

First Ordinary Session of the 50th Synod of the Diocese of Sydney: October 2014

Presidential Address

Delivered by Dr Glenn Davies, Archbishop of Sydney, on Monday 13 October 2014.

Members of Synod, brothers and sisters, saints of the Most High, welcome to the first session of the 50th Synod of the Diocese of Sydney.

As we gather together in the presence of God, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet. In his wisdom and love, our heavenly Father gave this estate to the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. Upon this land they met for generations until the coming of British settlers. As we continue to learn to live together on these ancestral lands, we acknowledge and pay our respects to their elders, past and present, and pray that God will unite us all in a knowledge of his Son, in whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth, whether visible or invisible—all things have been created through him and for him.

We live in a very different world to the one in which Sydney Anglicans lived, when Bishop Frederic Barker presided over the first session of this Synod on 5th December 1866 at Church Society House in Phillip Street. It is hard to imagine gathering members of Synod so close to Christmas, and possibly even harder to imagine members sitting for seven days over two weeks, let alone the record sitting of 13 days over three weeks in 1868!

Yet the concerns of my predecessor and of yours in that first Synod are not so different from ours. We wish to see Christ honoured as Lord in our world as they did in theirs. Our circumstances may be different, but we both align ourselves with the invitation of King David to all people:

Shout for joy to God, all the earth!
Sing the honour of his name.
Give to him glory and praise! (Psalm 66:1-2)

Of course, it is Jesus, David's greater son, who deserves glory and honour and who receives it from God the Father (2 Peter 1:17). As honour and glory belong to God for ever and ever (1 Timothy 1:17), so honour and glory belong to the Lamb (Hebrews 2:9; Revelation 5:12). The vision of John in the Book of Revelation therefore sees every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever! (Revelation 5:13)

This is our eschatological vision. A vision that will be seen by all, when our Lord returns to usher in the new heavens and the new earth. Until that time Jesus' commission to his followers is to make and mature disciples from all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them all that he has commanded.

Mission 2020

At the last session of the previous Synod we asked Standing Committee to bring to this Synod a fresh iteration of our mission. This followed a report from the *What's Next?* Committee, whose survey of parishes and individuals indicated that a fresh formulation of a mission document would be a helpful tool for mission in their local situation. Mission 2020 is the result of this work and the current formulation in your Supplementary Papers is the result of feedback from members after the distribution of the first draft on 1st August of this year.

Mission 2020 is a document that spans the second half of this decade, rather than a ten-year mission. It proposes a **Vision Statement** (what we hope to see) as well as a **Mission Statement** (what we want to do), both of which are undergirded by the **Values** that flow from our identity in Christ and which we cherish as a Diocese. There follow four Priorities, each addressing three key factors that have been identified as requiring specific attention. For each priority, one or more specific goals are set, based upon data collected through the National Church Life Survey (NCLS). Each goal is therefore measurable, enabling us to determine whether or not we are achieving our goals, either at the local level or across the Diocese by the

end of the decade. We recognise that the front line of mission is the local church, whether it be the parish church, the school chapel, the retirement village congregation, or the chapel services held in hospitals and prisons. The Standing Committee has set up a Strategic Research Group to develop some strategies over the coming months to support churches, congregations and organisations in achieving the goals for the Mission.

No document will cover everything that everyone believes should be incorporated in our Mission. This is the Diocese of Sydney after all! Some parishes and organisations will develop their own priorities for their local situation. However, I am hoping that the Synod will come to a common mind on the kind of vision, mission, priorities and goals that this document proposes for the Diocese as a whole. The Vision should be a memorable one: to see Christ honoured as Lord in every community. With the psalmists and the apostles we look forward to the day when every knee shall bow before the Lord Jesus, when the honour and glory that is due to him shall be acknowledged by the righteous and the unrighteous, by saints and sinners alike, and by both elect and fallen angels. The submission of all creatures, whether voluntarily with joy, or involuntarily with sorrow, will be universal before Christ the King on that last day, who will then deliver the kingdom to God the Father.

Sadly, not all honour Christ as Lord today. Not all honour the Father who sent his Son. For one cannot honour the Father without honouring the Son (John 5:23). To honour the Son is to honour the Father. Yet our vision for the next five years is to see Christ honoured as Lord in every community. That is, we want to penetrate every part of our society, every ethnic group, every tribe and tongue with the gospel of Jesus so that more and more from every part of our diocese come to put their trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. We have a mission, which is a matter of life and death. In the 2011 National Census 22.3% of people described themselves as having no religion, which when added to those who did not adequately respond to the question, results in over 31% of the population without any religious affiliation. Moreover, the number of such persons has risen by 3% over a ten-year period, whereas from 2001 to 2011 the percentage of Anglicans decreased from 21% to 17%. If one reflects upon the gaping differential between those who tick the Anglican box and those who are united to Christ by faith and incorporated into the fellowship of his people—a ratio of 10:1—the stark reality of our mission field becomes clear.

If we truly want to see Christ honoured as Lord in every community by 2020, we need to work together as partners in mission to bring the gospel to all who live in our Diocese. We need to mobilise ourselves in prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit to meet the challenges of being ‘salt and light’ in a world where Christ is not honoured as Lord. Our mission requires a fresh commitment to glorify God and to love our neighbour. Such a commitment, of course, is not new. It reflects what should mark out all Christians who are seeking to be faithful to the calling to which we have been called. To love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbours as ourselves encapsulates Jesus’ own summary of the Law and the Prophets. Yet how shall we love and glorify God? How shall we love our neighbour? By proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ and by living lives worthy of him. Here is the inseparable twofold word and deed of Christian living, which was characteristic of Jesus’ earthly ministry (Acts 10:36-38). Our opportunities for proclamation will differ from person to person, in accordance with our gifts, but we all have a part to play in promoting the gospel. In so doing we glorify God and show true love towards our neighbour. Likewise, as our lives express the obedience of faith, we not only glorify God but we demonstrate love to our neighbour by doing such good works, that God has prepared beforehand for us to walk in them.

It is no doubt the case that in the eyes of the general public, the revelations of child sexual abuse among the clergy of Christian denominations have had a severe impact upon our own reputation. The submissions to the Royal Commission regrettably provide ample evidence of the widespread abuse of power and authority in institutional environments, and the church has rightly not been exempt from this public scrutiny. While we cannot undo the past, we can declare our abhorrence that servants of Christ have acted in such un-Christlike ways and we can show compassion to the victims of abuse. Although our commitment to safe ministry among all church workers has a very high priority in our training and professional development, we must be ever vigilant, both institutionally and personally, so that our behaviour adorns the gospel and is pleasing in the sight of our Saviour.

If we are to embrace such a bold Vision and an enduring Mission that is being proposed at this Synod we shall need to reflect upon the areas that require attention and discover ways of measuring our effectiveness over the rest of this decade. Some items are always a priority, such as the need to reach the lost with the gospel of Christ. However, one of the more significant metrics from the 2011 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) indicates that across the Diocese we have an average of 9% of attendees who were newcomers to church life in the past five years. This proportion is lower than that measured in previous surveys. Therefore our goal is to raise this percentage of ‘newcomers’ to 12% over the coming years.

The following three priorities reflect the need for developing spiritual maturity among our members, the equipping of our members to exercise their gifts and the need to respond to the changing face of our society. Each of these priorities has goals attached, based upon the relevant NCLS data that will help us measure our progress over the next five years.

Although the next National Church Life Survey will not take place until 2016, with results known the following year, any parish can request a specific survey for themselves at a time of their own choosing. For a modest fee the NCLS researchers will provide a tailor-made survey for a parish so that they have up to date information as to how they are tracking. Parishes can also set their own percentages for the various mission goals, recognising that every parish serves a specific community and a local situation, which may or may not reflect the average parish statistics across the Diocese. Yet any increase in any congregation will improve our diocesan average.

I commend Mission 2020 to the Synod and I look forward to sharing the vision of seeing Christ honoured as Lord in every community.

Jesus Brings

While we await the adoption of a new mission document, it has been gratifying to see that parishes and organisations have continued to implement new strategies for proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ in their local situations. One such strategy has been the creative ways in which the campaign *Jesus Brings* has been used—*Jesus brings life*, *Jesus brings forgiveness*, *Jesus brings peace* are some of the ways the campaign has been adapted for local settings.

The *Jesus Brings* Campaign has been a shared mission initiative across our Diocese, enabled by funds from the Synod. While not all our parishes have been involved, a great many have used the resources produced, with over 140,000 'Search' Luke's Gospels being distributed to churches, so that they might be read with friends or given away, together with 40,000 Quiz-Worx Children's DVDs, 550,000 'flyer' invitations to church events, 1000s of Christians trained to share Christ with others. Churches from other denominations have also been involved, and we rejoice in their partnership as local communities have seen Christians unified in their shared focus upon Jesus as the bringer of all blessings. Anglican churches from other Australian dioceses have also requested and begun using these resources.

Recently some parishes worked together in hosting nine different regional campaign events, and in partnership with other Sydney mission organisations, two citywide events were promoted with over 5,000 people attending these combined events, and hearing the good news that Jesus brings.

None of us will imagine this has been a 'break-through' campaign, or has seen significantly greater fruit than any other. There is much work in mission still to be done. However, it is our combined strength as a network that enables initiatives like this to take shape, and it is our combined strength as a network that will ensure we have a continued and powerful impact upon the cities of Sydney, Parramatta and Wollongong and their surrounds for the cause of Christ and the honour of his name. We praise God for his blessings on this initiative during the past year.

Within our organisations and schools the important role of chaplains as agents of mission ought not to be underestimated. While we can sometimes take our organisations for granted, the changing ethos of our schools and organisations as places where the love of Christ can be heard and experienced is a cause for much praise. In particular, in 2008 Anglican Retirement Villages appointed their first Director of Mission, then in 2012 Anglicare appointed the Reverend Dr Andrew Ford who is now Director of Pastoral Care and Mission Development, while Youthworks recently announced the appointment of the Reverend Dr Bill Salier as not only College Principal but as Director of Theology. These are very welcome developments in the lives of our organisations.

Georges River Region

At last year's Synod I expressed my concern that the Georges River Region had no full time episcopal oversight, as did the other four regions of the Diocese. While I have been very grateful for the continued ministry of Bishop Peter Tasker and Archdeacon Ian Cox, both working for the Region in a voluntary capacity, I knew that this could only be a stopgap measure. I indicated last year that if I were not able to fund a full time Bishop of Georges River Region from the Endowment of the See then I might return this year with a request for funds from the Synod to enable this vital ministry to the most ethnically diverse region in the Diocese to continue. Georges River Region arguably faces the most missional challenges of our Diocese

and I firmly believe that we should do all that we can to provide it with full time episcopal oversight. I have agonised and prayed over this situation.

It is therefore with great joy that I am pleased to announce, owing to the generosity of some businessmen whom I specifically approached to fund this project and who have committed themselves to do so for the next three years, that I am able to appoint the next Bishop for the Georges River Region. While the funding is guaranteed for three years, it is not unreasonable to predict that the Endowment of the See will be able to sustain a fifth region beyond that time, owing to the likely increased distributions from St Andrew's House and the probable sale of Bishops Court in the next couple of years. This morning the Standing Committee held a special meeting to approve my appointment of the next Assistant Bishop in the Diocese. Having gained the necessary approval, I am therefore delighted to announce that I have this day appointed the Reverend Peter Robert Lin as the Bishop of Georges River Region from 2015. Peter has spent all of his stipendiary ministry in the parish of Fairfield with Bossley Park, as Catechist, Lay Stipendiary Worker, Assistant Minister and from 2001 as Incumbent. He has overseen the growth of the congregations during that time and he knows the region well. He is a trusted servant of Christ, an able minister of the gospel, a respected elder among his peers, and one who has contributed to the strategic direction of the Diocese through his subcommittee work as a member of Standing Committee. I believe that Peter will make a significant contribution as a Regional Bishop as well as an Assistant Bishop in the Diocese as a whole. I do commend him, Isobel and their family to your prayers as they make this transition. Peter will be consecrated on 30th May 2015.

The Training and Development of Ministers

I am also delighted to announce that the Reverend Gary O'Brien has accepted my appointment to become the next Director of Ministry Training & Development (MT&D) from January 2015. This is a very strategic position in the life of the Diocese as the Director oversees the development of all clergy and lay ministers from their departure from Moore College to their retirement. Currently MT&D is largely focused on the first three years after College, due to limited resources, a situation that the Synod will need to address if MT&D is to fulfil its mandate under its Ordinance. Gary has been the rector of St Matthew's West Pymble for the last twenty-two years. During that time he has exercised a fruitful ministry which has seen God's blessing upon the growth of the congregation, an increase in ministry staff, a steady flow of members entering Moore College for full time ministry, and an ambitious building expansion on the property. Gary has a well deserved reputation for mentoring other ministers and these gifts will be invaluable in his new role. I commend Gary, Carol and their three daughters to your prayers for this new ministry.

It is fitting that I also acknowledge the significant contribution that Gary's predecessor has brought to MT&D over a ten-year period. Dean Phillip Jensen is unable to be with us this Synod, and while I note there is a motion of appreciation for his ministry in the Diocese over the past 40 years, I want to add my own appreciation for Phillip's ministry among us. Institutions like the Anglican Church need people like Phillip to challenge us, provoke us, unsettle us, disturb us and awaken us from our slumber so that we might be more effective Christians in the market place of ideas and arena of unbelievers. I do not think that anyone would deny that Phillip has fulfilled each of these characteristics. A definition of a maverick is an unorthodox, independently minded person. I think that captures Phillip's personality fairly well. His contribution to the Diocese has been far ranging and will continue to have an impact for many years to come. Not all will agree with Phillip on any number of issues; he and I have often been on opposite sides of a debate, but more often on the same side, as our love for the Saviour regularly unites us in common cause. However, few will deny that his passion for seeing people saved, his love of preaching the gospel and defending the truth together with his desire to see Christ's name honoured is undeniable. Retirement is not in Phillip's Christian vocabulary, so we wish him and Helen well as he enters their next phase of ministry with the establishment of Two Ways Ministries in 2015.

The Challenges of Growth

One of the problems that besets large organisations is that of inertia, where we too quickly become content with the *status quo*. This symptom is often seen at the parish level as well, where often (but not exclusively) older members in response to the rapidity of change they encounter in society, cherish the security of a church experience that does not change! Yet we must always confront change: looking for ways to improve our church life; seeking new ways to interact with unbelievers and win them for Christ; and exploring ways to grow in the knowledge of our Saviour so that by his Spirit we might be changed from one degree of glory to another. The wise pastor will seek the common good for God's people and steer a congregation through the process of change, so that the more conservative-minded members are not disenfranchised, nor the more adventurous members disregarded. After all, the gifts of the Spirit are given to the church for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7), not merely for the benefit of the individual to whom such gifts are given.

At General Synod this year a landmark report was received from the Viability and Structures Task Force. This report in its opening words highlights the reality of declining membership across the nation.

The Anglican Church of Australia is at a crossroad. For over 30 years it has been slowly declining and the time has come for a revolution if it is to be a strong and sustainable church for the future.¹

The Report pulls no punches, with an abundance of statistical data that is chilling reading for those who think the Anglican Church of Australia is in good shape. Yet rather than proposing strategies to address the issues raised, it recommends a Steering Group be appointed to develop and implement such strategies.

By contrast, I am reminded of Bishop Barker's Presidential Address at the second session of our first Synod.

If the number and beauty of our churches, and the order and propriety of our services, and even of our large congregations and liberal subscriptions are regarded as the end of our efforts, we shall certainly fail of the great purpose the Church should have in view. The terms of our commission are not changed—"Preach the Gospel", "Preach the Word", that men may believe and be baptized and be saved. All our efforts are to have this in view, "that by all means we may save souls." Let this be our high and noble aim, and we shall find it giving a true direction to all our efforts, and animating us with constraining motives patiently to wait and labour even unto the end. If the clergy and laity are of this mind then the progress of our Church will be a national blessing.²

Nonetheless, the report is worth reading and since the General Synod has asked all dioceses to consider the report and send their responses to General Synod Standing Committee we should do so, as I believe we can make a significant contribution to the issues raised. Yet the unrealistic timeframe of responding by 31 December 2014 is counter productive to any considered reflection, if we are to address the matters raised with any seriousness.

Structurally, we have a greater responsibility to our own Province of New South Wales, as the Archbishop of Sydney is also the Metropolitan of NSW. This additional responsibility is not often acknowledged nor understood by the average Anglican in our Diocese, but it provides an important link to the other six dioceses in the Province. By the end of next month I shall have visited all six dioceses this year, including the opportunity to address two diocesan synods and one clergy conference. We have already placed the Viability and Structures Report on our agenda for the Provincial Standing Committee in November and are looking at ways in which we can harness our collective resources to see Christ honoured as Lord across the State.

In particular, I have had a number of discussions with the Bishop of Bathurst in light of the financial crisis facing his Diocese, which he inherited when he was consecrated in early 2013. Our Standing Committee has appointed a small committee to assist me in these discussions. Despite the grim future that the Diocese of Bathurst is facing, I am encouraged by the bishop's confidence in the gospel to change lives and to change structures. Without such a confidence all would be lost.

Two years ago this Synod took the courageous and costly step of agreeing to a levy on parish net receipts to raise \$2 million per year towards the purchase of new land in the areas of rapid population growth in our Diocese. The accumulated funds have already borne fruit with the recent purchase of land at Leppington, which will be on the South West rail link and is projected to have a population of 50,000 people over the next two decades. I am grateful to the Synod and the parishes for their sacrificial commitment to this levy, even when I know that such a financial contribution comes at a cost to local initiatives.

However, by purchasing land we are only part way there. The supply of godly ministers from Moore College provides the personnel, but land without buildings is of little help in the rain. I have therefore begun to draw together a small group of business people, under the chairmanship of Mr Philip Bell OAM, to become a fundraising committee for the erection of church buildings and rectories on land purchased by the Mission Property Committee. This is not unlike the Vision for Growth and Vision 2001 Appeals established by my predecessors. Although this group is in the early stage of formation, I am hoping to announce the launch an appeal for New Churches for New Communities early in the New Year.

¹ *Report of the Viability and Structures Task Force*, The Sixteenth General Synod Papers, 2014, 8-005.

² *Proceedings of the Second Session of the First Synod of the Diocese of Sydney*, 1867, p. 14.

Iraq and Syria

As we approach this first session of our Synod, we cannot be ignorant of the suffering of thousands of Christians in the Middle East as the militant forces of the so-called Islamic State attack any religious grouping that does not accord with their own particular and militant view of Islam, which impels them to slaughter Shi'ite Muslims, Christians and other religious adherents indiscriminately. The witness of such champions as Canon Andrew White in the city of Baghdad, itself under threat of invasion, should give us all cause to ponder how blessed we are in this country, even if we live under a heightened level of alert to the threats around us—as you will have experienced in the added security checks in arriving this afternoon. We are horrified at the barbaric behaviour and unadulterated evil of such militants and others like them in other countries, most notably, Boko Haram, who have kidnapped 200 schoolgirls and recently torched 185 churches in Nigeria.

I am grateful for the Archbishop of Sydney's Anglican Aid who among their many projects is raising money to assist the displaced Christians in Northern Iraq. I commend their appeal to you. I also commend to your prayers all those who are suffering due to the brutality of these vicious attacks upon the weak and vulnerable, especially our fellow Christians. I am also grateful for the Federal Government's decision to include displaced persons from Iraq in the intake of refugees, specifically including displaced Christians.

We pray for peace, as we should, in these regions of conflict. Yet we know the Prince of Peace who brings the peace that passes understanding. We know that while wars and rumours of wars will continue until the end, it is only the lasting peace that Jesus brings which will mend the broken hearted, restore fractured relationships and bring the conflict to an end.

Sunday, 2nd November has been designated Solidarity Sunday. Sponsored by the Australian Christian Lobby, November 2 provides an opportunity for churches around Australia to unite in prayer and solidarity with our brothers and sisters suffering persecution. Awareness Action Packs are available with information concerning the atrocities of persecution facing vulnerable people in specific locations. The wearing of T-shirts with the Arabic letter N is one example of expressing our solidarity with all those who follow the Nazarene.

I commend this initiative to your churches and the persecuted church to your prayers, as we address the many matters before us in this session in the relative safety and security that we, by God's grace, are privileged to enjoy in this country.

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Dr Glenn Davies
Archbishop of Sydney

13 October 2014