

Presidential Address 2009

What with Global Warming, the War on Terror and the Global Financial Crisis, we may well think that we live in apocalyptic times.

Extraordinary times provoke big questions.
Threatening times give the questions a special edge.
We want to understand the signs - the signs of our own era.
What's happening?
Why?
Where are we?
What should we do?
What's the future?
Who is responsible?
What does it all mean?

For many people in our world trouble is personal:

some hostile person, using magic, has been able to harness the spiritual powers of the cosmos and they have bent them against us.

For others, it is best to explain the times by appeal to such powers as fate or destiny. The fault *does* lie in the stars; the stars above us govern our conditions.

For others there is no meaning at all;

we are simply caught up in a vast, unthinking, impersonal universe which is churning through aeons of time, from a big bang to a big stretch, or perhaps a big collapse.

What *do* the signs of our times tell us?

Just this.

We live in an apocalyptic era, but the response is neither panic nor paralysis:

it is persistent active faith.

The signs are enough to make us anxious.

Every time the weather behaves erratically, we are reminded of climate change and its likely consequences.

The authoritative scientific consensus to the fact of change is so strong that it would be folly to ignore it.

But what does it mean for us?

At least this:

the ordinary human feeling that we are powerful creatures who live in a stable world and a stable universe, is deluded.

We are frail beings who live in a creation which is ever changing, however slowly; it is not fixed, permanent, unmoving.

We experience earthquake, tsunami, flood, fire and apocalyptic-red dust;

we see our precious topsoil blow out to sea, lost forever;
we ask,
What is happening?
Why?
Who is to blame?
What does this mean?
What times are these?

Of course it is not only the physical world which has made us anxious.

The world economic order, which delivered such stunning prosperity and security, has been shaken to its core.

There were moments last year when some very knowledgeable people were removing their money from the banks in cash.

Credit itself - the trust which is foundational to wealth - was about to run out.

Indeed, some experts gazed into the economic equivalent of the Book of Revelation's bottomless pit.

Many have suffered losses which will never be regained.

Naturally we ask,
How has this happened?
Who is responsible?
What should we do?
What does this mean?
What times are these?

Meanwhile, the so-called 'war on terror' forward wends its weary way, apparently both unloseable and unwinnable.

Climate change, the Global Financial Crisis and the War on Terror, are signs that we have no hope of riding the flow of history to gloriously better days.

Thank God that sometimes we do avoid disaster and improve matters, and we certainly should do all we can to grapple with our problems and create a better world.

An active faith will do these things.

But because human frailty and human sin are always with us, utopianism is folly.

God is in charge of both history and nature.

We can detect his hand at work in both spheres.

Jesus points us to history and nature in order to give meaning to the times:

'For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.
There will be earthquakes in various places;
there will be famines.
These are but the beginnings of the
birth-pangs'.

For Jesus, these are the signs of apocalyptic,
'end-of-the-world-times'.

But he was not predicting the year 2009 specifically.

For the apocalyptic signs that he mentioned are always part of human experience.

We are always in apocalyptic times.

He was really saying to us that we are always one step away from the end of all things, that we ought always to be ready.

That is, we ought to observe such signs as war and economic collapse and climate change and understand that human beings are sinful, that human existence is fragile, that our confidence and hope must be in God.

It is right to look at the unfolding history of our own epoch and ask ourselves what God is doing.

But when we do, we find that the signs do not call for apocalyptic panic; they are not intended as a guide to the chronology of the end.

In fact, they are intended to prepare us always for the end, whenever that may be;

they are intended to remind us that all human utopias are folly;

that our salvation comes from outside of the resources of the human race;

that we are designed to trust in God, not ourselves.

We are not to be passive.

While we wait for the end to come we are to be energetically busy in the work of God's kingdom.

We are to live by persistent, active faith.

Fundamental to his thinking is this:

that the world is not a playground for evil spirits able to be controlled through magic; but nor is it empty of spirit - mechanistic and mindless matter delivering only luck and accident.

The world as Jesus understood it is a world controlled by one great Spirit, the sovereign God himself, who unceasingly supervises its minutest affairs.

He is not accessed by magic, but by faith which speaks to him in prayer.

His control is both complete and purposeful.

His goal is to restore all and so to be acknowledged by all and in all.

We have to read our own times, no matter how difficult they are, within the power and purposes of this great God.

The signs of the times may not be the *prelude* to the end of all things, but they are a *pointer* to the end of all things.

They continually remind us that Jesus will one day return in glory to usher in the final form of the kingdom of God and that his coming could be at any time.

Even a matter as serious and worthy of our efforts as global warming, needs to be understood from within this large picture of what God plans and purposes for history.

It should engender neither panic nor paralysis.

Neither should it so absorb us that we forget that it is a sign of the bigger story of the end of all things.

Even climate change needs to be relativised.

And what of us?

How are we to read the history of this year in our Diocese?

I would say just this.

We live, as ever, with all the signs and some of the pain of an apocalyptic era, but our response is neither panic nor paralysis:

it is persistent active faith.

I have had a number of memorable moments since we met last October.

One of them was at the Synod conference we held at Mortdale.

Peter, a member of the Synod, asked me,

‘what is God saying to us as a Diocese through these large losses?’

I have been thinking about that legitimate question.

Can we read the mind of God from such events?

Are there signs of the times for us here?

Let me be quite personal about my experience of the year since last Synod.

It was in November that I got the first inkling of the magnitude of what had happened to our investments.

Each successive month seemed to bring worse news.

It has taken a long time to grasp and begin to see the implications of it.

I can tell you some of the things I have felt:

I felt *disbelief* - I have been schooled to believe that this could not happen because we have been so careful and professional in our handling of the Endowment.

I felt both *let down* and yet *responsible* since this has occurred on my watch and in part within funds in which I have a special interest.

I felt *doubt* about whether we had engaged in ethically dubious practices by gearing the Endowment.

I felt deep *uncertainty* about what we should now do and how we could carry on.

Above all, I felt *grief* - and this I have continued to feel - as the impact of these losses on many fine ministries and on the jobs and personal lives of friends and colleagues has become clear.

It is not easy to see the dismantling of so much of Anglican Media for example;

the loss of our Archdeacons;

the impact on the Cathedral;

the inability to fund local ministries through regions and through the Archbishop;

the decline in resources available to Youthworks - I could go on and on.

Are there signs here?

Yes, as always, there are signs of our human weaknesses;
signs which have rightly brought forth words of sorrow and apology;
but there are also signs which say that God is our only hope and our true resource;
signs which summon us again to persistent, active faith.

In some ways the experience has been similar to the sudden death of a key leader.

You are thrust at once into the turmoil of two contradictory things.

In the first place there is the whole emotional business of coming to terms with the loss - disbelief, doubt, uncertainty;

the persistent questions, Why did this happen?

Did we do the wrong thing?

And grief, a grief which can freeze, can paralyse us.

At the very same time, such is the urgency of where you find yourself, you must act;

you must make decisions;

you must push ahead.

While matters were clarifying over the months which followed November, some of us had to engage with the future - making decisions without enough information, struggling to keep everyone informed while not creating needless alarm.

My memory is that the full implications were not clear until about May.

I am glad to say that we had at hand a small group, the Mission Strategy Committee, led by Peter Tasker and then Peter Kell, who, in the midst of already busy lives gave themselves sacrificially to this role.

Providentially in November at the annual conference of the Mission Board, we had received advice and then discussed the principles on which we should act in a financial downturn.

At that stage we were thinking in terms of a 25% drop in income.

Later we came to realise that it was 50%.

We also studied expert advice on what organizations like ours should be doing in this sort of crisis.

Then we always asked the faith question:

what would the Lord want of us here, in this situation?

In the end, we had to do three things.

First, we knew that we had to cut costs - that was obvious; but we knew also that mere economies would not be enough. Nor would it be sensible simply to cut all recipients by 50%.

Thus, second, we had to decide to prioritise by identifying and returning to core business.

In our case, what must be funded from central resources?

Third we had to invest in the future - not allowing everything to suffer equally and not refusing to take any initiatives.

The Diocese must take this opportunity to regroup, to reorganize and to improve what we do.

Peter Kell's committee did not freeze - they worked.

Persistent faith made them actively obedient.

There was never enough time and although there was every attempt to consult and to listen, people have been left out of discussions and there have had to be decisions taken with which not everyone agrees.

That was inevitable.

How else could it be so?

The results of their efforts and those of the Mission Board and the Standing Committee are before you in the Strategic Directions document and the Synod Appropriations and Allocations Ordinance.

Whatever you may think of the results I can only say that the effort has been enormous and the debt we owe them immense.

They have performed a task which if they were in business would have been astonishing enough, so complex is it.

We began with the idea that we may be 25% down in income;
we discovered that it was going to be something like 50%.

Undaunted, they have acted on principle, not on mere pragmatics or politics.

They have risen above sectional interest.

As a result we have the opportunity to go forward in new ways which may prove even more profitable than before.

I ought also to add a tribute to those whose ministries have already been curtailed, or will be, if we pass the Ordinance.

I have seen serious faces;

I have detected pain and grief;

I have heard strong arguments in favor of a favorite cause;

I have seen some hard bargaining.

The whole move from five bishops and five archdeacons down to four bishops has not been without its anguish.

And that is only one case.

But the brothers and sisters of the Diocese have behaved in an exemplary way, seeking only the common good and not engaging in blame or special pleading.

They have looked for ways to go forward and accepted that we must act on principle.

I am immensely proud of them.

I have told you about some of my emotions - disbelief, responsibility, disappointment, doubt, grief, uncertainty.

As time has gone on I have worked through a number of these issues.

I do not feel that gearing was ethically dubious for example, though I had to have an argument with myself to come to that conclusion.

We have worked hard to tell Synod members what went wrong and what we are proposing to do.

But I can also tell you what I have *not* felt and why I have not felt anxious.

The bedrock of our faith is the sovereignty of our great God.

At every moment he has been in charge of us.

It may be that he is chastising us for our sins.

If so, it is only a further evidence of his fatherly care and love.

When the Apostle tells us that 'for those who love God all things work together for good,' he did not mean that we would therefore never suffer loss.

Rather he meant that the pain of loss would be used by God to make us more like Christ.

This is our greatest good.

I have always trusted God for this and have never found him lacking.

When Allan Blanch was my Rector at Barney's Broadway he frequently emphasized this:

God is a wise God.

Often we cannot understand our circumstances at all.

We cannot read them;

we cannot work out what God's purposes may be.

The thing which holds us is our assurance that our God is both loving and wise.

You see I am not sure that God is directly 'speaking' to us through these large losses - but I am prepared to trust his sovereignty and his wisdom and be led by his word.

As we do that, as we persist with active faith, we will receive whatever it is that he wishes to give us, whether it is a firmer trust in his goodness, or a deeper repentance, or both.

When we ask what God may be teaching us, we must be careful to seek the answer in the right place and in the right way.

It would not be right, for example simply to express our own prejudices and guesses and to confuse them with the word of God.

After all, we can think of a number of reasons why this has happened and even then all of them may be quite wrong.

Thus, it may be that the Lord is chastising us for our sins - but then some would say that it is the sin of arrogance, others would say it is because your bishops went to GAFCON, others would say it is because of the Diocesan Mission.

But then it may not be our sins at all - it may be that the Lord is simply seeking to test us;

or perhaps he is seeking to stop us doing something which is right in itself but not in accordance with his secret will;

or perhaps he is challenging our faith, to rely on him more boldly for our finances.

Certainly it is a serious warning to us about what the Scriptures call 'the uncertainty of riches'.

When we look at our circumstances in the light of God's word, we have been reminded powerfully that our Diocese cannot and should not depend on its wealth for its Christian life.

We don't avoid the issue.

Our access to the mind of the Lord is through his word and we must look there for our answers not to speculation.

Thus when we are convinced by his word of his wisdom and sovereignty for example, we already have part of the answer as to how we are to respond to any crisis - with great confidence in him.

Likewise, because we are convinced that he does chastise us for our good, it is an ideal opportunity for us to examine whether there is any evil way in us, and if so to repent.

The Bishops and Archdeacons with our wives meet regularly for prayer and the study of God's word on Monday mornings.

On August 10th, Archdeacon Deryck Howell led us in a study of Deuteronomy 11.

It was one of those occasions where the word of God and your present position intersect with power.

Deuteronomy 11 is a passage which reminds Israel of the saving mercies of God and his gift to them of the Promised Land.

Moses calls on them to cherish and obey the word of the Lord, and makes a strong link between obedience and blessing:

'See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse:

the blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today, and the curse if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way I am commanding you today...' (Deut 11:26-28).

Their enjoyment of the fruit of the land depended on their continual obedience to the word of God.

Deryck began with the point that as a Diocese we are faced with many options, but only one basic choice.

It is true that we have to prioritise, to think strategically, to work out what ministries to support and which to close.

There are a hundred options.

But *the choice* remains simple:

to obey or to disobey God's word.

The passage begins with a reminder of God's grace, with a description of their salvation for Egypt and the way in which God gave them the land.

They are not to think that they can earn God's blessing.

But it goes on to call them to obedience and to make the link between obedience and blessing, to show us that to walk in the path of obedience to God is to walk the way of blessedness.

In general terms, the path of obedience is a far easier way to live in this world than the path of disobedience.

The God who made the world knows how it works best and the pattern of family life he endorses for example, the honoring of parents, the love of husband and wife, the prohibition of adultery - these are things where obedience brings its own blessing and its own reward, quite naturally.

But the path of blessedness is not always easy;

the natural link between obedience and blessing is not simplistic or mathematical;

God deals with us generally, but also particularly.

As Glenn Davies reminded us that day, it was by keeping to the path of obedience when faced with the seductiveness of Potiphar's wife which landed Joseph in prison.

And, of course, as Judy Willis observed, obedience led our Saviour to the cross.

Indeed, the basic Christian virtue is obedience to God. Faith itself is obedient; we become Christians through repentance; the gospel centres on the Lordship of Christ; the kingdom of God is a kingdom of servants. We do not obey in order to merit salvation but we obey because we have been saved.

And here is blessing untold in the obedience for which we were designed as creatures.

Thus in the midst of the difficulties we face and are passing through, God summons us still to obey his word.

This is the chief question we can and should ask:

are we obeying the publicly expressed will of God?

Last year the Diocese of Melbourne faced a very similar financial crisis.

The Archbishop was asked what was God saying in all this.

He simply and wisely responded:

'Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you.'

In other words, what God is saying to us does not change;

it is publicly known in scripture;

we do not have to speculate.

But we do have to obey.

It is here that we have always before us the obligation to search our hearts and our attitudes and our behaviors in order to ask, are we obeying the word of God?

I have shared with you some of my feelings as we have passed through this year.

And I have told you that it has not left me anxious because I have trust in a sovereign, good and wise God. But I have by no means told you the whole story. For the year has contained as much stress and strain as I can remember; but it has also been a year of joy and energy and hope. Indeed, if I ever get the chance to look back on the year it will not be the bad that comes instantly to mind, but the good - that this was the year 09, the year Connect09. For this too is part of seeing what God is doing with us and for us.

What we decided to do as a Synod in 2007 was to continue to walk the path of obedience to the written word of God. We believe that God summons us to share his

word and to pray for unbelievers. Of course there are different ways of doing this, but we decided that a campaign in which we would try to give everyone around us access to the word of God in a suitable form would be an excellent way to accomplish the aim. Furthermore we decided to do so in a way in which we could connect with our neighbours and they with us. I believe that rich blessing has been the result.

There has been a blessing on our cities and countryside. Over a million copies of *The Essential Jesus* will have been distributed by Easter next year; over 180,000 copies of the Colin Buchanan DVD already; over 60,000 copies of the Mark magazine; many thousands of Arabic and Chinese gospels; other languages too; the spoken Luke on CD has gone out; the *Jesus All About Life* campaign has begun; the Mothers Union has run two central prayer meetings which were marked by enthusiasm and fervour; the *Inspiring People* meetings have resulted in over one hundred and seventy people doing a course on the life of Jesus; we are now providing key material for youth and there is to be a big evangelistic youth meeting in early December in the Entertainment Centre. In anyone's terms it has been - and continues to be, since it is gathering momentum even as we meet - a vast effort; a huge campaign.

Personally, I have never had a better year for sharing God's word with others, one to one. I have connected as never before. *The Essential Jesus* inspired me and I have passed out scores of copies to individuals. I have never experienced discourtesy or even indifference. Often I have been weary at the end of the day; I have prayed; a new energy kicks in, and an opportunity has presented itself. I can say that I have learned to trust the Lord even with fleeting conversations and to entrust people to the Lord for the future too. Christine and I also had a street party - in our case High Tea at Bishops Court - in which we were delighted simply to get to know 60 of our neighbours and host a function for them. But I could not stop St Mark's Darling Point handing out *The Essential Jesus*, as our guests left. I believe that thousands and thousands of people have now had a visit from an Anglican Christian from the local church for the first time. We have begun to show that we are good neighbours.

There have been amazing conversations. (I have abbreviated what follows but have given you the essence) A Sikh professional man said to me - 'I have been asking people about Christianity and they could not tell me...' A Chinese lady said to a friend of mine after she had read *The Essential Jesus*, 'I believe it. What next?' And of course there is Edna and her encounter with a woman in the street - 'I have been praying for you for two years that you will come to know Jesus,' said Edna. 'I want to know Jesus' said the woman. 'Here is a book which will tell you about him' said Edna. 'What's all this about?' said a visitor in church when Connect09 was being explained - 'no, not the bit about Connect09, I want to know about Jesus'. Another person said to me after we had read the Prodigal Son, 'I am the older brother, aren't I?' She was, but now she too has come home to her heavenly Father.

Have we had large numbers of new Christians? Not as far as I know...not yet. In spiritual work of any kind there are times of sowing and times of reaping. I have lived in a time of reaping and the excitement is palpable. During the course of the year, however, an enthusiast for Connect 09 said to me, 'This is a time of sowing'. Once again it is a matter of understanding where we are in God's timetable. As far as I can see what we have been doing is the first part of a process. A little girl I heard of had been praying for her friend at school - the friend came to school with *The Essential Jesus* and was reading it - someone had visited and left it with the parents. You see

those little books will be in houses, cars garages, shops - they will be there waiting for the person in whose heart God is moving, to pick them up and to find Jesus.

We can trust God to use his word; but people need to have the word. I know how busy church life is and I know what it is to have good intentions but to do nothing when the moment arrives. Although I have so far handed out over forty copies of *The Essential Jesus*, maybe more, no one has ever said to me, 'I have this already.' My guess is that some of us have ordered copies of the book but have not yet worked out quite what to do with it. I understand. Why not get to work now and think of what you can do? Let me say that the small parish of Corrimal handed out 600 copies at a town fair; let me say that Caringbah went door to door and in the end wanted more to hand out. Let me say that in my parish of Centennial Park we are finding that the *Jesus All About Life* Campaign is creating opportunities.

I have learned two things. The first is to pray, to connect, to expect. Of course I have always tried to talk to people about Christ. But the fact that we were all doing this together and the fact of attractive materials such as *The Essential Jesus* made me actually do it. It was easy. I know Connect 09 is only a year-long campaign, but now that I have started, I don't think I want to stop. I am going to trust God for the openings, trust him that he will take and use his word, trust him that he will prepare people.

The second is this: the secularists want us to believe that we live in secularist society. They love the picture of the long-drawn out decline of the churches and the steady growth of atheism and unbelief. It is true that there are many who have no relationship with God and who would class themselves as entirely secular. But our society, our nation is not secular. My experience this year is that we live in a religious society - with a large number of people who would say still that they are Christians, but with an increasing number of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and other religions. We are going to have to change our strategies and our assumptions.

In fact one of the key elements of Connect 09 is research. We want our church members to explore the real world around them to begin to see what the evangelistic task looks like. It is perfectly clear that unless our churches begin to do a great deal more to reach people of non-Anglo background, we will indeed become a small sect without connections to the community. I think that we have less than twenty years to make a difference in this area; I may be being generous.

That is not to say that we have been idle. I rejoice in news of people from many nations becoming Christian and joining our churches. I rejoice in news of work amongst Chinese, Japanese, Iranians, Indians, Vietnamese and others. I rejoice in the ESL programs which so many are running. But these are but the beginnings of our efforts. Because of this I have asked a proven cross-cultural missionary, the Rev Bruce Hall to advise Al Stewart in thinking through our whole approach and helping to inspire us to thoughtful and effective action. I want him to give us leadership.

Connect 09 has blessed our community. But what about the impact on our churches? We are looking for a permanent transformation. The heart of Connect 09 is connection - the summons to our churches to re-take the parish, to turn outward, to become energetically reconnected to their location. Hence the elements of Connect 09 are:

Prayer - interceding for the world in which God has set us.

Research - discovering who lives beside us as neighbours; locating the deserts where there is no Christian work; finding the tribes of people without the knowledge of God.

Connection - creating appropriate ways of sharing God's word. *Equipping* - preparing our people to make fruitful contact with their neighbors.

Partnerships - encouraging local churches to work together in their wider area, and to tap into the resources of the whole diocese.

Preparation - enabling churches to improve especially in being able to welcome and integrate new people.

Have we done these things in 2009? Since they are permanently valid and effective, I expect that we will want to embed them in church life from now on. Wherever Connect09 has been enthusiastically embraced, you will see a church which is poised to do even greater things in its local area. I have heard of some amazingly inventive and effective ways in which churches have connected with the community his year. We can do it. It is worth doing as long as it arises out of prayer for the community and our desire to share the word of God.

One unexpected joy has been lay participation and enthusiasm. Connect09 captured the imagination of lay Christians. It freed them to do front line evangelism in a way for which many had been hungering. A Christian lady told me, 'My theory of evangelism has been to live the Christian life and wait until I am asked why I live as I do. It has not worked. I have to be more active than that'. She was nervous as she started distributing *The Essential Jesus* to strangers, and exhilarated afterwards. Connect 09 has been like a stimulus package flowing through the network of churches and energizing us. Let's not lose its power to do good.

Connect 09 is a sowing campaign: this means that we need to sustain it into the future. in order to gather in the harvest. One minister told me of a man who had come to know the Lord this year: 'It is because we effectively did Connect 09 type things in 2006, long before we dreamed up the concept, that this man has become a Christian in 2009. It has taken three years.' Another man told me that as he personally researched, he discovered that his suburb was now inhabited by many Indian families, a fact he was oblivious of before. Is his church going to ignore this now? Or is that a permanent finding which will dictate what they do?

Connect 09 makes us think about the state of the churches - what our buildings are like and what we do together on a Sunday morning or evening. We have really worked hard missiologically on these issues. I hereby challenge us to think again from a theological as well as a missiological point of view what we do in our gatherings. I have asked Bishop Forsyth to follow up our excellent Doctrine Commission Report from last year to push us hard on these matters. Bishop Forsyth and a small group he has drawn together have been working hard on this. Some of their thinking and discussions can be found on the new web-site, bettergatherings.com

This is an urgent matter. It is right to turn outward to the parish; it is right to welcome the newcomer. But we cannot afford to lose our theological grip on what church is about. Our reading of God's word, our preaching, prayers, singing, and fellowship, including our sacramental fellowship, must be honoring to God and edifying to his people. I look for a tumultuous turmoil about these matters; I hope for courteous controversy. Let us aim to be principled and not just pragmatic in what we do in Christian assembly. What pleases God?

Last November the Mission Board asked itself this question: How can we sustain the ethos of Connect09 in the churches? Various suggestions arose; the way forward did not seem clear at all; discussion went on. At the same time, however, out of the financial crisis and the loss of regional leadership, an idea was germinating which was going to be integral to the answer.

It was originally called 'Mission Directors'. The concept immediately aroused anxiety, created confusion and provoked tussles - who would these persons be? What authority would they have? How would they relate to the regional bishops? Were they archdeacons by another name? These and many other questions and disagreements swirled around. Anxiety abounded; confusion reigned and tussles began at once.

Frankly, I was one of the anxious, confused and provoked. We had a big challenge, but was this a solution? However, through lengthy consultations, the whole thing began to take shape and life. In particular, we began to see that this was not a 'solution' to the governance issues raised by the loss of Archdeacons and the reordering of regions. The problems of governance are largely going to be handled in different ways. We have spent a lot of time thinking that through. The budget contains part of the answer.

But as the 'Mission Director' idea matured, I came to see that it was a concept which both helps us in the new situation, but which is worth doing in itself. The financial crisis has forced us to invent a good idea.

Let me explain.

There are huge benefits to any local church from belonging to the Diocese of Sydney. It gives access to resources of all sorts. Over the years, however, introversion has ruled. We tend to value isolation more than fellowship. Indeed this is something that one of our non-Christian researchers observed about us. 'You have many good ideas,' he commented, 'but you keep them to yourselves. There does not seem to be a mechanism for sharing at parish level.' Connect 09 answers: partnership in mission.

We can exaggerate. In fact, the regional structure delivers resources to the local church, in the ministry of the bishops for example. Likewise the Area Deanery structure exists and provides for the opportunity for fellowship and even joint action. But we can do much better. As I thought about the Mission Director proposal and as we consulted, talked, argued and prayed, the genius of it became clear. It just needed to be turned around to bring that genius out.

We begin not with Mission Directors, but with Mission Areas. That is, we begin not with the workers but with the work; not with who will do things, but what needs to be done. In my vision, we look at our mission field, together. We capitalize on our research in locating deserts and tribes. We commit to each other in partnership. We collaborate in our work. We pray together. Each local area has its own peculiarities, its own special quality known only to those who live there. In my vision, I see that a mission area will acknowledge that even within its boundaries there are sub-areas which require attention. Local churches are often too weak to do new work alone; regions are too large for effective action. They encompass too many quite disparate parts of our Diocese.

Can it be done? I say that it is already being done. I can take you to three parts of the Diocese known instantly to me where churches are co-operating in mission. Why can't we all think like that?

For me, one of the key elements of the ethos of Connect 09 is a commitment to a certain style of learning. This was the theory behind the two day meetings at Bishops court. I summed it up by saying that

we have to learn in a way suitable to the learner,

we have to learn by doing,

we have to learn by teaching others, and

we have to learn through fellowship.

It's precisely that mutual learning style which we must recapture in the Mission Areas. Sure we can learn from experts, and we will. But the real expertise already exists in our churches. Indeed Mission Areas are another name for Connect 09 going forward. You will see in the budget that a significant sum of money has been set aside to invest over the next three years, in the learning experience of local leadership, lay and clergy.

The sum is only available to us this once. If we pass the Appropriations and Allocations Ordinance in this form the money will be invested in every parish willing to partner with others learning and thinking, in improving the skills and understanding of the local leadership of the churches so that they can continue to be part of this big movement into our community.

My initial guess is that we will have about twenty Mission Areas, but as we consult locally that number may well grow. Mission leaders will be needed as Area Deans are now, in order to set the agenda, to draw people together and to keep the group focused. There will be some training and on-going financial support for the mission leaders and I have asked Bishop Ivan Lee to develop and sustain the network.

Obviously, I am going to take a keen interest in the whole project and will be as involved as I can be. You may ask, 'Does my church have to be part of this?' To which I say, 'This *is* the Diocese of Sydney!' I don't see this as mandatory; only as an opportunity.

I know that lots of you have questions about Mission Areas and I have been much helped by the comments of various people as they have entered the discussion. Thus, many have asked about its relationship to Area Deaneries. I have an opinion about this, but I think that I need to have my opinion informed and tested by local leadership. We are involved in a major Policy Four reform. Don't be surprised that we leave room for flexibility. But about your questions and concerns let me say three things:

First, it took me some time to be convinced, but now I am enthusiastic because I can see that it is the ideal vehicle to keep Connect 09 and hence the Diocesan Mission going. For me, over time, the genius of it has emerged.

Second, whereas the bishops were tasked by me with the job of encouraging the Mission in the local areas, this is no longer possible. I am proud of what was accomplished - but we became aware that the regions are too large and diverse for this strategy to be fully effective. Thus Mission Areas is not merely a necessary replacement strategy - it is actually a better strategy, because it is more local.

Third, a number of your questions cannot be answered because it is too early to do so. This is not a top-down carefully worked out bureaucratic grid to place over the top of the Diocese. It is an opportunity to recognize and bring out the skills, knowledge and

enthusiasm of local Christians. It will not prevent other alliances and networks. I envisage that its working out will be diverse. We are going to teach each other how to be a more effective network of churches and organizations. For me, the fact that this is not yet worked out to the last item, is one of its best features. It is called being flexible.

Where will we be fifty years from now? We are up against a large challenge and there is no guarantee whatever that we will survive except as a small but wealthy cult. The cultural mood is not flowing with us, and immigrant numbers are also not in our favor. I realize that for many Pentecostal Christianity is the answer and they will extol its attractions and its capacity to attract some of the very people who are missing from our churches. My problem with that suggestion is in the nature of Pentecostalism. I judge that its love-affair with modern culture will leave it insufficiently tied to historic Christianity, and that there is a chance that it will not be recognizably Christian in fifty years. That is a harsh judgment and I hope that I am wrong; but there are already signs of diversion from the fundamentals.

I do not doubt, therefore, that our commitment to conservative theology and to a high view of scripture is entirely correct. Only this will carry Christianity forward in a culture such as Australia in the next fifty years. However, I do see signs in our midst of a tension: I think that some of us will more readily come to terms with culture for missionary reasons, but not being as careful as we should be about the purity of doctrine, we will lose the structure of the faith and become effectively Unitarian. The theological weakness will begin, I think, with an impoverished doctrine of sin. From this will come a semi-pelagian anthropology, an exemplarist soteriology and a humanistic Christology. It will probably develop two forms - a wet pietistic one which will still look for spiritual experience, and a dry intellectualist one which will embrace cultural respectability.

Of course the opposite danger is to flee from the world and embrace not merely theological but also cultural conservatism. The heirs of such brothers and sisters will survive and survive to bear witness to the gospel; I would rather be with them than with the others. But we will be as invisible in the general culture as the smallest sect is today.

There is a better path. We have signaled our allegiance to it already via the Diocesan Mission and especially Connect 09. It is who we are and who we want to be. It involves a commitment both to biblical theology and purity of doctrine, and also to our neighbours. We want to be citizens of our nation with a transcendent loyalty to the kingdom of God.

Let me suggest four things which we must do.

First we must continue to cherish and support our College. But this is as long as, and only as long as, it embraces from the heart the theology of the Bible as expressed in the English Reformation. I wish you could all see the powerful effect which Moore College is having all around Australia and the world. Its teaching is the guardian of our theology and hence our life as a network of churches. More than that, the College has recognized as never before its duty to contend in the world of ideas, to speak for Christ and his word in the sphere of academic theology, of secular humanism and of world religion.

Second, we must take urgent action in the realm of Anglican education. It is great that for the time being we have a traditionally strong presence in State Schools. We support State education and always have. I thank Youthworks for its great contribution here. But we also gladly either run or have some influence in something like forty independent schools. Both state and private schooling constitute a key interface between our Diocese and the surrounding world. We proclaim that we stand for that world and we intend to be of it and in it. We also intend to make Christ known within it, refusing to accept the role given to us in recent days of the silent wall-flower.

My concern about Sydney Anglican education is that at a formal level it does not exist. There is no literature devoted to discussing it. There is no faculty whose business it is to research it. There are no courses devoted to explaining it. There is no philosophy which encapsulates it. There is no accessible theological discussion of it. There are no chaplains being inducted into it. There are no Christian studies teachers being trained to instruct in it. There is no induction for teachers into Anglican schools as such. There is no fellowship of Anglican teachers. There is no special place for new Heads to think about the issues raised by leading an Anglican school. There is no sustained discussion between or even within School Councils. There is no such thing as Anglican education as such in our midst.

The Anglican Education Commission under Dr Bryan Cowling is a fine start to addressing all this. However, if we are to continue to have any contribution in the area of education that is noticeably Christian, we are going to need far more than this. To my mind, ultimately, we are going to need a teaching and research institution of some sort, one which can work within the theological parameters of the Diocese and use that as a basis for a fruitful interaction with our world. I am working to create just such a body as soon as I can. To do it, I will need the support of our schools and the Corporation.

Third, we must deepen the partnership between Anglicare and the parishes. Anglicare is an organization of which we have every right to be proud. It does immense good within our Diocese. But a city-mission such as Anglicare always invites suspicion. We can fear that it will only encourage good-works religion and that it will do those good works in the name of human compassion alone. If we wish to be so suspicious, it will certainly float off in that direction and will join the long list of similar organizations lost to the gospel.

But Anglicare is not like that. It sees itself as an activity of our Diocese, or more specifically the parishes of our Diocese. It wishes to be theologically sound and gospel oriented. For many years it has never been closer to the parishes than it is now. It provides a permanent opportunity for us to declare and to be active in the community around us, to say that we are not withdrawing, not retreating, not becoming a sect. We belong to Sydney; we belong to its history; we belong to its fabric; we belong to its people and we intend to serve our neighbours openly and without cease. That is who we are.

I am presuming that when the Mission Area leaders sit down to talk about their region they will think of Anglicare as a partner in their conversation and a partner in their work. I take it that they will similarly think of the Sydney Anglican Schools Corporation, Youthworks, and Anglican Retirement Villages (which, by the way, celebrates fifty years of service this year, for which we thank God). These great works done in our name are a sure and certain sign that we are committed to the society in

which we are set and committed to its good. This will be true as long as we see ourselves in partnership with our organizations and not somehow distant from them.

And there is a fourth thing for us to do. Which brings us back to signs of the times. Or at least I think it does. This is something I said in the Presidential Address to Synod last year:

‘I have always thought that part of the answer (to our vast evangelistic challenge) will include a dedicated evangelistic fellowship, a local missionary society. I have looked to create something like that without success. As we have prayed for our city and its region this year, there has been what seems like a remarkable spiritual movement summoning young men into church planting. Is this the answer to our prayers? I think that this could be exactly what it is. Something is happening and it may be of great significance. Our local churches need to be on top evangelistically. Connect 09 is part of that. But for whole areas of the city and for whole tribes this is not going to be enough. I hope that when we meet again next year I will be able to describe the way in which a movement of the Spirit has begun to show its fruit for Christ.’

That was last year.

This is what I wrote to Bishop Al Stewart this year:

‘As you know I have come (reluctantly) to the conclusion that the way to see this happen is to ask you to be the one to lead it. You understand my hesitation. But you also understand that I have overcome that reluctance in the belief that what we see here may well be what the Lord is doing. Someone else can capitalize on all you achieved in Wollongong. But you are the man for us to trust ourselves to God’s Spirit in breaking new ground for Christ.

‘I am therefore writing on the recommendation of the Board of the Department of Evangelism to offer you the position of Director of the Department. The position would be particularly concerned with church planting: inspiring, recruiting, training, placing and supporting evangelistic church planters in the Diocese... While churches planted will begin wherever possible with the goodwill and encouragement of the local rector and regional bishop, permission will not be necessary for such a church plant.’

To lose Al Stewart from Wollongong in this way was like an amputation. I was helped by three things: first, the agreement of clergy from Wollongong that this was the right thing to do, despite their sense of loss. Second, Al’s overwhelming conviction that here was a task which he must do. Third, my sense that we may be seeing a forward movement of God’s Spirit and that it would require sacrifice. It is a sense; it is not a word from the Lord; for that, I look to the scriptures.

For me, it has been a year of great but mixed emotions, of hard, hard work, of frustration and sadness at the loss of ministries, of admiration at the way so many people have simply got on with being servants of Jesus even when hard decisions have affected them deeply. It has also been a year in which I have seen God at work through his servants in sharing the gospel and so a year of rejoicing. I am so proud to be associated with a Diocese which has poured all this energy and time and money into evangelism and into transforming churches. I am so thankful to God for his immeasurable blessings.

Paul writes to the Philippians as one who knows the great apocalyptic truth: ‘the Lord is at hand.’ He knows that whatever happens there is only one thing which matters,

that the Lord will appear and transform all things. He speaks of his joy, his contentment, of his pleasure in the partnership he has experienced with the church. And then in God's name he makes this promise: 'And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.' That is our testimony in good times and in bad: our God will provide. With Paul we also say: 'I can do all things through him who strengthens me'. And so he adds, in words which we can make our own, 'To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.'