



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

Tēnā tatou katoa

It is very good to be together once again to undertake the business of Synod. People often report that a highlight is the Synod Eucharist and the hope that people experience by being together in worship with others from across the family of the Diocese. We come from a region that extends from the Far North to the North Waikato and the Coromandel Peninsula and it's good that we find joy in expressing our common life. Thank you to the Cathedral team for your hospitality in St Mary's for the Eucharist and for the days ahead as we do our work here in the Nave. Thank you also to Archdeacon Peter Jenkins for being our preacher tonight.

Each year there is always a bit of a change in the membership of Synod and so some people here are coming new to the excitement and uniqueness of gathering as the Church in this way. If you are one of those people, please will you stand so that we can acknowledge and welcome 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

The Reverend Malcolm Clague
The Reverend David Cooper
The Reverend Noel Derbyshire
The Reverend Jim Hunt
The Reverend Michael John
The Reverend Barrie MacCuish
The Reverend John McClean
The Reverend Dianne Neilson
The Reverend Edward Subramaniam
The Reverend Mark Wendelborn
The Reverend James Withers
The Reverend Jeremy Younger

House of Laity

Des Aicken, Parish of Clevedon

Audrey Grimshaw, Parish of Mt Eden

Helen McKinley, Parish of Mt Eden

Paulene Murdoch, Parish of Papatoetoe

Christopher Scogings, Parish of Campbells Bay

Hon. Robert Smellie, Parish of Kohimarama

Rest eternal grant unto them, O God, and let light perpetual shine upon them.

May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

FAITHFUL AND FRUITFUL – DISCERNING FRESH DIRECTION

Over the last couple of years we have been working together on a fresh direction for the Diocese and opportunities to do things differently, more collaboratively, and with new initiatives. Last year's Synod demonstrated that emerging plans were not meeting expectations. The Diocesan Council took that very seriously and gathered in special strategy sessions at the end of last year and early in this new year. The result has been the developed strategy which we have themed as "Faithful and Fruitful." The theme finds its source in the John 15 image of the vine, where Jesus urges followers to faithfully abide in the vine so that God can bring forth fruitfulness in our lives.

Much more thought has been given as to how to implement Synod motions from 2024. The vision statement that has been created to express that is:

To enable the Church to embody its faith in the Gospel and trust in God by:

- Enabling parishes to be effective expressions of local church; and by
- Creating opportunities for new forms of ministry.

Three working groups have been established to:

- consider the resources available to us to undertake that work;
- to give fresh consideration to the parish structure and collaboration; and
- to identify the mission and ministry priorities which must guide our life for the next 5 years.

We will be convening a conference session tomorrow to hear more about that work as it has begun and to receive further feedback from you all about the direction and the questions we need to be considering as we undertake it.

Another significant way in which people have been encouraging change has been the way in which we work as Synod. A group led by Matthew Griffiths has done a huge amount of consultation and dreaming about how Synod could be organised to meet expectations. They have been guided by the root of the idea of synod as being on the way together. They have taken account of the way the Catholic Church has been working more synodically to gain the mind of the people of God as a whole about matters of common concern.

The result is the Bill we have before us. It revokes the existing Synod Statute in order to replace it with a completely new one, seeking to retain the best of what we already do as well as introducing new ways of meeting and undertaking business so that people have more opportunity to confer together on matters and to help us to say that our decisions seem “good to the Holy Spirit and to us.” (Acts 15:28)

I believe the key to managing this Bill well will be to ensure we have a good debate at the Approval in Principle stage. That’s when we can talk about whether we think that the Bill as a whole is taking us in the kind of direction that the consultation process discerned. If we do think so, I would then discourage too much tinkering when we go into Committee to deal with the detail. It’s a complex Bill and so if we are not careful about changes to some of the detail, the Bill as a whole might lose its coherence and become at odds within itself. If we agree to it, then over the next couple of years we will find the bits that don’t quite work for us and we can continue to fine tune it into the future. If we carry this forward, it will represent a very new way of seeking God’s will and doing God’s work.

WIDER CHURCH LIFE

We are all part of something much bigger than ourselves and our particular expression of Anglican Church life. As parishes, chaplaincies and mission ventures we relate to one another as colleagues and are expressions of the ministry of the Diocese as a whole. The Diocese is in partnership with the Diocese of Polynesia, and the Hui Amorangi of Te Tai Tokerau and Te Manawa o te Wheke. We relate to the other New Zealand Dioceses through the Tikanga Pākehā Conference, and to the Three Tikanga Church through the General Synod Te Hīnota Whānui.

This Province which is our Three Tikanga Church is part of the network of belonging across the Anglican Communion, an international body made up of 42 member churches with work in over 165 countries.

Most of the time, the place where we belong is of course our focus and can be plenty enough on its own. But it’s good for us to remember these wider belongings and to be praying for one another.

At the beginning of this year, The Most Reverend Dame Sarah Mullally became the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury to serve since Pope Gregory sent Augustine from Rome to formally establish the English Church. Archbishop Sarah is the first woman to hold this post, a moment of celebration by many of us but sadly also an event that has further highlighted the many tensions that exist within the Communion where Anglicans are in disagreement and impaired communion as the result of theological difference.

The Communion has worked hard on trying to heal those divisions over the past decades. In doing so I have observed that more and more focus and expectation has been placed on the role and person of the Archbishop of Canterbury to achieve that. But Canterbury is only one of four Instruments of Communion that help us to maintain a Communion life and belonging. I think it is a very human driver that makes us look to individual leaders to solve our problems, and I do not believe it is realistic to imagine that any single person can achieve that within such a complex community of worldwide belonging.

The Communion has been considering new ways of holding itself together with more dispersed leadership. The Nairobi-Cairo proposals were developed by the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFO) to help the Communion ask “what does it mean to be the Anglican Communion today?”

The 19th meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council (known as ACC, another, and arguably the most effective Instrument of Communion) met in Dublin in July and considered these proposals. They felt unable to recommend to the Communion that the specifics of the proposals yet be taken up, and so further consultation will go on for a further three years until ACC meets again.

These things highlight that we always live with differences, called as we are to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. How we handle those differences is for me a mark of the truth of the Gospel. We can find it easy to proclaim the saving grace of God in Christ, and the reconciling love and forgiveness that we know through that grace. But when conflict besets us, we too often struggle to be able to live into those things in ways that demonstrate the reality of what we believe and proclaim.

That’s a source of great sadness to me and especially so as the Episcopal Team and I find ourselves trying to respond to increasing instances of conflict and divisions within local worshipping communities. Mediation and investigation play an important part in those moments, but this is a spiritual work as much as it is one of diplomacy, as we continue to seek the reconciling love of God among us and find how we can live at peace across our differences, making space for one another.

They are matters we also work at within our Three Tikanga life. For some years we have been discussing how we achieve better equity of resources between the Tikanga to allow each part of the Church here to flourish. At the General Synod in 2012 a motion was agreed to determine how the pūtea that is the St John’s College Trust funds could be applied to help achieve that. Work was begun but fizzled out and sat largely forgotten.

At the General Synod meeting last month, that work has been revisited and the Synod amended the Canon which establishes Te Kotahitanga, the advisory body which assists the St John’s Trustees to determine the distribution of the funds. Te Kotahitanga members will be appointed by Runanga Whaiti, the Standing Committee of the Pihopatanga, who will consult with Tikanga partners on their needs but with an emphasis on creating greater resource equity for Tikanga Māori and Tikanga Pasefika.

This arrangement will remain in place for the next two years until General Synod meets again and reviews it. We anticipate that in 2028 the New Zealand Dioceses of Tikanga Pākehā may experience some reduction in funding to create this equity, and over the next year Diocesan Council will need work to prepare for that possibility with the reduction of one income stream.

We have a key partnership relationship with Te Pihopatanga o te Tai Tokerau and with Bishop Kito Pikaahu. Bishop Kito sends his greetings to us for our Synod and his apologies as he is overseas this week. The Diocese and the Amorangi have set up a new Partnership Working Group to help us work more actively on our common life and how we can best support one another.

There are a number of historical land sale issues that we are in korero about with iwi. These include Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei, Ngāti Tipa in Port Waikato, and the whānau of Heta Tarawhiti in Hopuhopu. In all cases they related to the gifting of land to the Church for particular purposes and the subsequent sale of that land without further iwi consultation. We are committed to finding processes to lead to reconciliation and appropriate redress.

SAFEGUARDING

As part of our ongoing commitment to responding to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Abuse in State and Faith-based Care, the General Synod also further amended the Canons on Ministry Standards and their processes for managing complaints and allegations of a breach of Standards. It is fair to say that there has been a high level of dissatisfaction with the experience of the workings of the Commission in practice, and that is being addressed in a number of ways through the House of Bishops and the General Synod Standing Committee. Changes in legislation are not enough and there must be improved systems for responding to people in ways that are better for both complainants and respondents.

In Auckland we have undertaken a lot of work this year to strengthen safeguarding policies and processes. It has become clear that the appointment of a dedicated Safeguarding Officer for the Diocese is essential to ensure that we remain compliant with the requirements of legislation in relation to children and vulnerable adults, that our policies and practices are fit for purpose, and that we have the right training in place for people to achieve this. The role is currently being scoped and the appointment will be progressed as a priority.

OUR SOCIETY

The legislation to create Move on Orders affecting rough sleepers has received considerable attention with opposition from people across sectors of society, including social service agencies and churches. Nobody working in this area would say that antisocial and threatening behaviour should be tolerated, but there is serious doubt that this legislation would address what is said to be the presenting issue. Instead “move on” would achieve what it describes, that is, the underlying issue would not be addressed but would be “moved on” elsewhere. The Select Committee submission process is complete and the Bill is due to be reported back to Parliament soon.

Many in our churches have been advocating for the legislation to be withdrawn and for energy to be put into addressing homelessness, especially in urban centres. City Missioner Helen Robinson and I have made that appeal to people in our diocese and encourage you all to be speaking to MPs in preparation for voting on the Bill.

The General Election is drawing nearer and once again we will be faced with a choice as to how we cast our votes as responsible citizens. To participate in this process is, I believe, a Christian duty, and one that is to be taken within the spirit of a kingdom vision that includes a care for neighbour and for those who are vulnerable within our communities. We hold these principles before us which seek the common good ahead of voting from self-interest. That is not an easy choice and requires personal discernment from our biblical understanding. Homelessness is one issue among many in a society experiencing the impacts of economic stress over several years.

Artificial Intelligence will create growing changes in our world as it impacts on skill sets, job opportunities and the environment, alongside placing new ethical challenges before us and potentially further distorting perceptions of truth and reality. Pope Leo's encyclical 'Magnifica Humanitas' makes an appeal for the safeguarding of humanity, and the promotion of truth, dignity of work, social justice, and peace. He warns of the power of technology lying in the hands of a few people and therefore the potential for AI to subjugate rather than serve humanity.

Whether or not an ethical code can be established for its use, we ourselves should determine how AI can be used appropriately within the Church. To that end I intend to establish a think tank within the Diocese to examine these questions and to develop guidelines to help us respond well to the unavoidable impacts AI is having.

You will know that I co-chair the Anglican Roman Catholic Commission in Aotearoa New Zealand (ARCCANZ). A current initiative in our theme of Walking Together as two churches is the issue of human trafficking and modern slavery. It is an international issue and one hidden in plain sight in our society, often taking advantage of migrant workers. We wish to play a part in raising awareness about this issue and in advocating for change in our labour laws and investigative processes which currently do not align with international standards to which our country has subscribed.

VOCATIONS, TRAINING AND FORMATION

We are blessed that each year we have a good number of people coming forth to test their vocation to ordained ministry. As a result we have been able to maintain a cohort of clergy which largely allows us to provide ordained service in our places of ministry. Sometimes it is a bit touch and go, and we are about to face a spike in vacancies with 10 or more places requiring appointments over the next 6 months as we work through retirements and resignations.

We take the process of discernment for ordination seriously and, alongside a group of Ministry Advisors, I work hard to apply good and robust discernment to those who offer. How can we help and encourage people to identify God's call, whether to a deepening involvement in lay ministry, or to ordained life? I would love to see more people exploring this in their 20s and committing to a lifetime of vocation. It is an incredible lifestyle, full of opportunities to serve God and the people of the Church, with enormous fulfilment that comes to us as a result.

It is always good to see the ways in which those in ministry continue to develop their skills and knowledge in ways that benefit the wider Church. A number of people have gained higher degrees in the past year, so I want to acknowledge the following: Clare Barrie who has gained a DMin, along with Jemma Allen, Richard Bonifant and Karen Taylor who have each gained a PhD. This is no easy undertaking as in all cases it is work done alongside other ministry and work responsibilities.

I note those people, but also want to thank all of you who make the commitment to developing skills and knowledge that add to the effectiveness of your ministry.

WORDS OF THANKS

Each one of you deserves thanks for me, because you are all offering the gifts of grace which God has given you for the work of the kingdom and for the good of our Church.

There are some who work more closely with me in Diocesan tasks. I mentioned the Bishop's Ministry Advisors earlier. I also want to especially thank the members of Diocesan Council who carry a heavy load and who bring wisdom and an ethic of service to their work as the governing body. Thank you to the members of our strategy working groups that have now got underway and are discovering just how much complex work there is to do! The team of Diocesan Nominators work with me alongside parish nominators when making new parish appointments and bring that broader insight to the selection decisions for new Vicars.

We have just returned from General Synod and you were well represented by a great team who worked really well together. It's a big commitment to take a week out to be part of that intense series of meetings.

The Legal Business Committee and the Chancellor work in a very concentrated way leading up to Synod and so ensure that our business is as well prepared as possible. A number of other people volunteer to help the Synod run efficiently through the secretarial and committee work.

The admin team at Neligan House do an extraordinary amount across a varied set of tasks and skills and manage it on minimal resources. They work really hard for us. I want to offer particular thanks to Mary Wong who for the last five years has been our finance manager and who leaves us next month to start to enjoy a proper retirement. Mary has been incredibly diligent in her work and has cared very deeply about this Diocese and its people.

The Episcopal Team continue to be a wonderful source of collegiality for me and, again, are a hard-working team who care about the wellbeing of the people of the Diocese. I've been especially grateful to each of them this year in the extra work they have taken up to allow me to have some sabbatical time. Between them they bring a depth of wisdom and discernment as we try to offer our best to the work of this ministry of oversight.

That brings me finally to my sabbatical. Most of you will be aware that we had to cut our original plans short in April after Jackie slipped and injured her leg. That didn't work for a sabbatical planned around a walking pilgrimage! I'm feeling very privileged that we have the chance to have another go this month. Work with the Order of St John is taking me back to London this coming week and so it made sense to take some extra weeks on to that and so take the opportunity to walk some of the Way of St Francis in Italy as we had originally planned. We will walk for two weeks, finishing in Assisi on the weekend that is the Feast Day of St Francis and the 800th anniversary of his death. It should be a blast.

IN CONCLUSION

Let's apply ourselves to our work well, speaking and listening with respect and dignity, and acting in ways that enable us to best do the work of God in our Diocese. In that spirit of collaboration, I offer this whakataukī:

Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora e te iwi
(With your basket and my basket, the people will thrive)

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā ra tatou katoa

Bishop Ross Bay
3rd September 2026