

Third Ordinary Session of the 49th Synod of the Diocese of Sydney: October 2013

Presidential Address

Delivered by Dr Glenn Davies, Archbishop of Sydney, on Monday 14 October 2013.

Members of Synod, brothers and sisters, saints of the Most High, welcome to the final session of this Synod.

My vision for the next five years is to see the name of Jesus exalted in the city of Greater Sydney and beyond, and to see his body, which is the church, gaining greater honour and respect among the communities in which we live (Ephesians 3:10, 21). For this to happen we must be people who are energised and transformed by the gospel, such that our lives reflect not merely the rhetoric, but the *reality*, of the love of Christ.

Let our love for one another and our love for God, grounded in Christ's love for us, be the magnet that draws unbelievers to the Saviour so that they too may be enfolded into the fellowship of the church, which is his body and his temple. We love him because he first loved us. It is his love that we proclaim and his name that we seek to exalt, as we commit ourselves afresh to glorify God with every fibre of our being.

Our Saviour left a final command to his apostles: to make disciples of all nations. This Great Commission, so aptly named, has not been superseded. It has not run its course, nor lost its energy or its urgency. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Jesus and it is by his authority that we make disciples through baptism into the triune name and teach them to observe all that he has commanded. Our mission is twofold: evangelism (the making of disciples) and teaching (the maturing of disciples). While our context is different from the first century context of the apostles, the mission is the same and will be the same until the Lord returns.

Over the past ten years we have embarked on a Diocesan Mission, a particular application of the Great Commission suitable for our times and focused on a specific goal. We may not have reached the initial goal of 10% of the population attending Bible-based churches within the specified decade, but this goal was meant to lift our spirits and raise our eyes to new horizons, knowing that any achievement of such a goal would only be due to God's grace and mercy, rather than our own efforts. We thank God for those who became disciples in that period of time and we thank God for those who have matured in their discipleship by keeping the commandments of Christ.

But what now, you ask? What is the next plan? Where to from here? The Standing Committee has been working on this through its Mission Board and you will find in your papers a report from the sub-committee chaired by Bishop Peter Hayward. This report was prepared following feedback from parishes and organisations over the last year, and is now presented to the Synod for its response. It will require our input before any future phase of a Diocesan Mission is adopted by the Synod. Over the past ten years new things have been tried and old ways have been refined, while still seeking to be faithful to the truth of the gospel. In the next stage of our life together as a Diocese, our mission needs to be refreshed and sharpened, as we learn from the last ten years. Following that feedback from members of Synod, the Standing Committee is planning to present a new proposal for our consideration in 2014. Yet brothers and sisters, we do not need to wait till next October to act. The words of Jesus continue to ring within our ears – make disciples of all nations!

You will notice the multi-ethnic approach of Jesus, not just disciples who are Jews or even Mediterraneans, but disciples from *all* nations. Our own churches are sadly no longer a reflection of Sydney with its current multi-ethnic mix and we are in danger of becoming Anglo outposts in a multicultural city. This is a challenge that is not to be relegated to the Department of Evangelism and New Churches, but is our responsibility as a whole Diocese—our parishes, organisations and schools who live within the multi-ethnic stream of Greater Sydney and the Illawarra. There are significant challenges for us in this regard and we need not only the expertise of experienced cross-cultural workers among us, but we need to pray earnestly for our heavenly Father's blessing on the work of our hands as we seek to engage with our neighbours, family and friends with the love of Christ.

JesusBrings

Since the gospel is the power of God for salvation, we need to keep thinking of new ways of unleashing that power. Of course, our Sunday services are always gospel-focused when we meet together to confess our sins, be assured of God's mercy in Christ to forgive us our sins, and to 'render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy Word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.' This was Cranmer's aim to have an English liturgy, which was Bible-based, gospel-focused and Christ-centred in both word and sacrament. Whether the sermon is evangelistic or not, it should always be 'evangelical', in the best sense of the word, namely, shaped by the evangel. However, apart from our weekly parish activities, there are occasions when the work of the gospel can be given greater impetus as we share with others in a united effort, which is beyond the resources of a single parish to accomplish alone. This is one of the reasons why Mission Areas were established, with a view to encouraging cooperation and mission partnership among parishes in close proximity to one another. Partnership is a key to the effectiveness of Mission Areas, overcoming the sceptical parochialism that breeds isolation and competition with the grace of cooperation and communion. Rectors now meet together for strategy and shared training opportunities and there is a new level of trust among rectors as they assist in the growth of each other's churches. For example, the Warringah Mission Area is planning a combined mission program in the Northern Beaches next year under the title 'Jesus is'.

At the same time that these initiatives were being planned the Mission Board, following a request from the 2012 Synod for a United Mission Campaign across the Diocese for 2014, considered that the time was ripe for another diocesan wide resource, much like Connect09, in which all parishes could participate. At this Synod we shall be launching the *Jesusbrings* campaign, which will have a focus on Easter next year, using resources prepared especially for parishes, and a second focus in August with some co-ordinated events.

The *Jesusbrings* campaign is all about Jesus' mission to seek and to save the lost. It is about God's people being stirred to work together in local churches and church partnerships to proclaim Christ to the world. It is about resourcing local churches in their local mission. Our prayer and purpose is that as his people proclaim the good news of Jesus to our world, Jesus would bring grace to many people, and draw them to himself. We also pray that the collective power of thousands of Christians calling upon our society to turn to Christ will shake our city and suburbs to the core. We invite your eager and prayerful partnership in this united campaign.

Royal Commission

On 12th November, 2012 the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, announced that she was recommending to the Governor-General the creation of a **Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse**. The establishment of the Commission followed revelations of child abusers being moved from place to place, instead of their abuse and crimes being reported. Several State Governments had previously and independently initiated enquiries into the abuse of children in institutions, but it was generally acknowledged that such enquiries had only scratched the surface of the endemic abuse of children across the nation.

The Governor-General, on 11th January, 2013, issued letters patent to six commissioners, which required and authorised them to inquire into institutional responses to allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse and related matters. Their brief is to examine the history of abuse in educational institutions, religious groups, sporting organisations, state institutions and youth organisations.

Matters related to child abuse include, among others:

- a. what institutions and governments should do to better protect children against child sexual abuse and related matters in institutional contexts in the future;
- b. what institutions and governments should do to achieve best practice in encouraging the reporting of, and responding to reports or information about, allegations, incidents or risks of child sexual abuse and related matters in institutional contexts;
- c. what should be done to eliminate or reduce impediments that currently exist for responding appropriately to child sexual abuse and related matters in institutional contexts, including addressing failures in, and impediments to, reporting, investigating and responding to allegations and incidents of abuse;
- d. what institutions and governments should do to address, or alleviate the impact of, past and future child sexual abuse and related matters in institutional contexts, including, in particular,

in ensuring justice for victims through the provision of redress by institutions, processes for referral for investigation and prosecution and support services.

We welcome the Royal Commission as a church that is mindful of its obligations to care for children, some of whom are the most vulnerable members of our society. While the Commission is due to hand down its first report in the middle of next year, it is widely believed that the life of the Commission will span a decade of investigation, if the Irish Commission into Child Abuse (1999-2009) is any guide in such circumstances.

The next ten years, I suspect, will see a number of revelations that will be uncomfortable for the Anglican Church as well as other denominations and Christian organisations. The suffering of those who have been abused can never be overestimated. We must face any failures of the past with integrity, honour, repentance and compassion. In November 2012, the General Synod Standing Committee established a Royal Commission Working Group to participate in the consultation process, to identify among all dioceses best practice protocols and procedures which respond to and prevent child sexual abuse, and to assist Dioceses as they are called upon to respond to the Royal Commission enquiries, should such assistance be required. The Standing Committee appointed as convener of the Working Group Mr Garth Blake SC, who has been a tireless champion of child protection not only in our own Diocese, which we gratefully acknowledge, but also across the Anglican Church of Australia and throughout the Communion as a whole. Our own Standing Committee has also established a Steering Committee to oversee the response of the Diocese to the Royal Commission and to provide the Director of Professional Standards with a point of reference for undertaking this work. Thus far a team of people have been sifting through diocesan records to provide as complete a picture as possible of known cases of child abuse in any Anglican parishes, organisations or schools within the Diocese, the protocols and procedures in place at the time of the incident, the degree to which they were followed and the outcome of such cases. This is all expensive work, but absolutely necessary, and there is still much work to be done, though at this stage we have not received any notice of a public hearing that may involve cases within the Diocese.

Since the days of the Wood Royal Commission in the 1990s, in the Diocese of Sydney we have put in place a number of measures to address the sin of child abuse in its manifold forms. The first full-time Director of Professional Standards was appointed in 2000 and the Professional Standards Board (now called the Safe Ministry Board) was established by Ordinance in 2001 (and I commend to members of Synod the Annual Report from the Safe Ministry Board which provides an insight into the breadth of their work and its importance in the life of our Diocese). *Faithfulness in Service*, the national code of conduct for clergy and church workers was adopted by the Synod in 2004. Safe Ministry training has now become a mandatory part of our fellowship for those involved in ministry with children and it is required by ordinance for all rectors and assistant ministers as well—a change long overdue, although it is heartening to note the large number of ministers who had voluntarily undertaken this training in previous years. The recently revised State Government's Working with Children Check provides a more stringent regime for protecting children, which, in principle, we applaud. This means, of course, another layer of bureaucracy and another canon of compliance.

While rectors and churchwardens grit their teeth when they see yet another form to be completed, another rule to be observed, another dictum to be obeyed, I do trust that you will stop to consider the wider picture and not merely judge things from a worldly point of view. As Christians, we have an obligation to obey the State, even when it is bureaucratically overbearing and where such obedience rendered causes hardship and inconvenience. However, how much more should we, as members of the body of Christ, be willing to express our care for the vulnerable in our midst, and ignore the inconvenience, especially when it relates to those who are of the household of God? Our reputation as Christians, ambassadors for the name of Christ, should be paramount since it is his reputation that suffers when we are not walking in the paths of righteousness (Psalm 23:3).

Our churches should be safe places for all who come within our sphere. In the same way that ordained ministers of word and sacrament are properly screened, recognised and licensed, so too should all paid lay ministry staff be properly screened, recognised and licensed. We need to ensure that our house is in order so that the cause of Christ is not tainted by our slackness or indolence in providing best practice in not only child protection, but in all forms of ministry, given the high privilege and significant responsibility that is afforded to those who serve in Christ's name. We should continue to uphold the work of the Director of Professional Standards and his staff, together with the members of the Safe Ministry Board, as they have onerous obligations placed upon them in their important work for the kingdom, which they do not shirk for the sake of Christ.

Episcopal Oversight

One of the pressing issues that the Administrator, Bishop Robert Forsyth, brought before this house at the Special Session of Synod in August was the challenge for the next Archbishop regarding the finances of the Endowment of the See. This challenge I now see is mine. One of the remedies for addressing the ability of the Endowment of the See to maintain the office of the Archbishop and episcopal oversight for five regions was the sale of Bishops court. Choosing this course of action was the subject of a robust debate in the Synod last year. As members of Synod are no doubt aware, Bishops court is currently for sale with expressions of interest closing at the end of October. It would therefore be premature to make any decisions as to the appointment of a new Bishop of Liverpool until the sale is completed. Indeed some members of Standing Committee have expressed the view that a replacement for the Bishop of North Sydney ought to be delayed until greater clarity emerges as to the financial position of the Endowment of the See.

I am aware that various opinions have been expressed within the Diocese concerning the current situation and it has been suggested that we have an opportunity to re-visit the role of regional bishops. Should we have four regions rather than five? Should assistant bishops be appointed with portfolios rather than geographical regions? Should assistant bishops be part-time, with a portion of their time being devoted to a parish (either as rector or senior assistant minister)? These are all important questions, and ones that various archbishops have wrestled with over the years. In Archbishop Robinson's day, some archdeacons were part time rectors, but the experiment did not last and it was generally recognised that the work of an archdeacon was compromised by such arrangements. Under Archbishop Goodhew we increased the pressure on the Endowment of the See by expanding to five regions, with an extra bishop, archdeacon and personal assistant, recognizing the special missionary needs of the Georges River Region. During the latter years of Archbishop Jensen's time in office we saw an almost 50% reduction in the staff paid by the Endowment of the See, with regional bishops' assuming the work of archdeacons. During his last year, great attention was given by the Archbishop in consultation with his senior staff as to the best way to deploy assistant bishops, exploring various options, including those mentioned above, and some quite novel suggestions, which might well be described as outside the episcopal box!

I have been aware of the problems of the Endowment of the See for some time and I have struggled afresh with these issues. Personally, I can see no practical advantage, and a number of disadvantages, to having our assistant bishops exercising part time episcopal oversight. Modern technology has provided some useful tools to make the work of bishops more efficient, but it would be a mistake to assume that they can currently achieve all that they could when supported by full time archdeacons. The load we place upon our regional bishops is usually underestimated and occasionally undervalued by clergy and laity alike. To limit their time and energy for episcopal oversight, I believe, would be a mistake, given the pressures and demands of ministry today. We have benefited from the model of full time assistant bishops for more than half a century and I do not see any merit in turning back the clock.

I also believe that regionalism is the best way in which to order diocesan life among the parishes. We are a large and variegated diocese, meeting the needs of the people of God within urban, suburban and rural contexts, across geographical and demographical divides of culture and ethnic groupings. While parish boundaries are more fluid than they once were, let alone the establishment of recognised churches (without property or parish), there is still value in dividing up the diocese into geographical, parochial units, so that responsibility for ministry to every citizen within the Diocesan boundaries can be identified.

Furthermore, I consider that the organisation of the Diocese into five regions is the best way to advance the gospel and care for the people within our parishes. I have therefore given notice to the Standing Committee, as required under Ordinance, that I intend to bring a name for the appointment of an assistant bishop to the next meeting of Standing Committee for their approval. In all likelihood the person so approved will become the next Bishop of North Sydney. Though we currently do not have a stipendiary bishop for the Georges River Region I am grateful that Bishop Peter Tasker and Archdeacon Ian Cox, at the invitation of my predecessor, have graciously and willingly offered themselves to exercise unpaid episcopal and archidiaconal ministry within the region till the end of the year. Furthermore, after consultation with and the goodwill of the Georges River Regional Council, given the state of flux in the financial position of the Endowment of the See, I have asked these two brothers to continue this ministry throughout 2014, and again they have graciously consented.

By this time next year we shall be in a better position to evaluate the ability of the Endowment of the See to fund the Bishop of Liverpool from 2015. In my own view, I consider it would be a retrograde step to merge our five regions into four. Georges River, in particular, with its ethnic mix and cultural diversity, is a microcosm of what Sydney will be like in 20 years time. The innovative cross-cultural ministries that have

been trialled under Bishop Tasker and Archdeacons Huard and Cox have already borne fruit and will continue to provide insights for our future ministry in the increasingly multi-cultural suburbs of Greater Sydney. It would be a tragedy if the population of over 1 million people in this region did not continue to receive direct episcopal oversight. If the Synod agrees with this judgment and the Endowment of the See were unable to fund such oversight, I may have to return next year and ask the Synod if it were willing to assist in the funding of the position of Bishop of Liverpool from 2015, either from the Diocesan Endowment or from a contribution from parishes.

Ethical Challenges

Australian society is ever changing and Sydney, the most populous city in the nation, is often in the vanguard of change. The political landscape has changed markedly in less than a decade. Whereas in 2004 the Howard Government, with bipartisan support, strengthened the Marriage Act so as to make explicit the definition of marriage as ‘the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life’, we have already seen attempts within the life of the last Federal Parliament to amend this definition and moves within the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania and our own State Parliament to challenge the *status quo*. Notwithstanding the Federal Attorney-General’s recent decision to refer the ACT legislation to the High Court, the agitation for so-called ‘gay marriage’ will not so easily disappear. Specious arguments for ‘marriage equality’ and ‘equal opportunity’ have become the mantra of many, without any serious engagement with the nature of marriage, its significance as the foundation of family life and the importance of the biological connection between parents and children. While we can mount strong arguments from the experience of human society, we also have a clear mandate from Scripture that recognises marriage as God’s design, not ours. It is his plan for the procreation of children, his ordinance for the mutual comfort that a man and a woman might have in their union of one flesh. In the words of the *Book of Common Prayer* such union is ‘holy matrimony’: ‘For be ye well assured that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God’s word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their Matrimony lawful.’ Even if the law regarding matrimony were to change in this country, we can still declare such a union as contrary to God’s law, or perhaps we should describe it simply as ‘unholy matrimony’. We shall need great courage to stand against the tenor of our society as it slips further and further away from the tenets of scriptural authority and biblical morality, whether it be ‘same-sex marriage’, abortion or euthanasia. We should also pray for those who govern us, as the Apostle Paul directs, ‘that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, *godly* and respectful in every way’ (1 Timothy 2:2).

The present crisis of asylum seekers and their treatment by our Federal Government is another cause for our concern. Sadly it has become a political football in recent years, with politicians playing to irrational fears within our society. The evil of people smugglers only exacerbates the ethical minefield that awaits any who enter into this debate. Yet no policy can justify the ill treatment of human beings, which either minimises or dehumanises their status as bearers of the image of God. Questions of on shore or off shore processing are important issues, which may divide us as Christians; the number of refugees that Australia can support may identify areas of difference among us; but we should all be united in our affirmation of the dignity of human life, regardless of a person’s ethnic identity, religious affiliation or economic circumstances. That God’s image bearers should be allowed to deteriorate behind wire mesh enclosures without effective opportunity for work, or occasion to give expression to their God-given gifts of creativity and imagination for productive output is a tragedy which we should all deplore. Yet even to make this stand will invite criticism from within the community, as I myself have experienced in recent days, having being labelled both a communist and soft-hearted libertine! But this should not dissuade us from speaking God’s truth into the world, declaring his righteousness and doing good, as we are called to do—so that we may be ‘a people of his own zealous for good works’ (Titus 2:14).

GAFCON

Ethical issues are inextricably bound up with theology and anthropology—our understanding of God and our understanding of humanity. Departure from the traditional Christian understanding of these disciplines has brought division within the body of Christ, and especially within the Anglican Communion. The events of 2003, leading to the consecration of Gene Robinson, were the catalyst for a number of responses to the crisis that had been simmering for more than a decade in the North American Episcopal Churches. That the firm commitment of resolution 1.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, which endorsed the Bible’s plain teaching on the question of human sexuality, was so blatantly and defiantly ignored by the North Americans brought the gospel into disrepute and fractured the fabric of our communion.

Despite repeated attempts to address the issue by conciliation, conferences, committees and endless discussions, it was clear that a stand needed to be taken. In 2008 a number of leading Primates of the

Anglican Communion called together like-minded Anglicans—lay, clerical and episcopal—to gather in Jerusalem for the first Global Anglican Future Conference. Sydney was well represented in Jerusalem, led by Archbishop Peter Jensen, who also played a crucial part in the design of the program. It would not be an exaggeration to say that GAFCON became a watershed moment in the life of the Anglican Communion and the Jerusalem Declaration that was endorsed by the conference has become the foundational document for the new Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans.

In a week's time the second Global Anglican Future Conference will take place in Nairobi. We are again well represented by Sydney Anglicans and it is my desire that we might strengthen our contacts with like-minded Anglicans from around the world, whose commitment to the authority of Scripture is resolute and whose passion to see souls won for Christ is unwavering. GAFCON 2013 will not be merely devoted to matters of human sexuality, but is built around the theme of the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, with separate mini-conferences on gospel proclamation and culture, theological education, economic empowerment and the church, marriage and family, and engaging with Islam. I commend this conference to your prayers that God might bless the gathering and that tangible outcomes might be produced that will benefit God's kingdom world wide with both the making and maturing of new disciples.

Final Remarks

Well this is my first Presidential Address, just in case you were wondering. Moreover, I am presuming this will be my only speech in Synod—and no doubt you are all delighted that such will be the case! It is not often that I have addressed any assembly, let alone Synod, with a prepared script, but I guess there is always a first time. As I take my seat as President of this synod, I value your prayers that I may be wise and judicious in my chairing, sparing in the need for correction, merciful toward those untutored in the peculiarities of synodical procedures, and gracious at all times. I only ask that you do me the same honour with a reciprocal measure of grace, as I shall no doubt fail at some point over the next three days.

Significant responsibilities are placed upon us in this assembly, as we come together as representatives of the parishes and organisations of the Diocese to make decisions, either by ordinance to pass legislation, or by resolution to express opinion. Yet we do not make these decisions in secret but openly and within full view of the public eye. More importantly, we make these decisions in the presence of God. It is to him that we must give account of our stewardship of time, resources and gifts that he has bestowed upon us. As our mission is gospel-focused and Christ-honouring, so our deliberations in this house ought to be gospel-focused and Christ-honouring. May his Spirit so direct us in our thoughts, words and deeds that what we do here over the next three days might be pleasing in his sight.

Dr Glenn Davies

Archbishop of Sydney

14 October 2013