

Presidential Address to the 2023 Diocesan Synod

The Rt Revd Cameron Venables - 24th June '23

It is an honour to offer an address to the Synod of this Diocese as Bishop Administrator, and there is grace for me in the timing because nine years ago, on this date, I was ordained a bishop at St John's Cathedral. The lectionary invites us to remember the Nativity of St John the Baptist on the 24th June and because of this focus my wife, Kate, was worried that after ordination I would adopt some form of Nazirite vow. If I had done this, I would now have nine years of uncut hair and beard! Happily, this did not happen, but I often think about God's call on John's life: namely, to speak truth to power, to make 'the road' a little straighter, and to prepare the way for Jesus.

In some ways a Synod Address can be like the State of the Union address that American Presidents offer each year. Please note that I said State of the Union, and not State of Origin, 'though I offer condolences to all New South Wales supporters in the room now that this has been referenced!

The first State of the Union address was delivered by President George Washington on the 8th January 1790 and, quite remarkably, it was only one thousand and eighty nine words in length. Every State of the Union address since then has been longer and, 'though I have tried to be concise, this address will also be longer!

Much has happened in the world and in Australia since we met twelve months ago as a Synod, and much has happened in the life of our Diocese, in the life of the National Anglican Church, and in the life of the Anglican Communion. I will begin with some things that form part of our general context globally and nationally, before talking specifically about our Anglican context.

Elements of Global Context

The war in Ukraine continues and the economic impact of this continues to be significant in our global village. We can recognise this as a factor in the higher costs of fuel, steel, and food; and in 'supply chain issues' that impact many areas of business. The humanitarian cost of this conflict also continues to be significant with the UNHCR currently estimating that 5.9 million people are internally displaced within Ukraine and approximately 8 million Ukrainians have registered as refugees in countries across Europe¹.

The persecution of women and girls in Afghanistan and Iran continues, and most people in Australia, born in Afghanistan and Iran, grieve what is happening in the countries of their birth. Similarly, the armed conflict within Sudan that began in April this year causes grief and anguish to those Australians born in Sudan and South Sudan, and many of these are in Anglican congregations across Australia, congregations of this Diocese, and in the membership of this Synod. Acknowledging this we can be thankful for the ongoing work of Bishop Daniel Deng Abot as an ethnic and multi-cultural congregation specialist.

Elements of Australian Context

We are fortunate not to be invaded or have civil war in Australia but that does not mean our society is without significant issues. **Domestic and family violence** is disturbingly common and is one of the main causes of homelessness within Australia. According to Mission Australia: 1 in 6 women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner, while for men it is 1 in 16². 75% of domestic violence victims reported the perpetrators to be male, while 25% reported the perpetrators to be female³. Overall, 1 in 5 Australian women, and 1 in 20 Australian men have experienced sexual violence⁴. And, on average, one woman every nine days and one man every month is killed by a current or former partner⁵.

Acknowledging this we can be thankful for the decision made at the 2017 General Synod to sponsor research to understand the prevalence of Domestic and Family Violence within the Anglican Church of Australia. Analysis of this research suggested ways that we as a Church could address and change this and these were expressed in the form of Ten Commitments. At last year's Synod we committed to funding a project officer who could help us implement the commitments across the life of the Diocese and we can be thankful that Jenny Clark has been appointed to this role. Jenny is working well with the Diocesan Domestic and Family Violence Working Group in developing strategies for awareness raising, reviewing and recommending training resources, and establishing a calendar of activities.

A problem with changing any aspect of societal culture is that the scale and complexity of the issue appears to be overwhelming – but in this, and in many other challenges we face, I don't doubt that God can use us to bring about positive change. The parable of the leaven in the dough described by both Matthew and Luke (Lk 13:20-21; Mt 13:33) speaks to this. Anglicare staff work with approximately 30,000 clients each day; our Anglican Schools work with approximately 20,000 students each day; and, across our 132 parishes approximately 8,000 people come to church each week. Relatively small numbers in the 'dough' of Southern Queensland communities but surely we are called to be mixed in with that dough, and in God's grace help it to rise!

Last month I was in Sydney for a board meeting of Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia and as I walked each night through Hyde Park I was struck that every park bench had someone sleeping on it, under layers of blankets and cardboard. Of course, we don't have to go to Sydney to witness significant numbers of people who are homeless. An ABC report in March this year noted that **homelessness** had increased in Queensland by 22% over the last five years, and in regional Queensland that the rate had increased by 29%. This is three times the national average increase in homelessness⁶. According to the Salvation Army there are currently more than 9,700 homeless people in Brisbane on any given night (which is approximately 1.97% of the population)⁷.

Related to this there is a well-recognized housing crisis across Australia which means there are not enough homes for people to rent or buy, which in turn causes the cost of renting or buying to be high – sometimes, absurdly so. Consequently, it is hard for many people to find

a place to call home and all the positive things that can come from such a place. It is not only hard to find a home in the suburbs of Metropolitan Brisbane: it is hard in regional cities like Toowoomba and Ipswich, and in rural towns like Warwick and St George.

Acknowledging this, we can be thankful for Anglicare's work in providing shelter and home through the St Mary's Hostel for women, the St John's Hostel for men, and for their ongoing advocacy to government to improve housing affordability and access. We can also be thankful for the Cathedral's work with rough sleepers each night; for the many parishes who have Op-Shops, pantries, and larders; and for parishes who are creatively partnering with not-for-profit community service organizations like Anglicare⁸ (Indooroopilly), Winter Shelter⁹ (Toowoomba West), and Thread Together¹⁰ (Indooroopilly).

The Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (AIHW), estimate that more than 2 in 5 (44%, or 8.6 million) Australians aged 16-85 have experienced a mental disorder at some time in their life, with 1 in 5 (21%, or 4.2 million) experiencing a mental disorder in the previous 12 months¹¹. The institute has also identified high levels of loneliness among Australians, going so far as to suggest a **loneliness epidemic**.

Acknowledging this we can be thankful for Anglicare's work in counselling provision and for the opportunity the 1500 in-home care staff, and 600 residential aged-care staff have in alleviating loneliness. We can be thankful for the care that hospital and prison chaplains bring to people who feel isolated and overwhelmed by their life circumstance; and we can be thankful that our schools, early learning centres, and parishes are each community hubs where people gather, find human friendship, and find friendship with God. We can also be grateful for Rebecca McLean's work over the last twelve months in organizing four two-day Mental Health First Aid training opportunities which have had 53 people participating. There are a further five training opportunities planned before the end of the year and I do encourage clergy and lay leaders to participate – because I learnt much when I took the course last year.

As a Church we recognise the need for **reconciliation** within Australian society between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and all others who call Australia home. Last month, on the 26th May, 'Sorry Day' marked the anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home* report which was presented to Parliament in 1997. This day has a particular focus on the legacy of trauma for those who were forcibly removed from their families by government policy and who are often called 'the stolen generation'. 'Sorry Day' is then followed by National Reconciliation Week which begins on the 27th May. This is the date of the referendum in 1967 where Australians voted to amend the constitution to include Aboriginal people in the census. Reconciliation Week ends on the 3rd June which is the date of the High Court's 'Mabo Decision' which led to the Native Title Act of 1993.

Between October and December this year there will be another referendum as part of the Australian Government's commitment to implement a recommendation from the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The proposal is to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

peoples in the Constitution, by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament. In March this year the Prime Minister announced the proposed constitutional amendment and question which had been developed in consultation with the First Nations Referendum Working Group. Like the previously mentioned dates, this year's referendum has the potential to be a significant milestone in the reconciliation journey we travel in Australia.

Acknowledging this, we can be thankful for the work of the Diocesan Reconciliation Action Plan working group; for Fr Bruce Boase as Chair of the working group; for Aunty Sandra King in her work as Diocesan RAP coordinator; for Mr Howie Van Dyke, the cultural capability facilitator for Anglicare; for Uncle Paul Paulson for his work with the Anglican Schools Commission as Director of Indigenous Education; and for Professor Anne Pattel-Gray who is Head of the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Divinity, now based at Saint Francis College.

Responding to **asylum seekers and refugees** escaping violence and persecution; responding to **domestic and family violence** in Australian society, and the incidence of **anxiety, depression, and loneliness**; responding to **homelessness and housing affordability**, and participating in the ongoing journey of **reconciliation** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples... are each part of the context within which we are called to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). Part of the context in which we are called to proclaim Good News, and, in God's grace, be Good News.

COVID-19

On the 5th May this year the World Health Organisation Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, announced that the COVID-19 pandemic was finally over, and that COVID-19 is now a disease that can be managed and monitored. This does not mean that COVID-19 infection will not continue to impact us in the coming years. The staff of St Martin's House were uncomfortably reminded of this when three weeks after the Director General's announcement seven members of a particular team came down with COVID and those not infected shifted to working from home. I am also mindful that there are some in our Diocesan family whose lives have been greatly impacted by long COVID, and their recovery is frustratingly slow.

We should not underestimate the psychological and emotional impact from the last three years while responding to the challenges created by COVID-19. Anglicare staff have gone the extra mile time and again, particularly in Residential Aged Care settings and it is a credit to their skills and hard work, and God's grace, that not one resident in our Residential Aged Care communities has died of COVID-19.

Similarly, our school staff have gone the extra mile time and again, to provide hybrid opportunities (that is face to face and online) for education and community. The ongoing challenge of hybrid delivery, and rostering when staff are COVID positive are part of today's reality for schools and all work-places.

Similarly, most clergy have learnt new skills in offering online opportunities for people to worship, be cared for, and be nurtured in faith. These offerings have been so well received that there is an expectation that they be continued alongside face to face provision and, I think, almost half of our parishes do this in some way... and this can be exhausting.

Each of us will grieve things from the sustained time of pandemic. Whether it was the restricted movement due to lockdowns; the inability to gather physically with others for months; or the limited opportunities we had to celebrate at weddings or grieve at funerals. Whether it was because people we loved died in another State or overseas; or, the anxiety and fear about where it might end. I think it will take time to process and recalibrate.

One of the gifts from that time of pandemic was a huge increase in the number of people using online platforms to meet and learn. Some had previously been resistant to their use but during the pandemic embraced the technology because through it they were connected to others and life could continue with some sense of normalcy.

Thankfully, the Diocese already had people with significant skills who were able to provide high quality offerings online, and training opportunities to learn how to use the tools. I will not name every initiative but particularly affirm Michelle McDonald's work with Anglican FOCUS online which last year had a remarkable 653 writers/contributors, and a monthly average of 9,190 active users¹². Stephen Harrison's work in the material developed and made available through the PMC website 'Faithful and Effective'¹³. Together with the work of educators Jonathan Sargeant and Fiona Hammond through the 'FormEd Faith' website¹⁴. I am also grateful to Tim Reid as General Manager, and his team, for the way that so many Diocesan meetings seamlessly move from face to face to online delivery. It is a strange and wonderful thing to now chair alternate meetings of Diocesan Council online, while sitting at home in Toowoomba with a cup of tea!

Anglican Communion Context

Since 1867 the **Lambeth Conference** has gathered Anglican bishops from around the world every ten years, more or less, for a time of shared prayer, study, discussion, and planning. This is understood to be one of the instruments of unity within the Anglican Communion. A Conference was planned for 2020 but because of the COVID-19 pandemic this was deferred until the last week of July and the first week of August last year. At this 650 Bishops and 550 spouses, from 165 countries, gathered at the University of Kent in England for the fifteenth Lambeth Conference, the theme of which was '*God's Church for God's World*'.

The Diocese sponsored the three regional bishops to attend last year's Lambeth Conference and we each subsequently wrote reports for Diocesan Council about our experiences, and these reports have been shared through Anglican FOCUS. It was a rich time and I know we are each grateful for Archbishop Phillip's encouragement to participate, and for the financial support of the Diocese which enabled this.

Different to previous Lambeth Conferences which simply met together, last year's Conference was structured to have three phases:

- 1) In the first phase we developed a sense of walking together before the Conference by meeting online in small groups for twelve months of conversation, study and prayer.
- 2) In the second phase we met together in Canterbury and **worshipped together** through a Eucharist most mornings, and Evening Prayer most afternoons; **we prayed together** in the conference rooms, at Canterbury Cathedral, at Lambeth Palace, and we prayed in small groups and pairs each day; **we studied the Bible together** and to assist in this a conference commentary on the First Letter of Peter was developed by a group of 35 New Testament scholars from Anglican and other Churches around the world. The scholars represented a range of Christian traditions and came from Australia, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Egypt, India, Ireland, Kenya, Nigeria, the Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland, the UK, and the US. It was good to study 1Peter online together before the conference; good to have Archbishop Justin Welby teaching on 1Peter before discussion in small groups; and, good to be grounded in this study each day; finally, **we reflected on priority areas together**. The conference planning group had identified ten areas that would be unpacked in plenary sessions and by small groups. To help prepare for this work ten groups were appointed, each led by an Archbishop, with five other bishops from around the communion, and subject experts from each field. These working groups prepared papers and made specific recommendations which were termed 'Calls'.

Each of these Lambeth Calls were drafted with a declaration that summarized what the Anglican Church has generally taught in response to a particular theme; an affirmation about what the bishops wanted to say in August 2022; and some specific requests for future action.

The ten themes of these Lambeth Calls were: *Mission and Evangelism; Safe Church; Anglican Identity; Reconciliation; Human Dignity; Environment and Sustainable Development; Christian Unity; Interfaith Relations; Discipleship; Science and Faith* and these can readily be found online¹⁵.

All participants read the papers before arriving, then ten plenary sessions gave further background, and each was then discussed by eighty-four small groups. Subsequently, the small group leaders wrote up the feedback and forwarded this to the relevant Call's working group.

I have taken time to explain the Calls because in some media reporting of the Lambeth Conference it was suggested that the only thing we talked about was human sexuality, same sex marriage, and same sex blessing! In reality this was referenced in one paragraph of the 'Human Dignity Call' and I will share more about that later.

So, to help set the record straight, I'll reiterate! As leaders within the Anglican Communion, we discussed the following priority areas: *Mission and Evangelism; Safe Church; Anglican Identity; Reconciliation; Human Dignity; Environment and Sustainable Development; Christian Unity; Interfaith Relations; Discipleship; Science and Faith.*

- 3) In the third phase of the conference the intention is for the Calls to focus work across the Anglican Communion over the next ten years.

Reassuringly most of the Calls resonate with existing areas of ministry and focus within the Anglican Church of Southern Queensland, but there were some new things, and always the potential to do some things more effectively. I'm going to offer some small commentary to each Call:

The Mission and Evangelism Call: To a greater or lesser extent I think all Parishes, Schools, and Anglicare have a sense of mission and I hope you've taken the opportunity to read the PMC, ASC, and CSC reports to Synod which give good indication of this. Looking particularly at Parishes I think we can be thankful that we have a good sense of how each parish is going because of excellent annual return data and analysis and I'm grateful to all who completed the annual return forms, those who compiled the data, and the Revd Adam Lowe for his analysis. 'Though the insights from this are uncomfortable, particularly when tracked against previous years data, they can helpfully inform and guide decision making.

At last year's Synod PMC noted that approximately 24% of our parishes had worked together to develop Mission Action Plans and that these have given helpful focus to their ministry and community life. We can be thankful for the focused work of Tim Booth in continuing this work with parishes and acknowledge that at least 50% of our Parishes have now developed some form of Mission Action Plan.

Our Diocesan Vision suggests that we seek to be an interconnected network of **flourishing faith communities** who proclaim and serve, worship and learn. Collectively we know the importance of invitation, welcome, and hospitality; we recognise the importance of worship that is inspiring and authentic; we understand the importance of teaching that nourishes and challenges; we acknowledge the importance of being present and active in service to the local community; and we recognise the importance of small groups, and introductory courses.

The Safe Church Call: We have policies and procedures in place that have been designed to keep Children and Vulnerable People safe when in our care. When people work with children and vulnerable people they are registered and are given ongoing training in this area. In 'Faithfulness and Service' we have an agreed code of conduct for people who offer leadership and ministry, and the General Synod document 'Being Together' suggests how we can best relate to each other, communicate with each other, acknowledge difference, and

respond to conflict. An interesting aside is that there are currently few mechanisms to hold bishops, clergy, or lay people accountable when their behaviour is contrary to that expressed in 'Faithfulness in Service' and 'Being Together', and this is challenging.

The Anglican Identity Call: in many ways Anglican Identity is an increasingly disputed area in the life of the Anglican Communion, in the life of our National Church, and to a much lesser degree in the life of our Diocese. Archbishop Phillip gave this significant focus in his development and teaching of the Anglican Foundations unit offered at St Francis College, and in his Synod address last year which affirmed the value of Evangelical, Anglo-Catholic, and Liberal thinking within Comprehensive Anglicanism. That work has been significantly developed and expressed in the Anglican Identity course created by Jonathan Sargeant and Fiona Hammond, and many Synod members feature in the video units of that work¹⁶.

The Reconciliation Call: I have already referred to the ongoing work of our Reconciliation Action Plan working group and alluded to the ongoing work being done within Anglican Schools and Anglicare. There is always more to be done in this area and I have a sense that we could learn much from the Anglican Church in Canada who seem to be some years ahead in their reconciliation journey with First Nation peoples.

The Human Dignity Call: As we consider this Call I am conscious of the responsibility Anglicare carries in its care of people within residential settings. This is not limited to residential aged care but extends to in home care, children in foster care, and young people in our youth bail support program. I also acknowledge the new complexity in care that Voluntary Assisted dying legislation has brought to those who provide residential aged care, hospital chaplaincy, and parish ministry since the 1st January this year.

The Human Dignity Call was confronting in acknowledging the ongoing impact of colonialism, the role that colonialism has played in exploiting people and natural resources, and the part Christian mission has played in colonisation. The Call spoke of people who leave the countries of their birth as refugees or migrants and the challenge of their journeying which includes prejudice based on ethnicity and language.

The Call also addressed prejudice on the basis of gender or sexuality and I think paragraph 2.3 of the Human Dignity Call is worth quoting in full because it is often partially quoted:

“Prejudice on the basis of gender or sexuality threatens human dignity. Given Anglican polity, and especially the autonomy of provinces, there is disagreement and a plurality of views on the relationship between human dignity and human sexuality. Yet, we experience the safeguarding of dignity in deepening dialogue. It is the mind of the Anglican Communion as a whole that “all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation are full members of the Body of Christ” and to be welcomed, cared for, and treated with respect (Resolution 1:10, Lambeth 1998). After careful theological reflection and a process of discernment, many provinces continue to affirm that same sex gender marriage is not permissible. Lambeth

*Resolution 1.10 (1998) stated that the ‘legitimizing or blessing of same sex unions’ is not advised. **Other provinces have blessed and welcome same sex/union/ marriage after careful theological reflection and a process of discernment. As bishops we remain committed to listening and walking together despite our deep disagreement on these issues.**”*

It is the last two sentences of this paragraph that are either not referenced in reporting, or are rejected, and I will come back to this later.

The Environment and Sustainable Development Call: ‘Though unprecedented became a word associated with COVID milestones, just before the pandemic the phrase ‘unprecedented anywhere in the world’ was used by Professor John Shine, President of the Australian Academy of Science, in January 2020 to describe the Australian bushfires at the end of 2019¹⁷. Professor Chris Dickman estimated that in that bushfire season Australia lost at least one billion birds, mammals, and reptiles and note this figure does not include insects, bats, fish, and frogs¹⁸.

Six weeks after COVID restrictions were lifted and the border between Queensland and New South Wales had opened, the biggest flood in modern Australian history inundated Lismore, and much of the Northern Rivers region. Commentators vary in suggesting that this was a one in one hundred year event, or – after the second inundation - a one in five hundred year event. Most agree that extreme weather events are happening around the world more frequently and with greater intensity than ever before.

‘Though I have referenced fire and flood in Australia, at the Lambeth gathering there was opportunity to hear the impact of similar events which included wild fires in Canada, and the rising sea levels being experienced by Pacific Nations.

In response we can be thankful for the ongoing work of AngliGreen, chaired by the Revd Peter Moore, and the sustainability commitment we made at last year’s Synod which helpfully focusses activity and gives clear goals for us to achieve by 2030.

The Christian Unity Call: At the Lambeth Conference there were faith leaders from a broad range of denominations and it was interesting to hear what conclusions some of the ecumenical dialogues had made and what questions remain. Within the footprint of our Diocese I think there are healthy relationships with other mainline denominations and this is expressed at a local level through a range of MOUs and Covenants and through regular meeting for prayer with other faith community leaders. There is a particularly strong relationship between the Anglican and Roman Catholic Church with an annual meeting of all bishops, and a shared training event for Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy in Brisbane. The current Secretary of Queensland Churches Together, the Revd David Baker, has noted that ‘though relationships between mainline denominations are generally healthy the ecumenical vision for greater Christian Unity is not on the radar for most young people. The reasons for this could include a lack of prejudice between denominations relative to forty

years ago, an impasse in a number of ecumenical dialogues particularly with regard to who is welcome at the Lord's table, different understandings about Ordination and the leadership of women, and internal division within some denominations, including our own.

The Interfaith Relations Call: In the Bicentenary year of 1988 it was affirmed that Australia was the second most culturally diverse nation in the world after Israel. That cultural and religious diversity has greatly increased in the thirty-five years since then, and our workplaces, schools, and shopping centres reflect this... and in this lived reality we are called to offer hospitality to the stranger (Matthew 25:35), and love our neighbour (Mark12:31). The Anglican Church of Southern Queensland participates in, and brings leadership to, a number of interfaith dialogues that includes the Queensland Faith Communities Council, and the Toowoomba Interfaith Working group. A principal that enables dialogue and interfaith activity, that some find challenging, is that any inclination to proselytise, or evangelise, by any party is set to one side. This means that we do not seek to convert people who have another faith, and we do not expect them to convert us to their belief. So... Muslim, Buddhist, and Sikh friends can encourage us to be faithful in our following of Christ, and we can encourage them to be faithful in their own beliefs and religious practice. In order to do this some understanding of the other, and the sacred writing of the other, is important.

The Discipleship Call: In very familiar words, often referred to as 'The Great Commission', we understand that we are called to make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). This is reflected in the first Mark of Mission within the Anglican Communion and not surprisingly it is the first element of our Diocesan Mission statement: 'To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers.' Now the English word disciple comes from the Koine Greek word *mathētēs* (μαθητής) which means to be someone who engages in learning throughout their life. In our Christian context it would be someone who wants to learn about God in Christ throughout their lives, and who wants to be Christ-like in the way they live their lives.

I'm up for discussion about this in the coming days, weeks and months – but, in general, I don't think we do this well and could do this better. It is clearly expressed in our Diocesan Vision statement that part of flourishing is to be not only individuals and communities that worship, but also individuals and communities that learn.

If we paused now, and took some time to ask each other what we have read recently that has challenged or inspired us in our faith, how would we go? Or, if we asked what comforted or disturbed us in the sermon last Sunday, or even yesterday evening at the Cathedral, how would we go? In all likelihood we might struggle, because nobody had their notebooks out last night as Lizzie preached, but if we were in a class wanting to learn surely we'd have our notebooks ready? I am currently trying to learn Spanish and I certainly remember things better if I've written them down – and can go back to them when I have forgotten some vocabulary!

Imagine a future Synod some years from now in which we could ask each other what we're reading, and encourage each other as life-long learners, during coffee breaks and shared meals. Could this be a priority for us, and if it is, how would we get there?

As a Diocese we can be thankful that we have a theological college with opportunities for us to learn as individuals and as communities. There are approximately fifty students currently studying part time at St Francis College who, in partnership with the University of Divinity, have a broad offering of subjects and study levels. It would be entirely possible for us to double the number of part-time students at St Francis over the next twelve months if we agreed that we valued learning and gave it priority as disciples.

The indefatigable Lay Education unit at St Francis are working on a micro-credentialled Anglican Theology and Practice Certificate that will be launched in the last quarter of this year and in this there will be another tool with which we can encourage and develop a culture of learning within ACSQ.

The Science and Faith Call: The last of the Calls focused on a perceived need for there to be very intentional dialogue between the disciplines of science and the disciplines of theology and biblical study. This has certainly been happening in many places in an *ad hoc* way and Durham University's Equipping Christian Leaders in an Age of Science project is one example of this¹⁹.

I think there is great potential to explore in this for many seem to think that you either believe in science or you believe in God. I wonder particularly about possible synergies between Religious Education and Science Departments within our Anglican Schools; and between St John's College at the University of Queensland, and St Francis College.

In addition to the ten Lambeth Calls another inspiration from the time in Lambeth came from conversations with other bishops who have found some form of link relationship between their Diocese and another to be life-giving in their understanding and practice of ministry and mission. The terminology ranged from: 'Link Diocese', to 'Partner Diocese', to 'Companion Diocese' but the common elements were that people prayed for each other, visited each other, and collaborated on a project of some sort.

I think there are at least four possibilities worth exploring:

1. In February this year the bishop of Carlisle, the Rt Revd James Newcome, came to visit our Diocese with the particular brief from the Archbishop of Canterbury – to see how Anglicare Southern Queensland worked! Bishop James had co-chaired a review of all community service work in England, and in January this year presented that report to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and to Parliament. In his visit to Brisbane Bishop James met with senior Anglicare staff, and commissioners; and engaged warmly with staff and clients while visiting a broad range of programs.

After returning to the UK the principal recommendation of his report made to Archbishop Welby was that an English Diocese be chosen to pilot the development of an Anglicare model in the UK, which would bring together a range of community services into a single structure. As this is explored and discussed there is potential for partnership with that pilot Diocese through Anglicare Southern Queensland.

2. When speaking about reconciliation earlier in this address I suggested that there was potential for us to learn from the Anglican Church in Canada who seem to be quite some years ahead of us in the reconciliation journey with Canada's First Nation peoples. I think Canada has also been innovative in their approach to community refugee settlement, so look forward to learning more about each of these areas of ministry in a visit to Vancouver later this year.
3. Through the seasonal workers program significant numbers of people have come from different parts of the Pacific to work in communities within our Diocese. For those who have come from the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu there is a strong relationship with Anglican Church and in some of our Parishes more than half of the congregation is now Melanesian. Consequently, it would make sense to explore co-operation and partnership with the Anglican Church of Melanesia.
4. We have four Dinka speaking congregations and one Arabic speaking congregation in the life of the Diocese and at last year's Ordination two of those made Deacon came from one of those congregations. Mamuor Kunpeter and Peter Jongkuch each worked through our discernment and formation process, and each studied at St Francis College. I think there is potential to dialogue and identify suitable projects to support because we share life together here.

At the end of the conference I returned to Australia with a renewed sense of hope about the future of the Anglican Communion, and the future of our Diocese, and despite all that's happened since then... I still have that!

The first of our Diocesan values is 'Faithful' which has the helpful explanation – 'steadfast in love for God and each other, and steadfast in purpose to undertake God's mission'. Steadfast in love for God and each other, even when 'the other' disagrees; even when 'the other' leaves.

The second of our Diocesan Values is 'Imaginative and Creative' and I love this for it seems to give permission to be creative and encourage it. If we agree that we are each made in God's image, and that God is creative, then – surely - we are each also creative? So, I wonder how you express your creativity. Perhaps, that is a question we can ask each other during morning tea?

Music is one form creative expression for me and I'm grateful for the opportunities I get to share this with Parishes and Schools. I think the bar is high in our schools because they are

power houses of creative arts which enable excellence in music, dance, musical theatre, and visual art. When invited to school graduations I have usually shared a song and it'd usually gone OK. The challenge is to find the right song and offer it well enough, trusting that in the combination of melody and lyric something will resonate. According to my son, provided I never attempt to rap, I'll be OK!

However, there is something about rap as a genre that fascinates me and it's partly about the rhythm, partly about the density of lyric, and partly about what the singer is saying. Please don't feel anxious, I am not about to cover any songs from Hamilton, although that is a musical I found stunning!

The closest I could come to rap would be a form of poetry that American youth poet laureate Amanda Gorman offers so brilliantly. Inspired by our Diocesan affirmation of creativity I went to two graduations at the end of last year without a guitar! Instead, I offered a poem I'd written earlier that week and I'd like to share it with you because it seemed to connect with staff and parents, as well as the graduating students. It's called, 'We are not the same'...

We are not the same... thank God!
For it would be odd, if the only game to play... was football;
or, the only instrument... a bassoon;
imagine these – please!

Imagine a monochrome, homogeneity,
in which there was a single deity,
and we all looked the same,
spoke the same, dreamed the same...
it would be... LAME!

A world without colour, limited by binaries;
without the synergy of community, or the mystery
of that which remains to be discovered,
acknowledged, and celebrated...

We are not the same... that's strange,
Yet surely something to revel in
draw strength from, find where you belong:
Your tribe – who describe – the way you see
the world.

Now I think it's quite cool
that you've been at this school for years...
and there has been sweat and tears
and friendships and conflicts

and moments of insight
for the new season
that's arriving...

For YOU stand at the edge of a nest
and you're spreading your wings
To fly high, maybe; maybe, low... just go
and explore this extraordinary earth
and bring to birth, that which is uniquely
within you.

For it's not just the prize-winners,
lead singers, goal scorers
who can flourish and grow,
it's each of you... and deep down
you know.

For sure, there'll be challenges,
failures, and gloom,
But pick yourselves up
and reach out to the room
for friends are important
At school, and out there,
and we need them especially,
when the world is unfair.

And wherever you go, know that God is there too
and God is a someone, who knows and loves you
no matter the why, or the what, it just is.
'Though not all agree, some get in a tizz!

Have faith in yourself – and do some things well
for wicked complexity is best responded to collectively;
so, please collaborate, let me elaborate...

Each of you have learnt much in these walls
And yet 'much to learn, you still have'.

In the lifetime ahead be curious about everything...
and marinate yourselves
in whatever is true, and right,
and lovely, and excellent...
and maybe learn to play...
a musical instrument!

Know you are gifted and blessed,
and that a key to success, is simply being kind.
and make a habit of this, until you no longer think
what to do,
it's just in you!

We are not the same, and it's good!
May God's blessing be yours...
is that understood?
Amen

Not everyone agrees with the understanding that difference is God given and good, particularly when it comes to Biblical interpretation; and particularly when it comes to different understandings about sin, grace, and blessing.

National Anglican Church Context

Since we met last year at Synod two priests have resigned from our Diocese to lead congregations in the Diocese of the Southern Cross which, according to their website, is not part of the Anglican Church of Australia. Some people from each of the congregations they had been leading also left the Anglican Church of Australia to become parishioners of the Diocese of the Southern Cross. I have no doubt that this has been painful for those who have left, and for those who have remained, and think we are called to pray for God's blessing on each group.

Within Anglican polity a Diocese is usually defined by a geographical area so the Diocese of the Southern Cross, established as an extra-Provincial Diocese by the Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) is interesting because it claims Australia as its territory! It now has a parish in Western Australia, and a parish in Cairns which were similarly established by clergy who had been previously licensed in the Diocese of Bunbury and North Queensland and who have now left the Anglican Church of Australia.

In this it seems that the Diocese of the Southern Cross has split four evangelical Parishes in four Dioceses, and we can rightly grieve this. Apparently, those four clergy are licensed by different bishops in the Anglican Church of Australia with one in Brisbane licensed by the Bishop of Armidale and the other by the Bishop of North-Western Australia... so, this is new territory for us as a National Church.

In addition to the two parishes on the south side of Brisbane the Diocese of the Southern Cross has launched a church plant based in Stafford, led by a former minister of the City on a Hill Church, who had been previously ordained in the Anglican Church of Australia. Most recently, last weekend the Diocese of the Southern Cross welcomed into membership a former Uniting Church congregation and recognised eight former Uniting Church ministers as Presbyters (Ministers of Word and Sacrament). I am not sure how the Diocese of the

Southern Cross can claim to be Anglican in this but have no doubt this will be discussed and debated in the coming weeks and months – particularly at the meeting of National Bishops in October.

Anglican Communion Context

In April this year the fourth GAFCON conference was held in Rwanda. Towards the end of that time a statement was agreed which is known as The Kigali Commitment²⁰. I think many of you will have read this and will understand that it refutes this previously mentioned affirmation in the Human Dignity-Lambeth Call: *“Other provinces have blessed and welcome same sex/union/ marriage after careful theological reflection and a process of discernment. As bishops we remain committed to listening and walking together despite our deep disagreement on these issues.”*

The GAFCON bishops and other delegates expressed the view that they will not listen or walk together any longer because they believe, from their own theological reflection and discernment, that same sex marriage, and the blessing of same sex relationships, is unacceptable to God.

Further, that because the Church of England General Synod welcomed proposals to allow the blessing of same-sex couples in February, they assert that the Archbishop of Canterbury, Archbishop Justin Welby, is no longer fit to be an Instrument Communion within the global Anglican Communion. Further, that the other instruments led by him (the Lambeth Conference, The Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates’ Meetings) are also unfit.

There is a call within the Kigali Commitment for the Archbishop of Canterbury, and any others who interpret Scripture on this matter differently, to repent... together with the suggestion that the GAFCON Primates offer care and oversight to those who feel unable to remain in the Church of England.

This leaves the Anglican Church of Australia in a very interesting place because we have a clear relationship with the Church of England expressed in the ruling principles of the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia. Most Australian Bishops went to the Lambeth Conference and recognise the Archbishop of Canterbury’s leadership within the Anglican Communion, while others went instead to Kigali and reject his right to lead.

If the trend continues it is not impossible to imagine a future Primate of the National Anglican Church of Australia rejecting the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury and not attending the Primates meeting convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury. And, a future in which the Anglican Consultative Council’s work is ignored in favor of the work and direction of GAFCON councils.

In all this we can rightly say that we are living in interesting times, but such times give opportunity for us to pray, read the Scriptures, do the theological work and – hopefully

guided by God's Spirit - be clear about what we believe and why; and, be clear about what we don't believe and why.

Looking forward, looking back

Since we last met a number of significant people have retired and this of course includes Archbishop Phillip who served this Diocese as Archbishop for twenty-one years. We can be thankful for Archbishop Phillip's leadership of the large and complex life of this Diocese, and for his nine years as Primate of the National Church. We can be thankful for his determination and leadership in helping the Anglican Church in Australia become a safer place for children and vulnerable people; and a more compassionate organisation when responding to those who were sexually abused as children.

We can be thankful for him authorising the ministry of women and men, clergy and laity, and for ordaining a very great number of Deacons, Priests, and Bishops; and... we can be thankful that he endured when many would have walked away; endured when things untrue and unkind were published or said; and endured when people would rather have had him do the wrong thing, rather than that which was right.

We can also be thankful for Dr Mark Sly who was the founding principal of Coomera Anglican College, serving fruitfully in that role for almost twenty-seven years before retirement at the end of last year.

Since we last gathered new people have been ordained Deacon and Priest, and new people have felt called to come and work in the life of this Diocese from other parts of Australia, and from other parts of the world. Collectively, we give thanks for you and pray for God's blessing on your various ministries.

In conclusion, I suggest that we face many challenges, but we have been greatly blessed by God. We have clarity and purpose and we have gifted and able people working collaboratively – both lay and ordained – and that includes all who are here in this hall.

In your ongoing prayers I'd ask you to pray for God's blessing on each parish, each school, and each expression of Anglicare; and pray for God's Spirit to continue guiding the Archbishop Election Committee in the work they were called to do by this Synod.

With that work in mind, would you please join me as I close in prayer:

Eternal God, shepherd, and guide,
in your mercy give your Church in this Diocese
a shepherd after your own heart
who will walk in your ways,
and with loving care watch over your people.
Give us a leader of vision and a teacher of your truth.
So, may your church be built up and your name be glorified;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

References:

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- 2,3,4,5 Australian Institute for Health and Wellbeing (AIHW): Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the National Story 2019. Canberra: AIHW
- 6 ABC News online: 20th March 2023 at 7.38pm – Baz Ruddick, Mark Rigby, and Emma Pollard
- 7 [The Salvation Army Australia | Hope where it's needed most](#)
- 8 [Health & Wellbeing | Mental Health Support | Anglicare SQ](#)
- 9 [Winter Shelters - Stable One](#)
- 10 [Thread Together - Driving Social and Environmental Change](#)
- 11 [Prevalence and impact of mental illness - Mental health - AIHW](#)
- 12 <https://anglicanfocus.org.au>
- 13 [Home - faithful + effective \(faithfulandeffective.com\)](#)
- 14 [FormEdFaith](#)
- 15 [Lambeth-Calls-July-2022.pdf \(lambethconference.org\)](#)
- 16 [Anglican Identity](#)
- 17,18 [The Australian bushfires—why they are unprecedented | Australian Academy of Science](#)
- 19 [ECLAS – Equipping Christian Leadership in an Age of Science \(eclasproject.org\)](#)
- 20 [GAFCON IV – The Kigali Commitment | GAFCON](#)