

## Second Ordinary Session of the 49<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Diocese of Sydney: October 2012

### Presidential Address

Delivered by Dr Peter Jensen, Archbishop of Sydney, on Monday 8 October 2012.

#### Last Words

And so we come to my Last Address to this Synod as its President. The boundary of my time has been reached; my Last Words are to be delivered.

Of course, it would be better if I were dying. Death is such a decisive boundary. It creates the best opportunity for memorable Last Words.

I met death once, or so I thought. A Council meeting, a pain, a dizziness, a sudden weakness. Lying on the floor. Serious faces. The room cleared. The ambulance summoned. Barry Newman beside me holding my hand.

I recommend Barry in a crisis. He was the right blend of concern without anxiety, and consolation without terror.

I feebly made a feeble jest. Then I thought, 'What if this is the end? What if Christine says, "what were his last words? Did he say anything to me or about me?" What if Barry answered, "No, all he said was, 'Have you heard the one about the parrot and Clancy of the Overflow?'"

I was composing my words, when the medics pronounced I was not sick enough for hospital. Much later, I gave Christine the epitaph for my grave: 'At least I tried'. She retorted at once that she will put, 'He *said* he tried'.

Why remember Last Words?

Some reveal the person's real passion:

Barnum, the money-making circus man said. 'How were the receipts tonight...?'

A French expert on grammar said, 'I am about to, or am going die. Either expression is used'.

Frederick William I of Prussia, reminded that he would go naked out of the world, managed, 'No not quite naked; I shall have my uniform on'.

Dr Joseph Green's last word on checking his own pulse was, 'stopped'.

General John Sedgwick, peering over a parapet, 'They could not hit an elephant at this dis...'

The great philosopher Hegel allegedly said, 'Only one man ever understood me. And he didn't understand me'

From others we expect a testimony to the Truth made powerful because of the moment:

Martin Luther, asked did he still hold to the faith that had shaken the world, replied simply 'Yes'. William Tyndale, burned for translating the Scriptures into English prayed, 'Lord, open the King of England's eyes'.

Nothing in me could match that, and I am not under sentence of death.

But this *is* a finale. What is so important that I would want to impress it on you?

I suppose I could offer you a peaceful reminiscing, the comfort of the elderly and the sleep of the young. I do love remembering, with advantages.

I suppose I could defend my reputation and explain that I have been seriously misunderstood and traduced. I do love sympathy.

I suppose I could assault my enemies who have been lying idly for some time now and expose them for what they are. I do love revenge.

I suppose I could outline my 'legacy', doing the work of a historian before time in case they fail to notice how much has been achieved. I do love my own ego.

I suppose that I am personally capable of any of these follies. But the business of Synod in 2012 is not the spurious legacy or melancholy emotions of a retiring Archbishop. Such suggestions are fatuous.

The real issue is this: Ten years ago in obedience to the Lord we bound ourselves to our ten-year Diocesan Mission. Under God, what have we done? What have we learned? And most important, what now? What of our future? To this Mission and its future I dedicate these Last Words.

We may decide that we no longer need to make evangelism so central a part of our endeavours. Evangelism cannot be abandoned of course but perhaps another priority needs to be embraced

I could say, *Defend the Faith* for I see much contradiction and criticism ahead.

I could say, *Reform the Church*, for we have allowed the world to enter and compromise our holiness.

I could say, *Serve the World*, for injustice is rife, people are dying and the physical and social needs of people trap them in pain.

I could say, *Worship the Lord*, for hearts have grown cold and we have a form of godliness without the power of it.

All these obligations can hardly be neglected by serious Christians and they may at some time and circumstances achieve the highest priority.

But for me in 2012, the priority remains as it was in 2002, *Preach the Word*. Charles Wesley was right about his preferred Last Words and his ambition is mine too: 'Happy if with my final breath, I may but gasp his name, preach him to all and cry in death, Christ Jesus is the Lamb!' Is that your ambition?

Our nation and all nations need above all to hear the news of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. I pray that today the Lord will enable me to inspire you afresh with the vision for evangelism as our central task in the years ahead. We must remain on mission.

To persuade you, I am going to use five key questions: Where are we? Who are we? How are we? What must we do? Why must we do it?

### **Where are we?**

We are in a place and time of growing evangelistic opportunity and obligation.

Our secure, wealthy and beautiful region is alive with people, especially new people. Many of these people know nothing about Jesus and they need to hear about the way to eternal life. We are here for them. It is as simple as that.

Within the boundaries of the Diocese since 2006,

Population has risen 7% to 4.5 million people. One in five Australians lives in our Diocese.

The majority of people are aged under 40, with the largest cohort being those aged 30-39.

Around 60,000 people are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent – people for whom we have a special respect and responsibility.

Just over 725,000 claim to be Anglican, a decrease of 4%. Of these Anglicans, about 10-12% would be regularly in church.

Just over 60% claim to be Christian. There are now more people who say they are Christians, but there is a smaller proportion, down 4%.

Over a million people say they have no religion or do not answer this question at all. Within these two groups there has been an increase, but not a dramatic increase, in numbers. Overall, about 70% of people claim a nominal religious adherence.

In the period 2006 to 2011, over 300,000 people arrived, from 216 countries. In our different homes, 255 languages are spoken. China and India now dominate the countries of origin: it is no longer England. We use to grow simply because of the number of English migrants. Now hardly so at all. Other significant intakes are from Nepal, Korea and the Philippines.

Consequently we now see more Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims in our population.

There are hundreds of other relevant facts about our time and place, but what do we make of these?

You could say, don't fret: Our business is to look after the religious needs of the descendants of the English. We are a declining chaplaincy church. Christianity is a religion of consolation rather than salvation.

You had better say: The gospel itself utterly forbids us to think like that. The gospel addresses all men and women without exception in the same tone of voice, with the same demands and the same promises, the same Lord and the same Saviour. It is a matter of salvation, not consolation: of salvation, not of

growing our numbers. Any gospel church is aptly described as One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, universal words which embrace all nations and peoples and languages. If our denomination, will not accept the challenge posed by the new and increasingly different world which has come to us, we are not being faithful to the gospel which has formed our churches and saved our souls.

### **Culture**

But if we are in a place of growing evangelistic opportunity and obligation, why is progress so slow? We have worked so hard. We hear of massive evangelistic growth in China and Africa. Is there something in our spiritual culture which is especially resistant to religion?

One obvious answer is the secularism thesis. With the rise of modern knowledge, the God idea is no longer convincing and as more people are educated, atheism will rise and religion will decline. It is true that a significant number of people have embraced atheistic naturalism, a view of the world which excludes the spiritual. However, the number of Australians still claiming a religion of some sort remains virtually the same in 2012 as in 2006. Despite a decade of propaganda on behalf of atheism, the actual number of people who put atheism as their preferred choice on the census was a measly 10,000. The number of 'no religion' grew dramatically but the number of those who did not answer the question at all, fell almost as much. In any case, 'no religion' does not equate to atheism. We have widespread religious pluralism and nominalism rather than outright secularism as such.

Let's examine the matter of gospel rejection theologically. Then we start with sin and remember that rejection of a relationship with the living God is natural. All cultures express in various ways the human rejection of the true God. Often we evade God by religion, including forms of the Christian religion. At some level each culture displays the outward and visible signs of the choice made by Adam and Eve. They chose to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They took into human hands the task of determining the boundaries of right and wrong, to become autonomous, self-legislating.

We see the outworking of this in many ways. Take the Last Words of Mao Tse-Tung: 'act in accordance with the principles laid down', an invented ideology by which he had defied God, collectivised Chinese society and destroyed millions of lives while himself living the life of a Lord. A poor gift, those Last Words.

We are not much better. The western alternative to this collectivism, is the favourite Last Words chosen by so many Builders and Boomers for their funeral, Frank Sinatra's *I Did it My Way*. Here we find an expression of Western individualism, the reverse of collectivism. I think that one key to current Western indifference to the gospel is this deadly individualism.

Individualism is made possible by material wealth and technological mastery. It seems that we simply do not need each other as once we did. Nor do we need God. To think that a person is so proud of the phrase, 'I did it my way' that they would use it as a summary of their life's achievement reveals an astounding moral ineptitude, a sort of vulgar egotism. But it actually makes spiritual sense. The moral ineptitude rests on a profound spiritual rebellion against the living God. Our business as humans is '*thy* will be done;' we have made it '*my* will be done.' Worldly wealth and mastery makes this plausible.

Plausible but foolish. Humans remain interested in questions of the spirit, of meaning and purpose and value; we remain quick to judge each other by invisible standards of right and wrong. Evil remains – if you want to know the human heart, read the horrible things that are said in the anonymous world of the blogs. Furthermore, our wealth, mastery and power are not secure and nor are we independent. We exist in dependence on each other, like it or not.

But we are so flattered by our apparent mastery of the world that we have come to believe that we know the answers to all our own spiritual questions. We are better off with a private and self-made spirituality than with the wisdom which comes from God himself. Undemanding, individualistic. home-made, sentimental spirituality is the new religion.

Individualism turns the human impetus to worship inward, toward the self. Love of neighbour becomes self-love, the most sincere form of love there is. The cost of individualism is relationships. You can see the consequences in the quality of community, in family life and in the treatment of death. You can contrast it with the genius of the gospel based on the love of the God whose very being is self-giving love.

*The quality of community.* One obvious product of individualism is the decline in voluntary associations, for work, for play, for religion, for education, for charity, for protection, which characterise a truly free and healthy society. If you wish to protect and respect the individual, especially protect us from an over-mighty government, it is essential that ordinary people form clubs and groups and unions, free associations which can accomplish together what the individual is not able to do. It was this which so impressed the great French philosopher Alexis De Tocqueville in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when he studied American democracy. 'If men are to remain civilized, or to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve....'

Some have called these 'mediating institutions' – mediating that is between the government and the individual.

In our society there is solid evidence that the wholesome tendency to unite in a common cause is breaking down. In one sense it is precisely this which makes it so hard to plant, grow and sustain churches. People will not commit. It is not just the church – it is the club and the group and the union and the mutual society and the association – indeed it is human fellowship itself. One of the most disturbing signs of all, strongly reported by people like Mr Rodney Cavalier and Mr John Anderson, is the breakdown of the political associations, the local branches of the political parties. The fraternity of the left in which men and women combined to help each other and the libertarianism of the right in which the individual freely undertook the responsibility to work for the good of society, are now faint memories. Both needed to be activated by a love of neighbours strong enough to sacrifice the ego, not a love for power which exalts the ego. Both need to protect and cherish the free associations of individuals who work for good causes in local areas, of which local churches are prime examples.

*The corrosion of family.* The chief mediating institution is the family, particularly the extended family. Here the next generation of children are born and raised. Even if you are a single person, family matters intensely to you. In the family you will have your chief opportunities for love of neighbour in your care for the young, the old and the sick. It is from the family that you will receive in your turn the love which you too need and will need even more one day. Families identify, guide, educate and nurture and protect the young, including the young in the womb – and protect others from their young where necessary. Good families channel the powerful impulses of adolescence into fruitful activities. From good families come good streets and neighbourhoods. Good families re-inforce each other. Good families create better educational, health and social outcomes for all their members and their neighbours. Not all families are or even can be good, except in a broad sense; tragedy, wilfulness, disaster may strike us all.

Making family life even more difficult is our embrace of the technology represented by the communications revolution. In our pride, we have welcomed into our homes a stunning technological revolution in our communications and one that promises what only God possesses: complete knowledge. But we have not learned the self-control we need to use it wisely, let alone the restraint offered by love of God and neighbour. Even the powerful barriers of love with which devoted parents always guard their growing children from experiences they are not ready for, even those defences will now collapse. The fortifications are obsolete; the boundaries are gone. This technology delivers the knowledge of good and evil and its products to every eye and ear and brain. Indeed its continued use will help form the brain; we made it, and it is now making us. It apes community and subverts family. As you are using it, it shapes your hopes, tastes and desires. It is not neutral; Babel has arrived.

The benefits of stable and loving family life are so huge that any society which does not aspire to it and enable it, is courting and experiencing the general judgement of God. But the prevailing philosophy of individualism has wrought its malign work on family as elsewhere. At the heart of family is marriage, understood as the union of two persons of the opposite sex from different families by way of promises of permanence and exclusion. If the promises reflect, as they do in the Book of Common Prayer, the differences between man and woman as well as the equality, it is always to be understood that the headship of the man brings with it the awesome responsibility to nurture and cherish as Christ loved and cherished his church. To use this, as some have, as an excuse to demand slave like servility, or even to engage in physical and emotional bullying is to misuse it utterly and no wife should feel spiritually obliged to accept such treatment. Here too sin takes and distorts what is for our good in its own evil interests. Likewise, however, to treat husband and wife as two simply interchangeable 'partners' is to court damage to the fabric of the family itself. Even more damaging, of course, is the modern habit of living together without the benefit of the public promises – an inherently unstable relationship. Still more damaging is the current encouragement to casual promiscuity.

The Biblical account of marriage and family is, I believe, demonstrably better than what we now have. We should be confidently setting out our teaching, demonstrating its sources, extolling its virtues, running courses on marriage preparation and enrichment, showing how marriage and family reflect the Creator's intentions and also that the gospel of forgiveness and transformation makes it possible. We need to encourage our nation to recover its respect for such a vision. Such teaching is so consistent with our Mission and a natural point of contact with the interests of men and women everywhere, that I urge us to do it. On the other hand, the ideology which stresses the individual and so is contrary to family life and associations, is also contrary to the gospel and to churches based on the gospel.

But there is a Last Word here too:

Teaching on the family is not the gospel itself. Indeed, as with all else, Jesus Christ relativises the family: '...and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God,

he is my brother and sister and mother.” There is an idolatry of the family to which we could easily be prone. It sometimes takes something really good to displace the best. I would rather be a friendless orphan with Jesus, than the patriarch of the best family I know. Listen as an old, unknown tramp, a man without family, unwittingly gives us what amounts to his last words, his Swan Song, his testimony recorded by chance forty years ago: ‘Jesus’ blood never failed me yet, never failed me yet...’

*Attitude to death* What a contrast to the Swan Song of our generation: *I Did it My Way*, and how worldly is our attitude to death. Once, funeral services were opportunities to hear God and to pray to God, to be forced to think about to hear about sin, judgement, redemption and resurrection and to reverently dispose of the body. Now in the hands of unbelief they have become opportunities for eulogists to attempt to resurrect the deceased by the power of fine words. The Last Words come from friends and family, and their aim seems to be to build up the reputation of the dead person so that all will believe how good a person he or she was. All seems designed to avoid the truth that the person is gone, that death is horrible, that bodies turn to dust, that the person has not one chance in hell of avoiding hell based on the quality of their lives.

Dr Richard Stanton, an expert in media, writes about the pornography of death, in which death has been disengaged from true emotions and been commodified, ‘thus reducing meaning to a bureaucratic process.’ Gone is any memory of our hope, our only hope, my only hope in life or in death, Jesus Christ. Compare what the godly George Herbert said on his death bed: ‘Lord, forsake me not, now my strength faileth me; but grant me mercy for the merits of my Jesus.’ “The Blood of Jesus never failed me yet...” All we have by way of hope is *I’ll Do it My Way*, or some vague wish that we will all meet again. Individualism promises much but delivers loneliness. In the face of death, it is a god who has failed.

If the gospel contrasts so favourably with individualism in community, family and death, why is evangelism hard? Precisely because it is a spiritual matter and human individualism is the love of self which it takes the Holy Spirit to make us abandon. Our society is even more in the grip of a malign individualism than ever before and its resistance to all relationships and especially an all demanding relationship with God is powerful indeed. But there us another side to this. I think that many people are tiring of the fruit of individualism and want to know the God who brings order and family and acceptance and relationship into the community.

I have never had such good opportunities in speaking to people about Jesus as in the last few three or four years. Our theory of Connect 09 is true – there are people everywhere who would like to know the gospel and will want us to befriend them. In particular lay people are ideally placed to quietly but confidently share Christ and show what a difference he makes. It may be that the evils of individualism will become so apparent that the world will be more open to the gospel, especially a gospel which stresses love in the face of community and family breakdown and hope in the face of death. In the meantime we preach a gospel which offers a radically different view of the world. After all this Lord did seize another communications revolution and turn it to good. He did hear Tyndale’s last Prayer and he did open the King of England’s eyes and so we have our English Bible and so here we are tonight. But who are we?

### **Who are we?**

To preach the gospel in this world, we must be confident of our identity.

When I entered university aged 17, I had a choice. Which Christian group should I belong to?

The Student Christian Movement had a large membership and a distinguished history. According to my memory of those days, its ethos was one of exploration and social action, its invitation to belong included anyone interested in discussing the Christian faith, and it did not formally adhere to the inspiration and infallibility of scripture. I was attracted – especially by the somewhat fuzzy membership criteria and the possibility of religious discussion. It seemed to be the more *chic* group.

The alternative was the Evangelical Union, a body, like my own, less *chic*, whose specific aim it was to present the Christian gospel on the campus and who invited its leaders to a specific adherence to the inspiration and infallibility of scripture as well as such doctrines as the penal and substitutionary work of Christ, his bodily resurrection and his personal return.

For me the issue was authority and specifically biblical authority. One thing I knew: I belonged to the Lord Jesus Christ and I had set myself to live in obedience to the will of my Lord. Christianity was a matter of obedience before it was a matter of discussion. When I studied the matter I became convinced then as I remain today that the Lordship of Christ is mediated to us by his word the Bible and its authority expresses his authority. Later that year, I invited my friend Michael to an evangelistic dinner at the Law School, at which the speaker was Dr Alan Cole and to my great joy, Michael accepted the Lord Jesus as

his Lord and Saviour and so was brought from death to life. I never regretted my choice of the Evangelical Union.

In a world increasingly hostile to and ignorant of Christian faith, it is the EU and its affiliates which survived on our campuses and is vigorous and strong. The secret of its success is Bible and gospel: it lives and believes by the authority of the Bible and it preaches the gospel. I believe that the more flexible and even radical we have to be in evangelism, the more important for us to identify ourselves by strong adherence and bold unwavering commitment to Bible and gospel. Failure here will see us become indistinguishable from the world which surrounds us, unable to challenge it, unable to live for Christ within it, unable to evangelise it.

Let me give you my experience. I do not regard myself as a combative man, but over the course of my Christian life there has scarcely been a period when there have not been contests between the world and the gospel and within the Christian fellowship over doctrine, contests in which as a teacher of God's word I have been forced to take part through synods, debates, discussions and the media and in the making of hard, very hard decisions affecting the lives of others. There have been contests about the authority of scripture, about the place of social action, about human sexuality, about the role of the Holy Spirit, about the nature of Christian worship, about justification by faith, about the ministry of women and many other matters as well. We have had to contend internationally and nationally. Many recoil from these arguments and prefer to live quietly. I sense something in our own circles of the mood critical, as though contest is itself wrong or as though we have fought the wrong issues or as though conciliation would have been best.

Well, if you feel thus, let me say you were not there at the time. You enjoy the fruit of the labours of others and no doubt it is easy enough now to see what has been exaggerated, what misapplied, what taken too seriously. Military historians are always right. But to take one case, the contest between the charismatic arminianism and the reformed faith here in Sydney starting in earnest over forty years ago, was and remains crucial to our identity and our ability to preach the gospel. It is easy to pick the faults even in Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther and John Calvin. But I warn you all, that if you shrink back in your day from contesting for the gospel, if you opt for the quiet life and a nice reputation, if you prefer political compromise to biblical truth, you will lose your way and squander the mighty legacy of a Marcus Loane a Broughton Knox, and an Alan Cole. Do not let the last word spoken over your generation be the chilling Last Word of the daughter-in-law of Eli: Ichabod, 'the glory has departed'.

But I feel sure of better things of you my brothers and sisters.

Who are we? Well let me tell you what I confess about the Bible and the gospel.

The Bible is the unique word of God. It is inspired by God and has as a result the features of clarity, sufficiency and infallibility or as I would prefer to say, inerrancy. It is the perfect revelation to us of God's person and purposes. It tells the story of the kingdom of God, centring on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and culminating in his reign with the Father and the Spirit for ever and ever. The Bible teaches us the truth about God, his requirements for us and his ways with us. It gives us the words by which we may speak about God and with God. This written word of God is the authority by which we may judge all things, not least within the Christian fellowship. The duty of the Christian pastor is not to preach his own religious thoughts or emotions, but the word of God, for it is through the word that Christ rules his church and the conscience of Christians. Thank God that he heard Tyndale's last prayer and opened the eyes of the King of England and gave us the Bible in our own language.

In our day the struggle is over interpretation. Obviously, we must interpret. The difficulty is the suggestion that 'it all depends', that somehow on matters such as sexual ethics it is merely a matter of opinion. We do have to challenge accepted interpretations and explore and change our minds where warranted. But the idea that one interpretation is as good as another and that the Bible both endorses and does not endorse sex outside of marriage is lunatic. Better to say that the Bible is wrong than to pretend to overturn the obvious. In my view, however, what we are often dealing with here is that individualistic philosophy which repudiates authority and wishes to remake biblical religion in line with what the world is saying. This we must continue to resist.

The final content of the Bible is the gospel. The one God created and sustains all things by the power of his word and his Spirit. The Word of God gives the universe both its order and its *telos*, its End or purpose. Humanity, designed to inhabit the earth and rule over it as God's image bearers, overthrew the order and purpose of God in our lust for the knowledge of good and evil and entered a state of spiritual darkness, suffering and death, the symbol and experience of the judgement to come. The noble image bearers have become the ignoble slaves of our own evil desires, forever longing for the false fulfilment, forever inventing our own religions and moral systems, forever preying on each other. We are 'without God and without hope', not recognising God's order in this world and having rejected his *telos*, plan for its End.

Into this darkness comes the promises of God and the work of God in creating a people of promise. And at the chosen moment, impelled by divine love, comes the man of promise, God's Son and his true image-bearer, God come from God, to save the world. His name is Jesus Christ. He shows how the world should be ordered, as he brings health and goodness. He announces the coming of the Kingdom of God, the *telos*. He does the great work of saving God's people by suffering death in our place and on our behalf, thus bringing forgiveness and eternal life to those who by his Spirit repent and put their trust in Him alone. And then God brings his End, his Last Word into our present history by raising Jesus from the dead and seating him on his own right hand. It is this Lord Jesus we proclaim and summon men and women to turn to him as Lord and entrust themselves to him for eternal life. But for those who do not believe they are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

You are constantly going to be tempted to mute or distort that gospel. It is so confronting, indeed as well so odd. It says that humanity embraces utterly disabling sin. It calls upon us for love and for relationships and for submission to God and to one another. It calls on us for the very community and family life which the individualist philosophy has discarded.

Think again about how the world is now treating death and how you must treat death. Think of Dr Stanton's 'commodification of death', and elsewhere the 'pornography of death' in which death is detached from the normal emotions surrounding it just as in pornography sex is detached from love. Grief is now replaced by manufactured celebration and the diversion of the mind from death towards fantasy. As one Sydney undertaker is reported to have said, 'We are event planners...'; and as Kate Legge sums it up so perceptively when observing how modern people treat death and funerals: 'How we're remembered, celebrated, is the only afterlife we can vouch for here on earth.' Try preaching sin, penal substitution, the resurrection of the dead and justification by faith in this milieu. Being a parish minister has rarely been so hard. For the sake of Christ, be faithful!

We must all daily determine to be Bible and gospel people. Being Anglican helps us here and I thank God that in his providence he has given us an Anglican heritage. In particular we are shaped by the legacy of Thomas Cranmer, a legacy which comes to us through his Book of Common Prayer, the Thirty Nine Articles and a legacy sealed by his magnificent Last Word: his martyrdom. In a world which so little knows or cares for the biblical faith, Cranmer's teaching on the great matters of sin and death and judgement and salvation will keep us in the biblical tradition. My hope is that our new liturgical resources will help keep us in that godly tradition. Losing touch with it is not going to help us retain our identity.

We will not survive in any recognisably Christian form in the next decades if we do not understand who we are and who we need to be. We take the long view of things; we are not about to disappear and we see our task as involving the whole diocese and not just a section of it. Precisely because we are Bible and gospel people, we are a preaching people. The culture around us is going to change in ways unimaginable and if we do not meet these changes without capitulating to the culture, we will become an irrelevant little sect. But in order to meet them we need to be scrupulously faithful to the gospel of salvation through Christ as expounded in scripture as the word of God. Somehow you are truly going to have to preach amazing grace to the human heart which says 'I am my own boss'; John Newton's 'I am a great sinner but Christ is a great Saviour' to those who are saying again and again: 'I'll do it my way'. Mind you I know which gospel I would prefer, in the face of death and judgment!

### **How are we?**

How can we assess the Diocesan Mission? Has the blessing of God been upon us?

We gave ourselves a big goal, to reach at least 10% of the population in 10 years.

In 2002, I gave three reasons for choosing this goal.

First, it is humanly speaking impossible. Only God could do this and it is pre-eminently a reminder to pray and trust God.

Second, our real goal is 100%. The 10% figure challenges complacency.

Third, the 10% goal has the power to make us look outward. We need a mind change.

What has happened to us in the last decade? The 10% has been a blessing: we are constantly reminded to pray, as only the Lord can move like that; he has kept before us the big goal of reaching the whole population; He has changed our mind-set about evangelism and church ministry. He has yet to give us 10% of the population, but, remarkably, in contrast with voluntary organisations in general, we have experienced numerical growth.

How has the Lord blessed us? As I think of our four policies, to preach and pray, to plant and penetrate, to multiply and train, to reform, I see significant progress on all fronts.

***Policy 1***

First, we kept preaching the gospel. The biblical gospel has been proclaimed in countless contexts during this period, from pulpits, at camps, in halls, in prisons, in campus, to members of other faiths, at the bedside of the dying, in classrooms, in the workplace, in private conversations, in parks and trains, in shops, at funerals, through the media, via the internet and facebook, through gospel distribution, in season and out of season. Rejection has occurred; disciples have been made, believers have been assured.

Second, we prayed. We prayed for Sydney. The mission prayer was in constant use. Prayer meetings took place. Private individuals and parishes became involved in praying for their neighbours and suburbs and institutions. We have begun to lift up our eyes.

***Policy 2***

Third, we progressed. In a period when there were fewer nominal Anglicans and where the general tendency in various mainstream denominations has been a marked numerical decline, we have continued to grow. As far as we can tell the growth during the decade has been approximately 7.1%, from 75,000 to 80,000 regular attenders. The experts tell us that by comparison this is quite notable.

Fourth, we planted. The challenge was to plant new congregations, groups, churches. This being the Diocese of Sydney keeping records of new initiatives has been impossible. As far as we can tell, however, there have been 109 new church plants and congregations and at least 105 other groups initiated. I am glad to report also that a number other groups and plants have closed. It would be monumentally foolish to persevere with something which does not work. But what we have here is a record of an unleashed initiative on a large scale unprecedented in 60 years at least. In earlier decades, viewed overall, we were closing churches at an alarming rate. Now we are starting them. The turn around is extraordinary.

Furthermore we have started to move forward in creating new parishes. For years we have been gently stagnating at around 260 parishes, quietly amalgamating the dying ones, leaving suburbs unpastored and letting buildings go. We have now begun to go forward, refusing to close parishes or amalgamate them without the hope of re-opening them in the future, finding new congregations and uses for buildings and doing what we had forgotten to do – inaugurate new parishes. This changed mind-set must be permanent.

Even better news. We have seen our responsibility for our neighbours from all nations. In 2002 we had an impressive 18 ethnic congregations. In 2012 we have 60! I cannot tell you how excited I was to attend the birth of our sub-continental evangelistic fellowship. Here let me pay tribute to the indefatigable, brilliant and clear-eyed work of the Rev Bruce Hall, now full time at Evangelism and New Churches.

***Policy 3***

Fifth, we have proliferated workers. Many denominations are declining in workers, with people becoming part time and being older. For us the reverse is happening. The biggest expansion of workers has been amongst the ordained clergy where the numbers have advanced by an astonishing increase of 26% from 480 to 604. Our workers are better trained and higher quality in gifts than ever before. Most parishes are now using teams of workers, including a very significant number of women. I believe that our complementarian position is Biblical and has never held us back. But the advent of the Priscilla and Aquila centre at Moore College has signalled at last a sustained theoretical and practical exploration of that position. It should always mark our approach to ministry. I urge you to recognise that it is the clear teaching of scripture and remain loyal to it. God will bless such costly, counter-cultural obedience to his word and he has done so already.

***Policy 4***

Sixth, we have empowered change. There has been a mood change in the Diocese. I do not mean that the past was hopeless. But the Mission has given us permission to experiment, to try new things, to adventure. It has also summoned new workers to our ranks. We are going forward. Integral to this has been the insistence provoked by the figure 10% that we look outward. Hence the fundamental changes to our ministry structure. Hence a dramatic jump in the first five years in the number of people involved in evangelistic activity; in the next five years there has been a similarly significant jump in the involvement of people in community service or welfare-related church activities. The statistics say that we are on the way to becoming more outwardly focused and hence more able to penetrate the community around us with the gospel. The Mission is working.

Seventh, we partnered. Parishes helped each other. Our organisations marshalled their resources as they never had, to make sure that they were witnessing to the gospel and that they were co-operating



with each other and with the parishes. The whole Mission Area project is a challenge to make the outward look in partnership with others natural in our Diocese. Positive results have begun to emerge.

Eighth, we have prospered. In spiritual terms the most important test of vitality is not our inherited money but money generously given through the plate. In 2002, the figure was \$47 million; last year, it was \$89 million, an increase of 88%. Far from our churches dying off quietly, as the media would like us to believe and as is happening in many places, these figures tell us of vigorous commitment and serious discipleship. It is an indication of morale, spiritual maturity and generosity. At the same time missionary giving through CMS has also gone forward strongly, with an increase of 78% over the last 9 years. The loss of endowment money has been a serious blow, but I make two comments. First, much money was provided for the early stages of the Mission and it has had ongoing positive results, especially the distribution of \$20m for land and buildings. Second, we have been forced to consider our priorities very carefully as you will see from this year's budget. This has been a painful but excellent undertaking and I congratulate Mr Kell and his team for doing it so well. Here, if we accept their work, is a permanent gain.

I have given you the big picture with scarcely a negative nuance.

I have done so for a reason.

It is typical of Australians to be cynical and disbelieving of success. However we are not dealing here with mere success; we are dealing with blessing, blessing which has come as a result of prayer and obedience. Furthermore you need to realise that we are dealing with the long-term here – we have used ten years as a useful period. But we are fifty-year people. We are not deterred by lengthy effort and hard work. We are building to last. If you accept my challenge to continue with the priority on preaching the gospel into the long term, there will be an absolute need for clarity and hard headed planning. It is time for the Mission to be dismantled, examined, adjusted, reformed, improved and embraced. But for now there is a moment for rejoicing, for acknowledging the kindness of God. Brothers and sisters, the Lord has been at work in and through us to bless our city and its region. Praise his name!

### **Now, what must we do?**

Preach the gospel!

The Diocesan Mission does not belong to the Archbishop. I did not invent it. We should not think of this as something that an Archbishop does – it belongs to us all. Already and rightly the Mission Board is working on the question of what we have learned and what comes next. Much of what we have done is right. We need to keep the momentum going, not start again from scratch or abandon it at this point. What we are doing is not for the short term – we must plan ahead to at least 2060 for a start.

Thus, in my view the four policies are theologically responsible and fundamentally sound. The wording may need improvement but the concepts flow from an unchanging commitment to theology and mission. Likewise, the idea behind the 10% goal is integral to what we are about, namely fulfilling our calling to reach out to all people, not just to grow churches. We have created a wonderful ministerial workforce. The whole ethos of parish ministry, of looking out has been embraced. We now need to ensure that our ministers are rightly deployed for evangelism. We have started well. I take it we are committed to prayer, to planting churches, to multiplying workers and to continuous reform. How do we keep going?

Let me dream about our future. In the light of what I know of our challenges, what do I see?

*I see cross cultural work flourishing.* Why not 120 ethnic congregations in the next decade? Where are those people groups not even in mind yet? I see Moore College packed with students, especially from India and other parts of the sub-continent.

*I see children's and youth work flourishing.* This is the best entry point for new people, the best place for people to come to know the Lord, the best place to train people for a lifetime of ministry. The alternatives for young people in Sydney are very poor. What we can provide is great. Think of the Year Thirteen program for a start. We must grow.

*I see the lay people of our Diocese unleashed for service.* We already have an extraordinary number of lay people involved in evangelistic ministries. Indeed the laity of the Diocese must surely be the best trained and most dedicated you can imagine. But the evidence is in: you are frustrated at not being more involved! It is usual to think that if we just trained rectors better all would be well. I think that our major resource is lay Christians in the work place and the community.

*I see new churches buildings in new suburbs.* We have always had a vision to be present throughout the whole region. We will vote for our absence if we don't buy land and build buildings. New churches cannot afford to buy into the property market. We need to deploy workers and back them with the resources they need. Just as your church was helped so you need to help. The twenty million dollars we spent on this in the last decade has been fruitfully used. I hope that the Synod joyfully partners with the Mission Property

Committee in passing the levy to raise the money. Into this category also comes the sale of Bishopscourt, which I also thoroughly support.

*I see a spirit of partnership emerging.* The Bible loves fellowship or partnership in gospel work. We have huge opportunities to partner together in local areas and through our extraordinary organisations to reach the lost tribes and the deserts of our region. This is also the goal of Mission Areas. I was delighted to hear for example of the Liverpool Area has now drawn together the young people of the region on two occasions, giving a number of small groups the chance to meet with several hundred instead is brilliant. Why are not doing a lot of this?

*I see the gospel becoming visible in the media.* We will engage with the ideas of this generation and refuse to accept the censorship which is so easily imposed on Christianity. We must find ways of putting our case for Christ and making it natural to speak about God in the general community. The large mail I received after the recent QandA program showed me that once the gospel is visible, Christians in the workplace can and will make use of opportunities.

*I see the glorious gospel guarded and promoted.* There is no point preaching a false gospel or a distorted one. We must be vigilant to guard the gospel which has been entrusted to us. We have been enormously blessed by the development of Moore College over the last ten years and for its faithful testimony to the word of God. I always say that the College is the first work of the Diocese – not in any way to diminish the great work being done by bodies such as Youthworks and the Schools Corporation. But the vigour and faithfulness of the College is a vital component in our capacity to preach the gospel and we must ensure its well-being as much as we can. I particularly ask you to pray for the choice of the next Principal.

### **Why must we do it?**

Last Words.

Now I have given you my Last Words. And yet, again I say, I hardly think that my own Last Words as such are of great importance. I could have said many different things from what I have actually said to you. I have chosen to say one thing, the one thing which I believe I have had to say at this time and place. To do so I appropriated some Last Words from the Apostle Paul, who tells us as he writes, ‘the time of my departure has come’: ‘I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word, be ready in season and out of season...’ Paul sees that our mission comes from the love of God to the lost in all the world and that our obedience is motivated by the love which drew salvation’s plan.

Let me take you to some other Last Words, ones which really matter, for if you will not listen to these, you will hardly listen to mine:

‘And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”’

The thing about solemn Last Words like these ones is that they are carefully crafted. The Master chooses to say at the very end what it is that he wants his disciples chiefly to remember. Here are the standing orders for disciples; and the standing orders have us going into all the world, in the name and by the power of the one who has all authority. His gospel is about him and it is a declaration of his Lordship.

As we go, we make disciples through teaching the word of God, bringing men and women into faith and obedience to Christ as they hear the word of God, a discipleship sealed outwardly and unforgettably in baptism in the threefold name. For there is one God, one name and yet three names, for our one God is both three and also magnificently and mysteriously three in one, all equal in glory and splendour and power and honour and we are have the privilege of baptism in such a name, this name.

And then the promise: ‘And behold I am with you always, even to the close of the age’. For do you think he leaves his people to struggle with the problems of their age? Do you think he leaves it to us to plan and strategise and dream and labour and count? Do you think he knows nothing of facebook and the internet and twitter and whatever will come next? Does he now know the hardness of men’s hearts and what it is like to see his disciples fish all night and catch nothing? Do you think he knows nothing of small churches and struggling congregations and a veritable sea of unbelief? Does he now say that there is only one age left and we are in it however long it lasts, and throughout it by the power of my Spirit, I am with you?

For you see I have been fooling you all along. Have you not noticed, this is not the Last Word of Jesus? I guess if you are looking for that you would think of his word from the cross: ‘Finished’ – done, complete, atoned, paid for, saved. Now that is a great Last Word.

But his word here is not the Last Word of a dying man. It is more like a First Word, the word that inaugurates a new era. We are face to face here with a resurrected Lord. The *telos*, the End, the goal has arrived in person. This sick, tired, sad, death-haunted old world in which we live is passing away. Its death sentence has been pronounced. A new age has broken in. The kingdom of God is here. From now on when we look back into the darkness of human history, nasty, brutish and short, we see that a light has dawned, the age of promise is no mere promise, its beginning is there, there in history and its full coming, the rising of the sun is not long delayed.

And in the meantime, whatever this world says or does and however hard our way is or not, Jesus Christ is with us and all power has been given to him and he rules over all things!

That is why we are joyfully determined to preach his gospel as our priority.

Would you please stand as we pray?

And so 'Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen'

Dr Peter F Jensen

**Archbishop of Sydney**

8 October 2012