

Second Ordinary Session of the 50th Synod of the Diocese of Sydney: October 2015

Presidential Address

Delivered by Dr Glenn Davies, Archbishop of Sydney, on Monday 12 October 2015.

Members of Synod, brothers and sisters, saints of the Most High, welcome to the second 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—for all things have been created through him and for him.

Mission 2020—New Churches for New Communities

Last year the Synod enthusiastically endorsed Mission 2020 with a vision to see Christ honoured as Lord and Saviour in every community. It was the result of much work both before and during Synod. Of course, if we thought that we laboured long and hard in getting the wording right, that is nothing compared to the work that lies ahead as

we commit ourselves afresh, in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit, to glorify God and love our neighbour by proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ, calling people to repent and living lives worthy of him.

The Strategic Research Group (SRG) has been hard at work seeking ways to resource and encourage parishes in their local mission context and Bishop Peter Lin will provide an update of its work during this Synod. In particular, given that Mission 2020 has measurable goals aligned to the NCLS statistics, the SRG has developed in conjunction with NCLS the M20, a shortened form of the NCLS survey which parishes can use each year to assess their progress against their own particular goals aligned to the priorities of Mission 2020. As all rectors have been informed last week, the M20 survey is now available for use at a modest cost to parishes. With the five yearly National Church Life Survey being undertaken in 2016, I encourage all parishes to consider using the M20 survey this year, and again in 2017 and beyond, so that you can track your missional effectiveness with objective data. It will be a significant aid in directing and informing your missional efforts, though of course, the choice is yours.

Next year Greater Sydney's population will pass the 5 million mark. The Bureau of Statistics' latest population figures indicate the Cobbitty-Leppington area in south-western Sydney is the fastest growing area followed by Parklea-Kellyville Ridge. In fifteen years it is expected an additional one million people will live within the greater metropolitan area of Sydney, with a total population of 5.9 million. Whether by birth or migration these new arrivals will be part of our mission field.

Of course, Sydney has been a growing city for many years. In 1836 Bishop Broughton established the Diocesan Committee for Church Growth to address the need of the mid-nineteenth century. Twenty years later Bishop Barker formed the Church Society (to become Sydney's Home Mission Society under Archbishop Wright, which we now know as Anglicare). After the Second World War, Archbishop Mowll established 'More Churches for Greater Sydney Campaign'. In 1964 Archbishop Gough oversaw the formation of the New Areas Committee. Twenty years later Archbishop Robinson created 'Vision for Growth', which raised \$7m over six years. Archbishop Goodhew followed this enterprise with 'Vision 2001' and Archbishop Jensen was instrumental in the expenditure of \$20million from the Diocesan Endowment for facilitating church growth by not only providing grants to selected parishes to increase the capacity of their buildings, but also purchasing land and erecting new church buildings in Greenfield sites.

Yet Greater Sydney continues to grow. Therefore we must continue to grow. Before this Synod lies the challenge to continue funding the acquisition of land in the growth corridors of Sydney, which the Synod initially endorsed three years ago. This is a generous commitment of our parishes to look beyond themselves and to plan for the future. Yet the Greenfield levy will only secure the land. It was for this reason that last year I announced my intention to form a new body to raise the necessary funds to build New Churches for New Communities. I am pleased to say that I have gathered a committee of capable and experienced Anglicans,

under the chairmanship of Mr Philip Bell OAM to lead this work. I have also appointed the Rev. Glenn Gardner AM to be the Executive Director and in August this year we launched NCNC. It has been deliberately established as a separate entity so as not to become a drain upon already stretched diocesan finances. A number of significant donations have already been received from generous donors for which I thank God. Our goal is to raise \$2.5million by 30 June 2016 as part of an overall target of \$20million over the next five years. This is a daunting aspiration, but I see the results of this fundraising endeavour providing rich resources for the future growth of the kingdom of God. This requires our full commitment. Some of the funding for these facilities attracts tax-deductibility. The intention is to build new churches, gatherings of God's people who will reach out with the life-giving gospel to the new communities that are springing up in the growth corridors of the north west and south west areas of Sydney.

In the spirit of Mission 2020, I am delighted to report that other diocesan organisations are looking at ways in which they can constructively engage with NCNC in providing Anglican resources for these communities. Already Anglicare, Anglican Retirement Villages, Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation and, of course, the Mission Property Committee have expressed their desire to work collaboratively with this venture.

Some of the proposed church plants, like Stanhope, already exist, but experience shows that they will need facilities of their own for significant church growth to be achieved. In close cooperation with the Mission Property Committee, plans are well advanced to commence construction of church facilities at Stanhope Gardens in October 2016. Land has also been secured at Leppington, Marsden Park, Riverstone and Austral, upon all of which it is hoped that in association with MPC, NCNC will be able to build so that God's church might bring the gospel of Christ to the new communities arriving at their doorstep. Synod will hear more of these developments when MPC and NCNC report later during this session.

However, it needs to be recognised that Sydney is not only growing at the edges of its historic boundaries. Much of the growth is in the inner city and rejuvenated existing suburbs as high-rises dominate the landscape previously reserved for suburban bungalows. Last year the new developments in the Waterloo-Beaconsfield area of the inner south experienced the second largest population growth in Sydney with a population increase of 2000. The work of Evangelism and New Churches has a significant part to play in the planting of new churches and they have responsibility for two separate church plants in Green Square, in addition to the parish of South Sydney's own church plant at St James' Beaconsfield. The Reverend Philip Wheeler has been appointed as the new Director of ENC from 2016, after the retirement of the Reverend Bruce Hall to whom we are in debt for his contribution to our diocese in the work of both cross-cultural evangelism as well as church planting. I look forward to the contribution that Phil Wheeler will make to ENC as an integral part of Mission 2020.

Bishop of South Sydney

The work in Green Square has also developed under the watchful eye of the Right Reverend Robert Forsyth, who has held the position of Bishop of South Sydney since the year 2000, and at his retirement in December this year he will have been the longest serving bishop of any region. Robert has been a member of this Synod since 1983, a member of our Standing Committee since 1990 (currently its longest serving clerical member), a Sydney representative on the General Synod for twenty-five years and a member of the General Synod Standing Committee since 1998 and of its Executive since 2004. Robert has served our diocese well in a number of capacities since his ordination some forty years ago. He has not always won his battles on the floor of Synod, but he has always been an engaging and respected member of this chamber when he does speak. I particularly would like to pay tribute to his humility and grace following the Election Synod of 2001. Our diocese has some unfortunate history of relational difficulties around elections. Yet Robert distinguished himself under Archbishop Peter Jensen with loyalty and warmth, without rancour. An example to be followed by many who do not gain a position to which they might aspire—whatever their field of endeavour.

I am pleased that the Reverend Doctor Michael Stead has accepted my appointment to be Robert's successor as Bishop of South Sydney. Michael will be able to build on the good work that Robert has undertaken in the region and I have every confidence that Michael will be make a significant contribution to the life of the Diocese as whole in his new role.

'Same-Sex Marriage'

We live in a world of social change. This is not a new observation, yet it brings fresh challenges for gospel proclamation in our society, which appears to be moving further and further away from the guidelines for living which are enshrined in God's Word. As Christians, we are at odds with the world. For good reason, John the Evangelist recorded Jesus' warning to his disciples:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

John 15:18-19

Two things are identified by Jesus. Notice the world hated him first. To be a disciple of Jesus is to follow in his footsteps. This is not to suggest that we are to look for opposition, let alone persecution, but if we are true to our Master, faithful to his commission, then opposition and persecution will inevitably follow, as Paul reminded Timothy (2 Timothy 3:12). The second fact that Jesus mentions is that he chose us. It is his choice, not ours; it is for his glory, not ours. It therefore follows that we undergo opposition for his sake, not ours. Moreover, he who chose us is truly with us. His Spirit indwells us so that we may live for his glory and endure the persecution that may come our way. In the same chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus told his disciples that he had spoken these words so that his joy might be in them—in us—and that our joy may be full (John 15:11). This is an incredible promise and one that perhaps we do not appreciate, let alone assimilate, in our daily lives.

How is your joy? Is it real or feigned in the face of opposition to the gospel from your friends or family, workmates or fellow travellers? For joy is a fruit of the Spirit, listed second after love. Yes, even joy, in the midst of suffering, according to the apostle James.

Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James 1:2-4

While suffering in the name of Christ can be hard, it is also the fount of joy. It enabled Jesus to sing a hymn before he went to Gethsemane (Matthew 26:30) and Paul to sing hymns to God while in prison (Acts 16:25). It enables us to sing with the psalmist:

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy!
Those that go forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing their sheaves with them.

Psalms 126:5-6

The antagonism of the world to the Word of God is perhaps seen nowhere more acutely than in the virulent challenge to the definition of marriage which pervades conversations in the media, the workplace and even in our places of leisure. The bombardment, both subtle and not so subtle, is relentless. Those, like us, who hold dearly to the definition of marriage as enunciated in the *Book of Common Prayer*, are under attack for defending holy matrimony as

an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocence...and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men: and therefore is not by any to be enterprized, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which Matrimony was ordained.

The opening exhortation from the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony outlines three reasons for which the holy estate of matrimony was ordained. First, for the procreation of children; second, as a remedy against sin; and third for the mutual society, help and comfort that the one ought to have for the other.

Marriage is fundamentally not a social construct of human invention, but is a divinely ordained institution for the good of humanity and the well being of society. Yet our society for many years has not recognised the importance of this divine origin, nor of the importance of confining sexual intercourse to the marriage of a man and woman, united by an exclusive and permanent bond, 'forsaking all others', 'so long as they both shall live'.

Sexual activity outside of marriage became more prevalent following the sexual revolution of the 1960s. In the following decades we have witnessed the increase of couples living together without any commitment to marry, the erosion of trust between married couples where the dissolution of marriage has become more accessible through 'no fault' divorce, the celebration of homosexual acts, and the attempt to normalise sexual activity between two men or between two women. Yet despite the statistically small number of 'committed partnerships' within the gay community, let alone their representing merely 1% of all couples in Australia in 2011, it was only a matter of time before the arguments in favour of 'same-sex marriage' would enter the public debate. It is hard to believe that a mere eleven years ago, with bipartisan support, the Marriage Act was

strengthened by the explicit clarification that ‘marriage means the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life.’

Yet what was accepted and endorsed by the major parties a little more than a decade ago has now become anathema to the majority of the Labor Party and to several influential members of the Liberal Party. It would also appear that an Anglican Bishop in our country believes it is inevitable, and has even opined that it could be compatible with the teaching of our Church! Opinion polls, questionable though they may be, tell us that a majority of Australians believe that marriage needs to become inclusive of both genders—let alone those who claim no specific gender. ‘Marriage equality’ is their mantra. Yet despite the success of this slogan it claims more than it can achieve. There simply is no ‘marriage equality’ for everyone. Marriage necessarily has boundaries that even the adherents of the facile rhetoric of ‘marriage equality’ cannot deny: children, for example, are excluded; couples within prohibited relationships, such as siblings, are excluded; those who are already married and wish to marry another spouse are also excluded. Yet we are the ones portrayed as being discriminatory in our defence of marriage, when in fact we are not alone, for everyone needs to discern the *purpose* of marriage if one is to understand, and so rightly ‘discriminate’, regarding the eligibility of proper candidates for marriage.

It is for this reason that I applauded the decision of the Abbott Government, reaffirmed by Malcom Turnbull since becoming Prime Minister, to hold a plebiscite upon the question of marriage. I, like many others, had encouraged the Prime Minister to choose this path, for the nature of marriage is of such fundamental significance to the way in which we as a society operate, that such a question should be put to the people of Australia by way of a national vote, rather than be left in the hands of 200 parliamentarians in Canberra, many of whose views are as variable as the latest opinion polls in their electorates. However, a national plebiscite allows the people to express their opinion and to do so in an informed manner. Like a referendum, the government funds both the Yes argument as well as the No argument to any question put to the Australian electorate. It is not difficult to discern the bias that media outlets, whether they be television, radio, digital or newsprint, exhibit when promoting a change in our law with scant attention to the argument for retaining what has been an understanding of marriage in Australia, not only for the past two centuries of white settlement, but for thousands of years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

That two TV stations should recently refuse to air advertisements by Marriage Alliance for promoting what is simply the law of the land is a scandal! It is also symptomatic of the wave of naïve enthusiasm for the novelty of ‘same-sex marriage’ that a significant number of corporations have published their endorsement for this change in our law. How, one might ask, does such a position have anything to do with the core business of these companies—it is inexplicable. Why don’t we hear from these companies about their views on the treatment of asylum seekers on Manus Island or the decline in Australia’s foreign aid budget or other controversial issues such as the slave trade, euthanasia or abortion? Have these companies any idea of how many shareholders, let alone employees, who do not share these publically endorsed sentiments regarding ‘same-sex marriage’? It is public knowledge that certain activist employees within these companies have lobbied their employers and board members to make a statement, so that they can be seen to be anti-discriminatory, even though to take such a stance has all the hallmarks of discrimination against those who wish the law to be maintained as it has been since the dawn of human civilisation.

I am therefore very grateful for the work of our Doctrine Commission in its publication earlier this year of their report *Human Sexuality and the ‘Same Sex Marriage’ Debate*. The report is worthy of wide circulation as it deals not only with the biblical and theological arguments from Scripture, but also engages with the contemporary debate, explores ways in which to put the case in the public arena, and most importantly, offers counsel as to how to minister to those who experience same-sex attraction. I trust that all rectors have drawn the attention of this resource to their congregations. It expresses the ‘No’ case admirably and identifies the weaknesses of the ‘Yes’ case. Above all, the Australian public needs to be informed of the argument against ‘same-sex marriage’ and not be beguiled by the empty rhetoric of ‘marriage equality’, without considering the impact upon severing the link between marriage and procreation, let alone severing the bond of the nurture of children by their biological parents on the premise of selfish adult preferences. It is time that all Christians, especially Anglicans, should enter the discussion and graciously and sensitively explain the reasons why our good Creator has made marriage the way he has. We need to be courageous in our discussions both in private and in public, yet we also need to be sensitive and loving in our defence of biblical truth. As Vaughan Roberts reminds us: ‘homosexuality is not simply an “issue”; it concerns people, created and loved by God, many of whom are Christians.’¹

¹ V. Roberts, *Battles Christians Face: Tackling Big Issues with Confidence*. Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2007, p. 105.

Yes, it will kindle criticism, provoke ridicule, and invite hatred—but remember, you are not of the world, therefore, the world hates you. Yet such hatred should not silence us. Are we prepared to stand for what God has said, despite the opposition it will inevitably engender? There is no place, however, for a spirit of superiority, let alone a spirit of contempt for those with whom we disagree. We must persuade with gentleness (another fruit of the Spirit), sincerity and grace, as befits disciples of Christ.

Nonetheless, if the Australian electorate votes in favour of ‘same-sex marriage’ in a plebiscite, we as citizens of the State will need to acknowledge this outcome, and learn to manage its consequences. This will be a challenge for all Christians, as well as those of other faiths, whose theological commitment to marriage as being heterosexual by definition will not change, despite such a change at law. We shall find ourselves in very much the same situation as Christians in the first century, where Roman law was not as broadly aligned to biblical values as it has been in Western civilisation for over a thousand years. This will require wisdom, boldness and compassion. Of course, we should not forget that many Christians today live under even more oppressive regimes than Ancient Rome.

Among our business papers are two motions: one, affirming the biblical definition of marriage, which in the current climate needs to be re-affirmed; the other, addressing the wisdom of clergy retaining their marriage licences should the Federal Government amend the Marriage Act to allow ‘same-sex marriages’. It is right that both motions should come before us, so that our voice may be heard. However, we should not be blind to other consequences of a change in the law. How will this affect our freedom of religion, or our ability to teach the Bible’s view of marriage from the pulpit or in the classrooms of Anglican schools? The recent complaint made to Tasmania’s Anti-Discrimination Commissioner about the Roman Catholic Church’s booklet *Don’t Mess with Marriage* is a worrying development that represents a genuine threat to religious freedom in our country. Therefore, our response as Christians to any change in the definition of marriage will need prayerful and careful thought and a renewed dedication to defend ‘holy matrimony’ in light of the possibility that the Federal Government may define ‘unholy matrimony’ by legislation.

Domestic Violence

If it were not enough that marriage was under threat by the advocates of ‘same-sex marriage’, the recent heightened awareness of domestic violence within marriage is another wake-up call for our society. Two years ago our Synod raised this question as a matter of concern. Since then, considerable work has been done in addressing the issue, including Moore College and Ministry Training & Development in their education of prospective and recently ordained ministers, though there is still more to be accomplished. I am particularly grateful for Canon Sandy Grant’s having raised this matter on a number of occasions both at Synod and Standing Committee and for his initiative in persuading Standing Committee to establish a Task Force to develop a diocesan response to domestic violence. The Task Force has been asked to consult with domestic violence victims or their representatives and report back with recommendations on the following:

- (a) developing, adopting and communicating a diocesan domestic violence policy statement, along with advice for good pastoral practice;
- (b) facilitating education of lay membership of our churches on the issue (e.g., via preparation of suitable resources);
- (c) educating our youth in regards to the recognition and prevention of domestic violence; and
- (d) encouraging further developments in our education of clergy and church workers in this area (e.g., recognising warning signs in marriage preparation).

While I welcome this Task Force, it grieves me that we need it. It is a salutary reminder of the corrosive effects of sin even in the believer, that men who profess Christ should treat their wives with such contempt, inflicting either verbal or physical abuse upon those whom they have promised ‘to love and to cherish, till death us do part.’

This is not the way of Christ. It should not characterise the bride of Christ. It does not reflect, despite the accusations of some, the inevitable consequences of the doctrine of headship in marriage. What it does demonstrate, regrettably, is that in the words of the Thirty-nine Articles: ‘in the visible Church the evil be ever mingled with the good’ (Article xxvi). If even Satan can use the words of Holy Scripture to tempt our Lord, it is not difficult to concede that the Evil One can twist good doctrines to his own evil purposes. That Christian women are caught in such a vulnerable situation at the hands of those who abuse their responsibilities as husbands is both horrendous and inexcusable. It is therefore important that we address this issue with honesty, compassion and resolve, so that we may protect those who suffer any form of domestic abuse and find ways to prevent its reoccurrence, especially in the household of God.

Refugees from Syria and Iraq

While our mission is rightly focussed within the Diocese of Sydney, to some extent we are all global citizens. The needs of the world radiate our screens, whether TV or iPads. I am therefore grateful for the work of Anglican Aid and the Church Missionary Society who labour mostly outside Australia for the love of Christ in bringing relief both physical and spiritual to a needy world. As the apostle Paul sought to raise the sights of the Corinthians to the plight of the saints in Jerusalem, so we too must be prepared to give, and give generously, to alleviate the suffering that not only is within our reach, but beyond our shores. Again quoting the apostle, 'as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially the household of faith' (Galatians 6:10).

Mission 2020 commits us to glorify God and love our neighbour—not only in word but also in deed.

The proclamation of Christ is central to the way in which we glorify God and love our neighbour, but unless we are living lives worthy of him, our proclamation will be ineffective and dishonouring to our God and Saviour. It was therefore with great joy when I witnessed the overwhelming response of our Diocesan family to the Syrian and Iraqi Refugee crisis that was catapulted onto our screens with the image of three-year old Aylan Kurdi, whose lifeless body was washed up on a Turkish beach in early September. The tens of thousands of refugees fleeing both Syria and Iraq suddenly attracted international attention, though the crisis had been looming for months. When the Government announced that Australia would take an additional 12,000 refugees from this conflict it provided an opportunity for us to offer a generous welcome to these displaced persons, many of whom are Christians.

Almost immediately Anglicare sprang into action and coordinated a response across both organisations and parishes of our Diocese. By the end of that week, I had been invited to a roundtable discussion with the Prime Minister in Canberra and in my hand were detailed plans of how the Diocese of Sydney could assist, with emergency accommodation, short term and medium term, food parcels, clothing, trauma counselling, English language lessons and special holiday camps for children. This was all possible because of the hard work of the staff of Anglicare and Youthworks, in particular, but the support offered by Moore College, Anglican Retirement Villages, Anglican Schools Corporation and Anglican Deaconess Ministries was also outstanding. To this was added the positive response of so many parishes, asking how they too might help. To date Anglicare has collected in excess of \$200,000 in donations towards this special appeal within the space of a few weeks. This has been an extraordinary response and I thank all those who have acted so speedily and given so generously.

For ancient Israel it was not only the fellow Israelites to whom a duty of love belonged, but also the foreigners in their midst (Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:18-19). Such treatment of resident aliens was unparalleled in the legal systems of the ancient world and was a direct consequence of God's love for the stranger, and the fact that Israel were strangers in the land of Egypt. The teaching of the New Testament is no less compelling, as Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan portrays.

In my opening address to Synod in 2013 I said:

Let our love for one another and our love for Christ, grounded in Christ's love for us, be the magnet that draws unbelievers to the Saviour so they too may be enfolded into the fellowship of the church.

This past month has seen such love in abundance. We shall have further opportunity during this Synod to share ideas as to how else we might respond to the refugee crisis. I thank God for his love, and I thank God for his love shown through his people. And it is my prayer that we might be able to share God's love with these people, in word as well as deed.

Both love and joy are fruit of the Spirit. May such fruit be the characteristic of all that we do in the name of Christ. May it especially characterise the conduct of our Synod as we seek to honour Christ as Lord and Saviour in every community—and especially in this chamber.

I commend you to God's grace and the blessing of his Spirit.

Dr Glenn Davies
Archbishop of Sydney

12 October 2015