



**Anglican Diocese
of Auckland**

DIOCESE OF AUCKLAND – SYNOD 2024

Opening Service

The Third Session of the Fifty-Seventh Synod opened with a service in St Mary's-in-Holy Trinity Cathedral with The Rt Rev'd Ross Bay, Bishop of Auckland, presiding and The Rev'd Sarah Moss (Diocesan Ministry Educator) as preacher. Her sermon was based on the opening passage of Luke Chapter 5, where despite the lack of earlier fishing success, the net was put out once more and filled to overflowing. Yet the challenge was to leave this for a more important command – to follow Jesus and become 'fishers of people'. As she outlined, it was easy to be overwhelmed by lack of finance against rising costs and limited numbers able to assist. However, this was the very time to develop an 'abundance mindset' where, despite living in a time of scarcity, we can still be generous with the good news of the Gospel, together with our hospitality, our compassion and care.

Bishop's Charge

Synod then convened in the Cathedral for the Bishop to present his Charge. He opened by acknowledging past members of the Synod who had died during the year. He paid a special tribute to Kiingi Tūheitia who had died unexpectedly in the past week, especially recalling his focus on kotahitanga and his calls for unity among both Māori and the nation. The new Māori monarch, Kuini Nga wai hono i te po, was welcomed and acknowledged. Bishop Ross also spoke of the on-going partnership with Te Amorangi o Te Tai Tokerau and also the ministry of the Diocese of Polynesia.

Bishop Ross spoke at length about the work of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care and Faith-based Institutions. Its report Whanaketia, published recently was extensive and he encouraged all to read the Executive Summary and Key Findings. He felt it was important to speak regarding matters relating to the Anglican Church, difficult although they would be to hear, especially for any survivors of abuse. He reiterated that the Church was committed to the actions called for by the Commission and had been working actively on redress with survivors.

The Bishop also foreshadowed the business of Synod relating to significant issues facing the Diocese. These arose from declining church attendance and rising costs. "As a Church we are facing big issues about our purpose and structure to be able to ... participate well in the Mission of God as bearers of God's love and the gospel message," he said. Fewer people meant a smaller volunteer-base to support clergy, thus limiting opportunities for pastoral work and mission.

He noted that in the Diocese, there were many assets in the form of land and buildings, places that had, "absorbed the prayers of generations of believers". They were our sacred spaces and they also stood as a sign in the community of God's presence. As costs rose in maintaining them, there was a tension as to whether they were a benefit or an impediment to God's mission – "an amazing blessing and a huge challenge at the same time". Looking ahead, it would be Synod's task to discern these issues and to suggest a way forward.

Transcripts of the Bishop's Charge and Synod Sermon can be found on the Synod page of the diocesan website.

Reports

Friday's session began with a report from the Diocesan Council about its activities over the past year. This was followed by the Chief Executive and the Chair of Trust Management reporting on some of the changes that had been made following the concerns raised at Synod 2023.

New Parish Statute

A bill proposed a new parish statute to be considered by the Synod. The new statute was designed to allow greater flexibility in local church structures, so they could fit more easily in both capacity and context. Under the changes proposed, mission districts and local shared ministry units would be designated as parishes.

The bill establishing the Parish Statute 2024 was passed. It would replace the Ministry Unit Statute 2013 but its enactment was delayed until 1 January 2025 to allow for various transitional changes needed.

Motions

Ten motions were on the agenda and a further one was accepted on the basis that it was a matter of urgency. Several were brought forward by youth representatives following discussions at the Youth Synod – a matter noted very positively by the Bishop in his Charge. All motions were passed. Details of motions were as follows.

- The Legal Business Committee’s recommendation to annul a Standing Resolution inviting all parishes to open their churches for two hours before and two hours after any public protest was passed. It was hoped many churches would continue this practice, but as the location and purpose of protests now varied greatly, it was felt this should be a matter for individual churches.
- The work of the Diocesan Committee for Overseas Mission was outlined and their support for mission, development and humanitarian work, especially in the Pacific region was warmly acknowledged. The diocesan target for the year was set at \$175,000.
- Another motion acknowledged the Church was a guardian of land with a significant history, to tangata whenua and to tangata tiriti. It asked that a process be put in place to record stories of our land with a database established to enable transparent public access to these records.
- The importance of digital communication was supported, particularly in providing information about parishes as well as, in some cases, broadcasting of services for those unable to be at a service in person. It was to re-establish the Digital Working Group with the aim of exploring ways to support parishes to increase their online presence and visibility.
- Issues relating to understanding and increasing awareness around the issue of mental health were raised along with the importance of being able to access research-based training programmes best suited for the Diocese. All ministry leaders were encouraged to increase their awareness and understanding of appropriate programmes so they could support any needing assistance, especially young people.
- The importance of youth leadership in parishes was discussed along with the need for encouragement to seek and work with the Diocesan Youth Facilitator. Funding would be needed to ensure that there were well-trained, safe and caring youth leaders available for placements.
- Encouragement was also given to all parishes to ensure young people were represented on their vestries, with an aim to have at least one under age forty.

Three other motions raised issues relating to the issues presented by the Bishop in his Charge. While these were not new issues, it was recognised they were becoming increasingly urgent. A conference session, held before these motions were considered, allowed a wider discussion in small groups. All motions were passed.

- It was proposed a Consolidation and Clergy Teams (CCT) Working Group be established to recommend a strategy to consider possible consolidation and closure of parishes in the Greater Auckland region and the formation of clergy teams “tasked to revitalise and sustain an Anglican presence in the context of local communities”. It was expected the group would utilise the findings of the Property Working Group and would need support from professionals with expertise in change management. It would report back to Synod 2025. The Bishop was requested to consider the creation and appointment of an archdeacon to lead this work.
- A further motion proposed establishing a working group to develop a strategic plan for outreach, with a special focus on children, youth and family ministry. It was felt this could be based on an

expanded Healthy Church Model and it should aim to support parishes with active leadership, financial and resources. A report would be presented to Synod 2025.

- A detailed motion acknowledged our calling to participate in God’s mission while outlining some of the hurdles – a decline in church membership, decreasing numbers identifying as Christian, aging congregations and loss of volunteers, as well as the need for resources to be committed to maintenance of buildings and current ways of ‘being church’. The motion pointed out that our post-Christendom cultural context presented different challenges and opportunities than at any other period in our history. It sought to empower the Diocesan Council, in consultation with the Episcopal Team, to make strategic decisions regarding the possible closure of some parishes and to explore and fund alternative models of mission to engage people more.

Additional Motion

A motion under urgency was considered and passed. This requested the Bishop to write to the Prime Minister expressing concern regarding the proposed Treaty Partnership Bill and the disruption being generated. It encouraged vestries to inform parishes about our history as related to the Treaty and to petition their local MP to vote against it.

City Missioner

Helen Robinson, City Missioner, provided a disturbing picture of the increasing number of families needing support. A reduction in government funding for programmes was also a significant concern. Dean Anne suggested all parishes write to their local MP expressing their concern regarding this reduction.

Elections

Elections were held to appoint members to the Diocesan Council.

After a vote of thanks, Synod was declared closed, to reassemble on 4 September 2025.