

8/15 Alternative forms of Anglican Church

(A report from a Working Group established by the Standing Committee.)

Key Points

- To encourage Alternative Forms of Anglican church, there is a need to encourage Alternative Forms of non-parochial Anglican Ministry
- The Diocese cannot rely on parish-based ministries for all ministry within the Diocese –
 - Parish-based ministries do not naturally reflect the changing face of society, and are less flexible and often less-missional than non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry
 - Attendance in church in the Diocese is keeping up with population growth largely as a result of transfer growth, not “missional fruitfulness”
- The Diocese and its structures do not hinder non-parochial forms of ministry, but also do not greatly support or encourage new non-parochial initiatives of Anglican ministry
- The Department of Evangelism and New Churches (“ENC”) is responsible for several non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry already, but it is seen as a less prominent part of their role, and those innovating with non-parochial forms of ministry may not know to seek support from ENC
- Supporting non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry should be emphasised in the objects of ENC’s ordinance just as church planting is currently emphasised
- Consideration should be given to increasing the funding to ENC from the next budget triennium to provide for a staff member of ENC to identify non-parochial forms of Anglican ministries, and to support the ministers who oversee them

Purpose

1. This report sets out the results of an investigation into the formation of alternative forms of Anglican church.

Recommendation

2. That Synod receive this report.
3. That Synod pass the following motion to be moved “by request of the Standing Committee” –

‘Synod, noting the report, “Alternative Forms of Anglican Church” –

 - (a) commends the Department of Evangelism and New Churches Board (“ENC”) for their past and current efforts in supporting non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry in Sydney,
 - (b) recognises the contribution of non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry to the mission of the Diocese,
 - (c) encourages parishes and individuals to partner with ENC in the support of non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry,
 - (d) requests the Standing Committee to modify the ordinance of ENC to make more explicit ENC’s responsibility for identifying and supporting new and existing non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry,
 - (e) requests that the Strategic Research Group, in light of this report and the contribution of non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry to the mission of the Diocese, provide a recommendation to the Diocesan Resources Committee as to the value and importance of potentially increasing funding for ENC in the next triennium to provide for the employment of staff to –
 - (i) develop existing and new non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry, and
 - (ii) identify, develop and support their leadership, and
 - (f) requests ENC to report progress to Synod within two years with suitable recommendations to support and promote non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry.’

Background

4. At its session in October 2015, Synod passed resolution 8/15 in the following terms –

“For the purpose of greater missional fruitfulness, the Synod requests the Archbishop to establish a working group that will investigate the formation of alternative forms of Anglican Church –

- (a) that are theologically Anglican,
- (b) that are shaped by the principles for Christian community voiced to us by the New Testament,
- (c) that are specifically designed to penetrate and engage with the multiplicity of non-Christian spiritual and cultural worlds in which the majority of Australians now live, and
- (d) that are not necessarily required to owe anything to our traditional (Christendom-form) parish model.

Further, that the working group report back to Synod 2016 with specific and concrete proposals for the initiation of a process to create such alternative forms of church.”

5. In December 2015, the Archbishop established a working group to address the requests of the resolution, comprising –

The Rev Dr Martin Bragger	The Rev Dr Ed Loane
Miss Mandy Curley	The Rev Dr Margaret Powell
The Rev Stuart Crawshaw	The Rev Bruce Stanley
The Rev John Gray	The Rev Stew Witt
The Rev Craig Hamilton	

6. The working group was chaired by the Rev Bruce Stanley, and met 5 times in early 2016.

Discussion

7. The working group discussed the following quotations –

“To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

1 Corinthians 9:22-23

“The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ’s ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.”

Article 19

“It is not necessary that the Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places, one and utterly alike: for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men’s manners, so that nothing be ordained against God’s Word.”

Article 34

“Christian assemblies can take place anywhere, do not require the presence of any particular person, can occur at any time on any day and do not involve any essential ritual. Christians do not have a place on earth to which they must come to worship . . . and there is no need to observe particular days or rites.”

“A Theology of Christian Assembly” Sydney Doctrine Commission

8. Article 19 provides a faithful summary of Anglican church fundamentals which does not limit Anglican churches to parochial forms. In order to fulfil its aim of investigating the formation of alternative forms of Anglican church, the working group has focused on the promotion of non-parochial Anglican ministries. These ministries may be Anglican churches (according to Article 19), they may aspire to become Anglican churches, or they may seek to send converts to established Anglican churches. The common feature of these ministries is that they are seeking new and innovative ways to reach the lost and they are not necessarily tied to parochial structures of church. Thus, the report uses the broader category of “non-parochial Anglican ministries” rather than “Alternative Forms of Anglican Church” in the understanding that the latter is both included in the former and, where ministries are not churches, Anglican churches may well arise as the fruit of such ministries. This report does not seek to redefine the characteristics of Anglican churches.

9. According to the “Review of the Diocesan Mission and the next phase of Mission”, the 10 year Diocesan Mission (2002-2012) clearly created a climate of permission to try new things.¹ Many new and successful approaches to ministry were undertaken during this time: 20% of survey respondents said they had a new church plant, 50% a new church meeting, 50% new staff, and over 50% had seen growth.² 84% responded that the progress of the Diocesan Mission had been fair or better.³ The 10 year mission saw much positive fruit that certainly may not have been realised without the push of a diocesan-wide mission.

10. Within this report, other ministry initiatives are outlined that are continuing within our Diocese each year, many seeing new conversion growth. Some of these are independently run by parishes, some with collaboration of churches, and some with the assistance of diocesan organisations such as the Department of Evangelism and New Churches (“ENC”). However, it was also clear that the 10 year mission, which began in 2002, had seen a downturn in newcomers to church life, both first time attendees and returnees to church life.⁴

11. While Sydney Anglican churches largely kept pace with the population growth, this usually occurred through transfer growth. This highlights our lack of missional fruitfulness—since real conversion growth (or kingdom growth) continued to trend in a downwards direction. This is a pattern that has been evident for some time in our Diocese, and is a cause for great concern—for the sake of the lost in our suburbs, cities and nation this trend needs to be reversed.

12. The task of the committee was to investigate the formation of alternative forms of Anglican church for the purpose of missional fruitfulness. These alternative forms were to be Anglican and biblical, but also needed to seek to engage those in our community in a way that was substantially different from the prevailing paradigm of Anglican mission and, as such, reach a wider section of our community with the gospel. It is the contention of this committee that the opportunity presented by alternative forms of Anglican church are better served by more broadly addressing the formation of “non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry” which are better adapted to engage with non-Christian cultures. These may, under God, be a significant factor in substantial kingdom growth in our Diocese.

Historical Context and Prevailing Forms

13. Evangelism has always been a priority of Sydney Anglicans. Today we are thankful for the hard work of generations of Anglicans who have gone before us and we are thankful to God, who has been very generous to us. Despite our rich history, today’s Anglican Church in Sydney faces many challenges posed by a rapidly changing Australian culture. To provide proper context for this report’s conclusion, we must first explore some of the key movements in Sydney culture and the Church’s response. This will help us consider our mission in this present generation and beyond.

14. For most of its history, the Diocese has focused on a parish model of ministry that produced a relatively mono-cultural expression of church; which thrived, in part, due to the predominately Anglo culture of Australian society. Since the 1960s, however, social upheavals have had a tremendous impact on existing paradigms of church. Some important developments include –

- (a) The widespread acceptance of the homogenous unit principle. Traditional evensong services gave way to youth focused services. Contemporary music and a movement away from liturgical norms were perceived to be a better strategy to reach and retain young people. In time this development spread so that it became common for a parish to have a traditional ‘oldies’ service and a family service in the mornings and a youth service in the evenings.
- (b) Increasing immigration from non-Anglo countries has led to particular language or cultural focused churches and services.

15. Apart from these parish-based innovations, at certain times in our history various diocesan structures have been setup to facilitate evangelism and foster church growth. One early example of this was Bishop Barker’s establishment of the Sydney Church Society. On his arrival in Sydney, Barker was confronted with rapid population growth on account of the gold rush and the threat of the withdrawal of government funding for the establishment of new parishes. As a result on 20 May, 1856, the Sydney Church Society was established inviting subscribers to financially support the Society in achieving the following four aims –

- Provide for the support in part or wholly of clergymen, missionaries to the aborigines, of catechists who may also be schoolmasters;
- The endowment of churches;

¹ Bishop Peter Hayward: *Review of the Diocesan Mission and the next phase of Mission*, Annual Report of the Standing Committee and Other Reports and Papers, 2013, page 64

² *ibid.*, page 64

³ *ibid.*, page 65

⁴ *ibid.*, page 74

- The erection of churches and parsonages; and
- The circulation of the Holy Scriptures, the *Book of Common Prayer* and other religious and useful publications.

16. These aims encompassed a broad range of opportunities to foster evangelism and ongoing ministry. The Society's vision was larger than merely supporting parochial clergy, but also included funding local missionaries and school ministries.

17. As the years went on, the focus of the Sydney Church Society turned towards the vital work of social welfare, changing its name to the Sydney Anglican Home Mission Society and then to Anglicare. Evangelism was again prioritised in Sydney Diocese with the establishment of the Department of Evangelism which has more recently evolved into the Department of Evangelism and New Churches ("ENC"). The Mission Property Committee ("MPC") has also been tasked to establish new parishes in growth areas. In a similar way, the Anglican Youth Department (now Youthworks) was established with a specific focus on evangelising and discipling children and youth. These endeavours are commendable and essential, indeed, they seek to fulfil some of the original aims of the Sydney Church Society. They are successful endeavours in "non-parochial Anglican ministries" which God has used to bear much fruit for His kingdom. However, there is a myriad of diverse evangelistic enterprises that do not neatly fit into the models of mission envisaged by these structures, and more could be done to encourage alternative activities.

Challenges Faced by non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry

18. The committee studied 7 recent church plants and non-parochial forms of ministry in Sydney Diocese (and several overseas based church plants and ministries) and observed the following comparison between traditional parish model ministries and non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry –

- Those modelled on a **traditional parish model** have been classed successful because of growth in numbers (albeit largely transfer growth), they have reached financial viability and have a building. The transfer growth is not a negative facet as new churches are much needed in new areas of Sydney, however it is not necessarily an indication of missional fruitfulness. These new churches attributed their success to –
 - financial support – from mother church or other churches,⁵
 - Anglican networks supporting them in prayer,⁶
 - administrative assistance from ENC,
 - Anglican structures to belong to, and
 - Anglican infrastructure.⁷
- Newly established non-traditional ministries** view success in terms of the Christian community connecting with previously unreached people and in being a discipleship movement (even if those being discipled do not come to a major group gathering). These new ministries have valued their identity as 'Anglican' because it gives credibility, accountability, networks and a support base. However, in the establishment of these non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry, different sorts of issues have arisen. They include –
 - theological differences with those of other Christian background also eager to join the team to make disciples, and
 - cultural issues including tribalism, language barriers, cultural practice and expectations.

19. Noting this comparison, the committee observed that there is a number of areas in which current Anglican structures do not encourage or support the establishment of different forms of ministry. Three key factors are Anglican identity, finances and leadership.

20. Non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry often face significant issues surrounding **Anglican identity**. Anxiety not only arises from being significantly different to prevailing paradigms of church, but also from disenfranchisement from Anglican structures. How are non-parochial forms of ministry supposed to relate to synod/bishops/parishes? Where are they represented in these structures? What are the appropriate channels of communication and oversight? Furthermore, some non-parochial forms have great difficulty in complying with traditional regulations for Anglican churches such as the need for wardens and a parish council.

⁵ Dr John Bellamy, Byron Kemp and Braden Compton: *Study into Effective Church Planting in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney*, Report to Synod 2015, pp.21, 35.

⁶ *ibid.*, p.38.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.39.

21. An example will help illustrate this challenge: *CrossNet* is a network of missional communities embedded in public spaces in the Wollongong area of NSW. The strategy of *CrossNet* is to establish live Christian communities in locations where they are observable by and easily accessible to non-Christians on a very regular basis, with the opportunity to build relationships with those outside the Kingdom, serve them, share the gospel and ultimately draw them into the kingdom. This network runs in parallel with the other half of *CrossRoads Christian Community* – a more standard but contemporary Anglican parish. So far *CrossNet* have included a ‘Church in a Playgroup’, a youth church, and a number of ministries meeting in pubs, clubs and coffee shops. In our current structures, there is no potential for ministry networks like *CrossNet* to exist and thrive as Anglican ministries apart from the patronage of a traditional parish.

22. Non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry also often face issues surrounding **finances**. Traditional parish plants generally operate under the assumption that they will pay for themselves (hopefully sooner rather than later). However, some non-parochial forms of ministry are among such people groups that being financially self-sufficient, even in the medium term is unrealistic. The result of this is that those engaged in these non-parochial forms often need to self-fund. In turn, this means that time is taken from the ministry to work in other jobs or fundraise. Although financial non-self-sufficiency has generally been the *modus operandi* for long term missionary organisations, there may need to be a paradigm shift in thinking about some local non-parochial forms of ministry in similar ways. Potentially, various churches from the wider fellowship of the Diocese could join together to financially ‘sponsor’ non-self-sufficient non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry over the long term.

23. An example of a ministry that would benefit from long term financial support is a particular indigenous fellowship in the Diocese. This community focuses on local indigenous families and gathers for Bible Study and a barbecue in a local park and for a Sunday meeting in a rented hall with a meal. They are seeking to be a discipleship movement by being present in the local indigenous community and connecting with whole families. The social and financial problems of those who are being reached in this ministry probably means this ministry will never be financially self-sufficient, even though it is a significant and fruitful endeavour.

24. Another example of a ministry that faces these issues is a particular multicultural fellowship in southwest Sydney. This ministry is a community of people from various faiths, including Muslim people, who gather together on Sunday nights. It is a Christian led ministry which is highly relational and accessible to Muslim friends who are interested in exploring Christianity. Many are regular members and call this their community despite being of different faiths. The number of connections in the community through midweek activities and groups are greater than the people who would come on a Sunday night. These activities establish relationships in which the gospel is seen and heard and the context for discipleship. Many will never come to an established Christian gathering or church, but there is potential for a non-parochial Anglican church to grow from this ministry.

25. A further issue that non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry face is **Leadership**. It is common for there to be a lack of mature and able personnel to fill roles like wardens and parish councillors in non-parochial forms of ministry. Furthermore, the training of future leaders is difficult because of Diocesan training requirements, language and learning styles.

26. One example of this issue is a believer from a different faith background whose current ministry involves connecting with people in that faith group to discuss issues of faith. His knowledge of their holy book opens doors for him unavailable to others. His goal is to see people of this Faith becoming followers of Jesus within their communities. Despite his leadership abilities, his inability to meet diocesan training standards and his non-parochial forms of ministry inhibit him from being recognised as an ordained Anglican leader.

27. What the above examples highlight is that newer non-parochial Anglican ministries may develop into churches that often adopt meeting patterns that are different from traditional parochial forms even though they share a common Anglican theology. For example, they may not meet as a large gathering every Sunday or on Sunday at all. Such ministries will be messy, non-streamlined and not easily programmable. While we applaud those seeking to think outside the box, current diocesan structures may act to discourage such pioneers from acting on their vision.

28. Our current practice does not prohibit non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry. It is obvious, however, that our current structures do relatively little to encourage or support them. Although there are no theological grounds prohibiting non-parochial forms, there may be ways in which the structures of the Diocese may more helpfully encourage and promote the formation and growth of non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry, which, in turn, may result in the establishment of more alternative forms of Anglican church.

Proposals and Recommendations

29. The terms of the resolution of Synod in 2015 call for “specific and concrete proposals for the initiation of a process to create such alternative forms of church”. The committee formed the view that a top-down approach is not likely to be successful in creating 'alternative' forms, and has focused on supporting and strengthening innovative non-parochial Anglican ministries that arise in response to different needs and opportunities. The primary purpose of these non-parochial ministries is kingdom growth. A further purpose of some of these ministries will be the establishment of new churches, which may also be non-parochial.

30. In light of the investigation and the conclusions drawn above, the committee identified that ENC is well situated to support and encourage non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry, in that they already do so and the broad responsibility for doing so already exists in their ordinance. However, the current objectives of the ENC ordinance are not sufficiently specific to lend focus to non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry. The result of this is that there is not an overall recognition within the Diocese in terms of the key role ENC can play in supporting these types of ministry.

31. The objectives for ENC are found in clause (4) of the *Department of Evangelism and New Churches Ordinance 2000*, having the following terms –

- (1) The object of the Board is to advance the evangelistic purposes of the Diocese, including through the planting of new congregations and fellowships in the Diocese.
- (2) The Board may, subject to the provisions of this Ordinance, fulfil its object by such means as the Board considers expedient including by –
 - (a) resourcing churches and parishes to evangelise, including through the planting of new congregations in the Diocese, and
 - (b) identifying, training, supporting and appointing suitably gifted persons to evangelise, including through the planting and leading of new fellowships in the Diocese.

32. In order to direct ENC to more intentionally drive, support, identify and equip non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry—and in order to direct people ministering in non-parochial forms towards ENC—it is recommended that the objectives of the ordinance for ENC be modified to emphasise their responsibility for non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry, and consideration be given to providing increased funding to ENC in order to appoint a staff member to identify, support and oversee such ministries.

33. It is the intention of this proposal that the formation of non-parochial forms of Anglican ministry will be pursued more widely in Sydney with the purpose of engaging with our culturally diverse city in order to see greater missional fruitfulness.

For and on behalf of the Working Group.

THE REV BRUCE STANLEY
Chair

24 August 2016