

First Ordinary Session of the 49th Synod of the Diocese of Sydney: October 2011

Presidential Address

Delivered by Dr Peter Jensen, Archbishop of Sydney, on Monday 10 October 2011.

Elijah could hear silence – the sound of sheer silence.

He thought he would hear more. He had travelled back to the birthplace of the nation, back to beginnings, back to Sinai where his people had their unforgettable encounter with the living God in tumultuous wind, and earthquake, and fire. He had complained to the Lord: of that great nation which had been created there, 'I, even I only I am left, and they seek to take my life'. The nation was finished. The Lord must either declare death or resurrection.

He thought that God was going to do a new thing that day. Just as with Moses, there was a great and strong wind, and there was an earthquake and there was fire. But the Lord was not in the wind, or the earthquake or the fire.

And now, Elijah could hear silence – the sound of sheer silence.

It signalled an end, an end to his hopes, his resources, his suggestions. The silence was a full stop. God was neither going to destroy the nation nor resurrect it.

Silence.

And then, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' The silence is broken by the Word of the Lord. God remains in control. He is still promoting his kingdom. 'I reserve seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.' 'Go, return on you way...anoint Hazael...anoint Jehu...anoint Elisha...' My Word stands: your job is to consult it, to believe it; to obey it.

Like Elijah, we sometimes feel alone. Like Elijah we have all sorts of plans and suggestions for God. Like Elijah we look for God in wind and earthquake and fire. Sometimes like Elijah we feel the silence of God.

But what we have is what Elijah was given – not God in earthquake, wind and fire, but the God in his Word. We live by faith, not by sight. Our business, whatever our situation, is to consult the Word of God, to trust it and to keep it.

There is silence from God because he has not been silent. We have his Word. And his Word shows that however invisible his work may be to us, still it goes forward and he is neither frustrated nor impotent. 'I reserve seven thousand in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal...'

What is this Word of God which we are called on to consult, believe and obey, no matter what? It is summed up for us in the gospel of Jesus Christ, 'the power of God for salvation to all who believe', the gospel of full assurance.

This gospel testifies that there is one Lord God who has made and owns all things.

This gospel testifies that God is righteous, with a dynamic righteousness which seeks to put all things to rights and establish his kingdom.

This gospel testifies that God is a God who reveals himself to us in words, words of promise and words of command, seeking our worship.

This gospel testifies that as a result of Adam's defection and by the standards of God's righteousness as revealed by his law, we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

This gospel testifies that the wages of our sin is death and that eternal judgement awaits those who have not been reconciled to God.

This gospel testifies to the grace of God who sent his unique Son into the world to be born as man, to announce the coming of his kingdom, to live fully under God's law, and to redeem his people from Satan, sin and death by his sacrificial death on their behalf and in their place.

This gospel promises that the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, true God and true man.

This gospel promises that by the power of his Spirit, we are united to Christ, that we are brought to new birth, that we are justified by faith alone, sanctified and glorified.

This gospel promises adoption as the children of God, our fellowship with him and with each other, the forgiveness of sins, opposition from the world, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

This gospel promises the return of our king to be the judge of the living and the dead, and to usher in a new heaven and a new earth in which dwells righteousness.

In short, Jesus Christ as he is found in the biblical gospel is the one great Word of God for our day. Wherever we are located in history, our Christian business is to consult the Word of God, to trust the Word of God, to live by the Word of God, to proclaim the Word of God and to defend the Word of God.

We sometimes lose the assurance of the gospel and try to grow churches by other means, forgetting that it is he who builds the church by his appointed means. And we sometimes lose confidence in the churches and wonder whether they are much more than religious clubs for those who cannot find a proper hobby.

But true churches are a product of the gospel. The Word of God, blessed by the Spirit of God, produces the children of God and unites them in the Church of God.

There is only one true church of Jesus Christ, consisting of all who are united with Christ. In essence, this one true church is experienced whenever two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ. It finds a stable expression in the communities which are to be found all over the world. Each true church of Jesus Christ is made up of those who gather in order to meet Jesus Christ through his Word and in the power of his Spirit. Since these churches are founded on and shaped by the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they are marked by the great signs – the great human and humanising virtues - of faith, hope and love.

I want to say to you, as Elijah was emboldened by God's Word, so you too take heart. The gospel of Jesus Christ addresses the spiritual needs of our nation in a direct and potent way and Christ's churches constitute a powerful vindication of God's Word and a key resource for the good health of the community. We have a Word which in blessing individuals has the capacity to renew, revive and restore human community in an age damaged by selfish materialism and individualism.

Australia needs the gospel and churches which are the product of the gospel.

We have been doing a lot of quantitative research into our churches recently. But earlier this year I encountered a short book which reveals the qualitative, inner nature of one of our churches, St John's Asquith, and shows the impact of the gospel in transforming people and creating churches. The book consists of 90 testimonies from members of the church, bearing witness to the work of God in their lives, frequently relating how they came to Christ. Through this lens we can see God using the gospel to bring people together, to bond people together and to bless the community.

Let me mention some of the agencies God used to help bring people to himself as revealed by these 90 remarkable stories of ordinary people:

The Bible, John Chapman, Two Ways to Live, Christianity Explained, a Gideon Bible, preaching, talks, Sunday School lessons, fellowship groups, School scripture, prayer, personal evangelism, ISCF, Beach Missions, Crusaders, AFES, CEBS, Navigators, an Anglican Bishop, an Anglican Archbishop, Billy Graham, Katoomba Convention, Christian Endeavour, Year 13, Camp Howard, Christian schools, Open Air Campaigners, Know Your Bible, Bible Study Fellowship, Youth for Christ, Christian literature.

Usually, coming to know Christ was both a process and a commitment, and a number of agents were involved. Being born in a Christian family is obviously a huge blessing; many had that experience. For some, the wonder of the natural world was a key factor. Others report spiritual experiences which frightened or awakened them. Still others went through a personal loss or crisis and it was in those depths that they sought after the Lord. The local church mattered – sometimes faith was born through preaching; occasionally the liturgy; sometimes through the warmth of a community and the love which they found there. One person even mentions the messages she saw on church noticeboards as she was seeking the Lord! A number of these testimonies are profound narratives of how people have found the Lord to be their all sufficient one in time of need. He answers prayer and preserves his saints.

One thing I love about our churches is the fact that wherever you go our clergy are capable of leading a person to Christ. Thus there are mentions in the book of the role played by Les Vitnell, Gary Mulquiney, David White, Gordon Lincoln, Noel Pilcher Don Begbie, Brian Heath, Brian Wynn, Denis Wann and Marcus Loane. Never take the ministry of such servants for granted – their ministries reflect their commitment to the gospel and to the scriptures which is our identity.

Marcus Loane helped a senior member of the Unitarian religion to see Christ as both true God and true man – the matter was later settled by a study of a New Testament provided by the Gideons. David White showed a godly artfulness in writing a reference for a lady who only attended every second Sunday. She reports, 'he wrote a lovely reference which included saying we attended church every Sunday. I pointed out to him his

error, to which he wisely replied he knew – but (now) we would! This indeed came true not long after as we came to know and love God more through his people, whom we now regard as our family.'

Because our clergy are so faithful, so are our lay people. Mrs Faye Keith tells us how she met a desperately sad young soldier named Sean on a train in America. She commented on his tats; he remarked how dangerous it was to get your wife's name tattooed; his marriage had only lasted two years. 'Because I am often on the lookout for an opportunity to share my faith, I asked the Lord to use me, if He would, in my present situation.' She used her own 45 year marriage as a bridge; Sean wanted to know the secret and so began a conversation in which the love of God was shared: 'After some time he said that he loved talking with me because in all his life he never had the chance to have such a meaningful conversation about important things in life.'

Two things impress me. The first is the priority of the Word for these Christians. Their experience of God is shaped by the gospel of redemption. Again and again there is reference to a consciousness of sin and guilt before a holy God and the wonder of the death of Christ in bringing forgiveness of sin through faith in him. They are assured of his love through the cross of Christ. It is a church Protestant and Reformed; bible and gospel. The deep confidence of our people is evident: they have tried God and found him to be their refuge and strength. We can see faith, hope and love in this church.

Secondly, the overwhelming sense is that coming to Christ is God's doing. He is the evangelist. He kindly takes our efforts, our activities and he employs them through the gospel, but in case after case we see that it was not just one thing but a series of things for which no one person was responsible which led to commitment. We gladly acknowledge the sovereignty of God in evangelism. We do not ourselves have to do it all; instead, God is already working in people's lives all around us. We must be prayerfully alert to do our part.

Recently, Christine and I caught a city bus late at night. A young woman staggered on to the bus clearly having been in party mode, but now her face suffused with misery. She sat hunched over in great psychic pain. We could not speak to her, but we spoke to our heavenly Father about her. She will never know. But I have confidence in our God that he will not let those prayers go without an answer and that sometime she will find herself gripped by the love of Christ. As the testimony of one church in Asquith shows, God is constantly at work in myriad ways in calling his elect home. Like Elijah, our business is to consult the Word, trust it and obey it.

The misery of that young woman crystallised for me the serious spiritual malaise in our culture. The contrast to the church experience is plain. When fewer people have deep friendships, when more people are lonely, when vilification becomes a norm of communication, when volunteering is replaced by paid work, when the law is used to sustain social fabric, when the government is constantly looked to, to provide the works of love which create community – you have a society under stress. The penetration of the gambling culture into sport and the media bodes ill for the future of sport in this country. That which has brought us together and given us some of our most memorable moments, is now at the mercy of commercial interests appealing to our greed. The social capital created by sporting associations is being funded by the real capital of addicts. The Gillard government's moral leadership about gambling addiction is to be commended.

In the end, however, it is communities and families themselves which must have the resources and resilience to deal with this problem. Think of the great temple-like shopping centres where we attend to the worship of ourselves through the accumulation of possessions and possessions and possessions – endless possessions; the obesity epidemic, where we are sated with unhealthy food; the substance abuse which mars the lives of millions; the slaughter of unwanted infants in the womb – these travesties of human flourishing cannot be fixed by legislation; the harm cannot be repaired with mantras about individual rights.

When you look deeper you will see that these are spiritual problems. They go to our hearts. They testify to our alienation from the Creator. They require a new relationship with God and with others.

Professor Patrick Parkinson's analysis of the experience of children today is alarming. More than a quarter of young people aged between 16-24 years have a mental disorder. There is an increasing incidence of self-harming behaviour, especially amongst girls. Binge drinking and early teen sexual behaviour is becoming more prevalent. Foster care programs are stretched to the limit as children need to be rescued from abuse or neglect in their own homes. He remarks, 'The crisis in child protection is just part of a broader pattern of serious deterioration in the wellbeing of many children and young people, It is a warning sign that all is not well with society as a whole.' (7).

Close to the heart of what Parkinson is getting at is the state of families. He points to the fact that so many young people no longer live with their biological parents as one of the key reasons for the fragile state of our children and our homes. As Christians we have God's mind on marriage: a man and a woman, publicly promising exclusive and permanent fidelity to each other, in sickness and in health until death do us part. We do not need the statistics to tell us - and they do – that generally speaking such a union is best for the

husband and wife and best by far for the children. But the remorseless libertarianism of modern society, the determination that each person chart their own course without regard to God or the law of God, has led to an astonishing collapse of confidence in marriage as good for most people. Not surprisingly cohabitation is notoriously fragile and unstable; it does not make for human happiness or well-being and it is not good for children.

The missing ingredient is commitment – a public commitment in the marriage vows. The strange spectacle of partners inventing their own marriage vows is yet another indication of the way in which we have lost our sense of transcendence, of public obligation, of family. Personal taste trumps what is needed and what is right. And yet without commitment clearly and publicly made, we continue to hold back a sovereign part of ourselves and enter marriage with an 'if', an 'as long as'. There is a cultural malaise here, a tsunami is beginning which, should it be unchecked, will engulf us. At the base of it the problem is spiritual – it is sin and evil, broken promises and broken hearts, our abandonment of God and our elevation of the individual self to the throne.

Our century is now a decade and more old. We may perhaps begin to understand this new era, not least the significance of the attack on the World Trade Centre and other targets. At first 9/11 seemed merely like an aberration, a slight check in the way of the unstoppable advance of western free civilisation to the mastery of the world. A great and semi-Christianised nation was the one super-power; its response was an attempt to be all-powerful in theatres of war far beyond its boundaries. It could afford to do this because as the Dow Jones showed, its wealth continued to expand to astonishing levels. At first it seemed that our friends were still in charge of everything, that the sacred cause of free enterprise and individual liberty was going to triumph, carried by the power of the dollar and the military might which stemmed from that. Even the reality check of the GFC seemed merely an episode.

We are now beginning to fear the worst. The unimaginably huge accumulation of American debt; the inability of European nations to pay what they owe; the alarm clearly shown by economists and political leaders; the potential unravelling of a European settlement which has been the bedrock of peace on that continent for decades. These are the conditions for civil unrest and even more. Likewise, we face the anxious unknowns of climate change. We are entering a dangerous period, a period which is going to call for such virtues as integrity and compassion and courage. What the culture is giving us is the new fellowship of atheists, the science of evolution inflated to become a total explanatory mechanism and the source of all values and morals, and a hectoring wowsersism, forever lecturing us about equal rights and personal freedoms. We don't need such moralism – we need the gospel. We need a gospel which reconciles us to God, identifies sin, brings forgiveness and meaning, transforms lives, sustains families and creates communities of faith, hope and love.

Two weeks ago I was speaking to a community leader who is not a Christian. He has a strong interest in the well-being of communities, in what is called 'social capital'. 'What are you doing to fill up your empty pews?' he wanted to know. He assumed that like most voluntary organisations we are in decline.

First, I had to put him straight on our Mission. I pointed out that in a time of unparalleled social change and a population growing by multi-cultural and non-Christian migration, active participation in our churches is more than holding its own. We are experiencing growth slightly greater than the surrounding population. The growth is not vast, but in a world where clubs, political parties and voluntary organisations are struggling to stay alive, it is significant.

Second, I said that we were committed to strong *identity* and strong *activity*. Our identity comes from an unshakeable, simple commitment to the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ. That is who we are. We have not yet halted between two opinions, we proclaim that the Lord he is God. We embrace counter-cultural beliefs which both set us apart from others, and also bind us together. We believe in miracles; we believe that the Bible is the word of God; we believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, true man and true God; we believe in husbands and wives and in marriage. We find these beliefs make sense of our human experience.

Furthermore, we are active. Our gospel promotes faith hope and love as integral to the good life and makes us better citizens of our nation. Our beliefs turn us toward our neighbours, not away from them; that is why we talk about 10% of the population, to remind us to look outward, to connect. Consequently we commit ourselves to the activity of sharing the faith energetically and imaginatively with those around us and drawing them into the fellowship of our churches. I could also have talked to him about the wonderful Kingsdene project being launched by Anglicare, to give practical help to the families of those with a disability.

Why was my guest interested to know about churches? He spoke about 'social capital'. This is a phrase made famous by Professor Robert Putnam, in his book *Bowling Alone*. Whereas in the US of some decades ago people belonged to bowling clubs and bridge clubs and athletic clubs and voluntary organisations, now they are more inclined to go 'bowling alone'. Active membership has declined dramatically. Informal

connectedness has been replaced by formal institutions. We now constantly appeal to government and to law to make community. We pay for the things we used to do collectively ourselves.

Social capital arises from networks of trust and friendship in the community. According to Putnam, 'The performance of our democratic institutions depends in measurable ways upon social capital' (349), and 'civic connections help make us healthy wealthy and wise.' (287). He is extraordinarily positive about the role religion plays in increasing social capital: 'Churches provide an important incubator for civic skills, civic norms, community interests, and civic recruitment' (66). His more recent book, *American Grace*, points to research that says that religiously observant Americans are both happier and better neighbours than the non-observant. He attributes this in particular to the experience of belonging and so learning from others.

Dr Andrew Leigh an economist and Member of Parliament applies this to Australia, in his book, very tellingly entitled, *Disconnected*. He points to the serious decline in joining, in volunteering and in belonging in modern Australia. He points out that church-members are far more likely to be generous, to give blood, to have a larger number of friends, to be engaged in voluntary work outside of the church, to cross social divides and, 'more likely to report that they had someone on whom they could rely in the event of serious financial problems.'

My friend the community leader is not a believer. But he was keen that we grow more churches, fill more pews. His research showed the benefits of religious association to the community as a whole. He is interested in what constitutes 'the good life', and he agrees that the Christian message has shaped our understanding of the good life in this nation since the beginning, and nothing has as yet come to take its place. It is here that we come to learn what is right and wrong, what makes life worth living, the value of relationships and the hope of glory. It is in God's Word that we see the political leader, the King brought to book by the prophet, 'Have you found me, O my enemy?' said Ahab. 'I have found you,' said the prophet, 'because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord.' It is here that we learn the humanising virtues of faith, hope and love. And as testimony after testimony from Asquith shows, it is the gospel of sins forgiven through the death of Jesus which transforms and emboldens.

Listen: 'I got on to a bus at Bankstown feeling thoroughly miserable. It must have been pretty obvious, because the young driver asked me, "What's the matter?" I thought that my answer, "Nothing," was enough. But I must have looked as bad as I felt, because he followed up with, "Can I help you, sir?" I was in my late sixties at the time and wasn't in the mood to discuss my private life with a stranger in his early twenties. "Mind your own business!" finished that I thought. As I was getting off the bus, he tried again. "What are you doing on Sunday? I'll be going to church and if you would like I could come and take you with me...

'This caring young man's boldness got to me and I agreed to go along with him. It was far out of his way. His church was Cherrybrook Baptist. It was there that I heard how much God loved me and what he had done for me in sending Jesus to die for my sins...

Later he had dropped off church going and moved to Hornsby. But another young man invited him to Asquith church. 'Church is now the highlight of my week. The young people have been so caring of me over the years I have been coming here. Just recently I mentioned that I was having a cataract operation and wasn't sure how I would get on. In no time people were organising themselves to care for me – even staying with me overnight for the first two days. Amazing!' (60)

That is social capital! Where did it come from? From the Word of God.

I gave my guest *The Essential Jesus* as he left. I owed my copy to social capital: Connect 09 was an initiative of our Diocese as a whole. Our network co-operated. I am still handing them out, because I trust God through his Word to bring people to himself and in due course to lead them to a local church. Sydney Anglicans are of course part of a network of about 400 Anglican churches and organisations called a Diocese. We have already seen how much the local church is supported by all sorts of other ministries beyond itself, evangelistic Bishops, Evangelism Ministries, Youthworks, Crusaders, Katoomba and so on. In other words the local church, although central to our interests, is not an absolute. It too relies on the efforts of others and belongs to a bigger whole, the bigger whole largely represented by this Synod.

And so, to Synod...a dangerous place: The *Eagle and County Cork Advertiser*, of April 28th, 1894 carried the following melancholy tale: 'The funeral of the late Mr Ludlow Sealy, of Burren House, Kilbrittain, took place on Saturday, when the remains, which were conveyed from his residence, were interred in the family vault...The deceased gentleman attended at the General Synod of the Church of Ireland held recently in Dublin, the lengthened sittings of which rather over-taxed his strength. He died on Wednesday after a brief illness.'

The synod of our Diocese governs our network. It is served by Robert Wicks as the Diocesan Secretary and his staff from the SDS. Their work is excellent and indispensable. We all own the whole network and need to look to its best interests for the sake of the gospel. We need to carefully elect people to be on our boards

and committees; we need to pass legislation; we need to arrange our financial affairs responsibly; we need to receive reports; we need to pass resolutions to indicate the mind of the Synod as it meets on that day and time. Unless the lengthened sittings of the synod overtax my strength in the meantime, it is likely that this synod will also meet in August 2013 to elect a new Archbishop.

These are heavy responsibilities, but past experience leads me to trust the Synod and to look to you to conduct our affairs under the eye of God with courtesy, wisdom, tact and skill and a deep underlying unity. When we disagree it is I trust over principle and not merely sectional interest. This Diocese is blessed by God especially in the quality of its lay leadership.

The last three years have been deeply challenging. It is never easy to have much less money, but it has made us think hard about priorities. We now know more clearly how much money there is to fund our operations and what those operations should be. The task of restructuring proceeded and our boards and committees are better for it. I am very grateful to the Glebe Administration Board, its chairman Canon Bruce Ballantine-Jones and the CEO Mr Mark Payne and his staff for the effort which has gone into renewing their part of the work in SDS and GAB.

We still needed to see the big picture, to enter our future better focused, better structured. I therefore transcended our usual boards and appointed an Archbishop's Commission to advise us. The key boards were directly represented on the Commission and could make their views known. I also asked certain people to pray for them specifically and this was faithfully done. The Commission has now reported with far-reaching recommendations. We will consider its Report in principle at this Synod and we will be asked to send its recommendations for further action to the Standing Committee. The Standing Committee will give the particular matters sustained debate with help from the responses of the Synod, the Glebe Board, the Property Trust and the EOS Committee and other interested parties. Large issues such as the possible sale of Bishops court will be brought back to Synod.

I wish to place on public record my deepest thanks for the work of the Commission. As you can imagine, the people involved are all senior and all extremely busy in other spheres of life. They gave considerable time to this project and brought knowledge and skills of the highest order. We may have been able to draw together a different group equal to this one, but it is hard to imagine that we could have had a superior Commission. Their Report gives us a fresh start.

In particular I owe the chairman, Mr Peter Kell a personal and professional debt which is beyond any repayment. Only a few of us have an inkling of the sort of demands placed on him in the last twelve months and more, but they were astonishing. He did not quail; he did not grumble; he gave us all his very considerable best. I cannot think of anyone in the Synod with more authority to guide us through what now must be done and I hope that we take his advice. He has the interests of the whole on his heart; he will not speak sectionally, but he will speak for all.

I believe that it is right to be more confident than we were a year ago. Then it was hard to see how we would advance. We had more bad news than good. The provision of money through a one off assessment was a very welcome decision of the Synod. It saved the day. I know it caused heartache, but it acknowledged that we all belong to this network and need to support each other.

This year we have had more good news than bad. There are improved prospects for both our Endowments. The work done by St Andrews House Corporation and SDS to rehabilitate our income flow is a significant reason for this. For this we thank the Lord. Both Endowments are very dependent on St Andrew's House for their income streams. Although there remains a year or two of no distributions while essential expenses are incurred and debt is repaid, there is now the prospect of satisfactory returns. In the meantime with the Synod's goodwill we can manage the cash deficit.

We also have before us a preliminary funding principles document to guide our thinking in the next triennium. It is preliminary because it not been through the Mission Board and Standing Committee as yet. But it is placed before you like an exposure draft for your input. Peter Kell has chaired the group which has begun thinking about this, and he would welcome thoughtful responses. Once again we are called upon to have the same temper of clear thinking and mutual support as we have shown before.

The Diocesan Mission continues to galvanize and embolden us. It is the application of the Word of God to the needs of our community. Everywhere I come across evidences of it: new churches, cross cultural ministries, Mission Area initiatives in partnership, the Year 13 program, and more. Our Mission has no single front line. At St Andrew's Strathfield I met members of the old Anglo congregation delighted with the large numbers in the Korean Congregations under the leadership of the Reverend Kevin Kim. Then I met representatives of the forty or so sub-continental Christians who are nestled within the Korean church. Why are Koreans looking after Indians? Because when the Korean congregation began, it was looked after financially and pastorally by St Matthias Centennial Park. Now they want to do the same thing for sub-continental Christians.

Likewise I had a brilliant conversation with one young church planter, Stewart Witt about his work in Concord North with Chris Chardon. There is a well-known Pentecostal church nearby and I asked him whether this made life difficult for him. 'Not really', he replied, 'people come across suburbs to that church drawn by its reputation. But we are embedded in the suburb; we are seeking to reach the people here with the gospel.' And then he told me about a local couple who are coming to know the Lord through walking by his church and dropping in. 'Proximity creates opportunity,' was the way he put it. That is the Mission in action. In fact, as Stewart pointed out to me, that is the spirit of Anglican ministry. We are committed to the suburbs and everywhere in the suburbs.

We must grow with our city. That means looking for Koreans and Sri Lankans and Tibetans and the rest of our neighbors. But it also means planting in new places. The Mission Property Committee has done sterling work in identifying places where we need to plant churches by purchasing land and erecting new buildings. The next opportunity is at Oran Park, where through a special providence of God we have a great location, and have already appointed our commencement minister. We now need to raise five million dollars for our new church. We will hear more tonight about this initiative and the opportunity to give.

That's a local gospel vision.

What is our national gospel vision? Let me talk to you about part of it.

Wherever you go in Australia you will find other Anglicans. From the First Fleet, the Anglican network has been planted in every part of this nation. Australia is covered by parishes and every parish is networked into a Diocese. We are a connected national movement, not just a local one. And that imposes both opportunities and responsibilities.

I think a key distinction here is between the fellowship reality of a national church and the subsidiary legal and political structures which have emerged. In all sorts of ways we have gospel connections with Anglicans across the nation. We have expressed fellowship through financial support, for example and I trust we will continue do this. Many of our people are serving elsewhere; we support the Bush Church Aid Society; we gave for relief in bushfire, flood and drought; parishes have linked with others in other dioceses; Anglicans from elsewhere have trained at Moore and Youthworks colleges and done Moore's certificate in theology. I have high hopes for us to reach out even more in friendship and fellowship.

The National Church existed before it had a Constitution and is a reality with or without the Constitution. But, after years of patient negotiation, the national Anglican Church was given a new legal status in the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia in 1961. This Act became part of the secular Law of each State.

It was our deliberate choice to enter the constitutional arrangement. Your parish is bound to the Diocesan network, and we are all inescapably linked to the church of the Province of New South Wales. Then, we are just as inescapably linked to the national church. That is part of what it is to be Anglican in Australia. It is all more opportunity for social capital. Just as the States federated to become the nation of Australia in 1901, so we are in a federation. Some had their doubts and some still do – but federation under the 1961 Constitution is a reality, as much for Anglicans as for Australians.

We have obligations under the constitution. We meet in a General Synod every few years; we participate in electing a Standing Committee; we take part in the national commissions, such as legal and doctrine commissions; we pay for joint activities, not least for the General Synod Office here in Sydney. The national Church looks after such things as your clergy long service leave and military chaplains. We are obliged to keep the rules of the Church as applicable to this Diocese and we have financial obligations. As with all such arrangements, we both give and receive.

However, there are profound differences of opinion about how the national Church should work. These go back into history. When entering into the constitutional form of the national Church, our Diocese agreed to join on a particular view of the workings of the national Church. This is a view which we have held tenaciously and in a principled way. In part it arises from our view of what it takes to *defend* the gospel and in part it arises from our view of what it takes to *proclaim* the gospel.

The stance we have taken from the beginning has been one in which we have sought to defend and promote the gospel in the best interest of the churches and we believe in the best interests of the Anglican Church of Australia as a whole. Let me now outline the traditional and grounded philosophy of our Diocese and the policy implications which flow from it.

We can sum up our philosophy in four basic principles:

First, it is best if the national church is committed in form and fact to orthodox doctrine and behavior. We adopted the Constitution because we saw that it commits Anglicans in the words of the Queen's Coronation vow, to the 'Protestant Reformed Religion'. If our behavior or that of other Anglicans is not orthodox, we can

rightly be called back to the standards of the Constitution. In identity we are biblical Christians and we call on all Anglicans to be equally committed to the biblical standards and the doctrine of Christ. By this we help defend and promote the gospel.

Second, we labour to retain the integrity of the national church. In God's providence, Anglicanism is one of the chief denominational expressions of Christianity in Australia and its presence and voice remains significant in national life. The division or dismemberment of the Anglican Church of Australia is not in the best interests of Christianity in this country. We must be united in gospel truth, but the unity of Christians is also a truth of the gospel. That unity, as long as it is recognizably linked to the commitments of the constitution, defends and promotes the gospel.

Third, Sydney always insisted that the national federation be decentralized in ethos and diocesan in structure as it is under the Constitution. Sydney has always understood that the Constitution and the General Synod are helpful to, but not coterminous with, the national church. We think of the Constitution as a compact, an agreement between Australian Anglicans to behave within certain boundaries and where possible to leave each other to get on with local initiatives to defend and promote the gospel. The national church is best served when the decentralized, diocesan-focused constitution is observed in fact and in spirit. Not all Anglican national churches are organized like this. Thus, in some overseas Anglican Provinces the Primate is given great authority. Under our constitution the office of the Primate is largely formal and has little power. In our federation, it is the dioceses which matter most, just as in the diocese it is the parishes which matter most.

Fourth, our Diocese has a role to encourage and support the growth of evangelical ministries throughout the national church. Our own diocese is not monochrome – we continue to honor and respect other expressions of Anglicanism within our immediate fellowship. But, in the history of Anglicanism in Australia, Sydney has virtually always been overwhelmingly evangelical and we are acutely conscious of the way in which evangelicals elsewhere have struggled to maintain their place. Dioceses which began as evangelical, even more so than Sydney, have been changed, with evangelicals becoming a small and sometime harassed minority. I am glad to say that there seems to have been a greater acceptance of evangelicals in some dioceses, although in others it remains a struggle. Our commitment to national evangelicalism is part of a commitment to defend and proclaim the gospel.

These are our principles. How do they translate into policies? We are for fellowship in the gospel, we are for the individual diocese, and we are against institutional expansion.

First, our policy is always to encourage the orthodoxy and mission of the fellowship of Anglican Christians around Australia, rather than to commit all our time and energy to the political and legal processes of General Synod. Synods are important of course, but some people seem to think that they make the denomination what it is. Our interest is in fellowship in the truth and service of the gospel. We will do what promotes and defends the gospel amongst the fellowship of Anglican Christians.

Thus, New South Wales Anglicans are having a conference in Canberra at the end of next January. This is deliberately not a synod. We want to meet each other and offer and receive encouragement in mission and fellowship. There is great need for this. If your vision extends to the world outside of Sydney, and you would like to be part of this event, please aim to attend. See Philip Selden for details.

Second, we will continue to uphold the significant constitutional autonomy of individual dioceses. In a country as large as Australia the gospel is best served if the relevant decisions are taken as locally as possible. Not all can be, of course. When it comes to such matters as child protection, the reputation of the whole is affected and we all must take an interest. But our interest is in local decision-making for as long as it is consistent with the orthodox commitment of the whole body.

Third, our policy is to pay our share of the money needed, but to resist the expansion of the activities of the General Synod and in particular the growth of the activities of the Primate beyond those stipulated in the Constitution. Thus we would prefer General Synod to be held every four or even five years instead of three and we have definitely not supported the provision made as a charge on us all of a research assistant for the Primate. His is not that sort of role. On the other hand we do offer financial and human support to other dioceses and ministries beyond Sydney.

What does all this mean in our present context? A number of things hearten me about Australian Anglicanism apart from the potential we have to do much good around the nation. To mention only two things of a number, several times now the General Synod has formally rejected the moral libertarianism of so much western Anglicanism. Furthermore I value my personal links with other Diocesan Bishops, and in my experience they are well aware of the need for evangelistic mission, and many are working vigorously in their dioceses for growth.

On the other hand, there are a number of factors making the relationship with some of our fellow Anglicans as fraught as it has been for some time. These include:

First, consistent, long-term misunderstanding of and even overt hostility to Sydney, given some credibility because of our failure to explain ourselves, by mistakes we have made and because our size makes us appear threatening. This antagonism is especially powerful in the General Synod Standing Committee and in the General Synod electoral system. It is exacerbated by the publication of prejudicial material intended to damage our standing in the broader Anglican world.

Second, the loosening of the structure of the national church caused by the ordination of women. By ordaining women to the presbyterate and even more so to the episcopate, those responsible changed for all time the nature of the fellowship we enjoy. For the first time our church has been formally committed to an unscriptural principle and for the first time some parts of our church find it impossible to recognize the orders of some clergy. People do not seem to realize that once such a basic matter has changed, many other changes became inevitable and many new changes become possible.

Third, the shock to the system caused by the use of the Appellate Tribunal to win a political battle over the consecration of woman bishops. This was followed by the decision by members of the General Synod to take our diocesan practice of diaconal administration to the Appellate Tribunal, once more trying to solve a political problem by legal means, in a context where other matters of practice around the national church could be challenged even more pointedly. This put the Appellate Tribunal in an impossible situation and harmed its standing.

Fourth, what I regard as poor policy and practice by the General Synod Standing Committee over such matters as the primatial research assistant, the exaggerated growth in general assessments, interference in diocesan questions of order and good government, episcopal standards, the holding of the General Synod a year earlier than it was needed and the wrong use of confidential material.

I am sorry to say that all this means that we have reached a more than usual difficult point in our relationship, especially within the Standing Committee of General Synod. However, I am a believer in conversation and prayer together, and am hoping that there will be a greater willingness to come to the table and talk about some of these issues. We want to establish the point that the ready appeal to the law to solve relational and political problems is unfruitful and to ensure that there is minimum interference with the life of the dioceses, in line with the spirit and intent of the Constitution. At the same time we want to affirm our strong commitment to the national church and its usefulness under God as an instrument for the defense and proclamation of the gospel.

Policy 1

The Word which has been given to us to defend and proclaim is powerful. In saving sinners and creating churches, it confronts the social and spiritual problems of our day with God's vision for the good life as well as his promises for eternal life. We have a Word which in blessing individuals has the capacity to renew, revive and restore human community in an age corrupted by selfish materialism and individualism.

2012 is the tenth year of our Diocesan Mission as solemnly undertaken by the Synod at its meeting in 2002. What should I personally give myself to in the year ahead? To the Word.

The first policy of our Mission is the crucial one 'To call upon God for such an outpouring of his Spirit that his people will be assured of his love through his word, seek to please the Saviour in all things, manifest the godly life and be filled with prayerful and sacrificial compassion for the lost in all the world.' My major task for 2012 is to challenge us all to call on God for his Spirit blessed Word to possess our hearts and then to look for the transforming consequences.

When we receive the gospel, we receive by the work of the Spirit an assurance that although we are sinful and undeserving, God loves us. Listen to this testimony from Asquith. 'I experienced very personally and deeply how much he loved me, unconditionally. I was deeply loved (still mystifies me – why?) by the great I AM!' (51)

Our assurance is not a rootless emotion; it is carefully and specifically linked to the cross of Christ. And our growth in grace, our maturity as Christians, depends on us going back again and again to the truth of Word and sacrament, that 'while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...' We cannot graduate beyond the cross.

Assurance is another name for Christian faith. Christian faith is trust in Jesus Christ and him alone for salvation. It is called assurance because by the power of the cross alone we may be sure of our salvation, and it is therefore a powerhouse of good works. Christian faith repents and crowns Christ as its only Lord. Since Christ is Lord, faith becomes active to please him; not to win salvation, but because salvation has

been won. As the Spirit imprints the word of the cross more and more in our hearts, so we are set free and emboldened to serve the Lord, to seek to please the Saviour in all things.

Am I 'growing as a Christian?' I am not sure what that question means or how to answer it. What interests me is not self improvement, but obedience. Am I more obedient than I was at first, more godly, more possessed by the fruit of the Spirit, more able to control my temper, speak a loving word, be generous and hospitable? Do I give myself in sacrificial compassion for the lost in all the world? The deep things of the Spirit come from the old, old story of Jesus and his love. In the immortal words of John Newton, 'I have learned this: I am a great sinner but Christ is a great Saviour.'

The test for our Diocese is always this: Will we remain completely committed to the scriptural Gospel, the one Word of God? Will we consult it, believe it, obey it? Will we be gospel people, or will our confidence and our passion ebb away?

It will only be by God's grace that we do stand. The lethargy of too much busyness may engulf us. Or it may be the hunger for new things, so that we can be different from our fathers. We may demand that God does mighty works or we won't believe in him. Scorn and opposition may erode our confidence. Elijah's challenge, 'how long do you halt between two opinions?' may come on us with surprising force, not least as the culture moves further from its Christian roots and biblical teaching seems more and more discordant.

Let me ask you: Why do we not pray, weeping over the lostness of our sick society? Why are our prayer meetings so poorly attended, our prayers perfunctory and our attention so weak? Is it because like ancient Israel we worship the Lord with our lips and the Baals with our hearts? Are the gods of this world so beguiling to us that we have become worldly Christians slaves of fashion and gadgetry and possessions, indistinguishable from our neighbours in the houses we own and the holidays we take and the bling we acquire? Where are our hearts fixed?

For our Mission is not about technique. It is about the heart, your heart and mine. It is about whether the Spirit blessed Word of the cross has so assured your heart that you have been set free to serve the Lord with every power you possess. It is about how seriously the gospel of Jesus Christ has impacted on your life and whether you are prepared to give all to him. It is about a young bus driver who challenged an older man, and a mature woman who cared for a young man on a train. We will never transform the world unless our own hearts are transformed first.

Stand with Elijah. He had seen a powerful exhibition of the power of God at Mt Carmel. But, even so, the people had not turned to God with all their heart. Now he challenged the Lord to do another mighty work, for he thought that he alone was left. But the Lord was not in the earthquake or in the storm or in the wind and in fact there were 7000 stout-hearted servants left. We have before us not the flash and flame of Carmel, but the man of shame at Calvary. In that cross we have been given the greatest possible testimony to the majesty and love and the glory of God. This cannot be surpassed; this cannot be exhausted. And with assurance imprinted in our hearts by the Spirit of God, we see that God has not ceased from the work of bringing in his kingdom and it is for us simply to be assured by his Word, to rest in his Word, to consult, to believe and to obey the Word and to pray that this great Word will capture the lost in all the world for Christ.

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Archbishop