaken in so many ways. All of our social service agencies are doing phenomenal work in their respective areas of expertise. Cuts in Government funding are having a huge impact on that. The Whāngarei Care Centre and the Auckland City Mission in particular have reported to me how that will affect their ability to provide the same level of service to their clients in those cities. On Saturday morning we will hear from Helen Robinson, the City Missioner, about that.

Beyond the familiar life of the local church, chaplaincy in schools, hospitals and other institutions is another significant way in which we undertake ministry and reach people beyond our own structures. It will be good on Saturday to hear from our group of school chaplains about their ministry.

Can I say how good it is to see a number of pieces of business being brought by youth members of Synod. It is very heartening to see young people wanting to play an active part in the direction and priorities of our Church.

Last year Archbishop Philip Richardson officially concluded his term as Senior Bishop Tikanga Pakeha after 10 years in the role. In practice he has largely done it for a further year until we were able to appoint a new Senior Bishop at General Synod this year. Archbishop Philip has brought huge energy to this work and has represented our Church well in so many ways, nationally and in the global Anglican Communion. His leadership of the Church's response to the Royal Commission has exemplified his commitment to us and to the wellbeing of others. We owe him a debt of gratitude, and especially in acknowledgement of the impact this has had on his own family and Diocese in their support of him as he has managed dispersed responsibilities with necessary frequent absences.

The Bishop of Wellington, Justin Duckworth, now assumes this role and we pray God's blessing on him and the Diocese of Wellington as he does so. It is good that the Primacy of the Church is complete once again, having had a long gap before Archbishop Sione was elected, and then this past year before Archbishop Justin was appointed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I greatly appreciate the words of encouragement that I have been offered in recent times as people recognise some of the complexity and demand of the role. I know I can seem reluctant to accept those words, but please know that I really value that support. I am at times tangibly aware of the prayers of people for my ministry through the sustaining grace of God.

In turn I wish to encourage and thank you. The commitment of people to this intense work over the couple of days we are here is remarkable. At times some of what we do might seem tedious, but the sum of it over the years enables the good governance of the Diocese and guides us on the path of Christ as we work together to build God's kingdom.

The Diocesan Council members are an amazing group of people, giving their time and talents to carry that work of governance through the year. I have been blessed by your grasp of the issues we face and the vision with which you approach the resolution of them, always within a framework of what is good for the people of God and the impact we can make for good in the world. So many others become part of that work through advisory committees and working groups, all voluntary time to contribute their talents and insights to building up the Body of Christ.

That work receives lots of support from the Neligan House team, led by the Diocesan Manager Sonia Maugham. It is a relatively small team which does an enormous amount bringing the hopes and decisions of others into reality. They are all part of the infrastructure and hospitality of Synod so enjoy putting faces to names as you see them about the next couple of days.

A couple of years ago we made a big change to how specialist ministry is resourced in the Diocese by gathering a number of roles into a Ministry Formation Team. That group is led by the Ministry Educator, Sarah Moss, and is appreciating the synergies that are being achieved through a higher level of integration across several different types of ministry. Again they do a lot with a little, as we are largely dependent on St John's College Trust Board grants for that work. Thank for your commitment and efforts.

I get to work day by day with incredible people. There is enormous privilege in being part of a team, especially one that cares so deeply about its work and undertakes it with such a high level of coherence. So my thanks to the Episcopal Team for your work once again this past year, for your support of me, and for your confidence about what we can achieve together as a Diocese.

Enough for tonight. I look forward to the kōrero of the next two days, and the opportunity to build our whanaungatanga by being together.

Kia ora tātou katoa.

Bishop Ross Bay
5TH September 2024