



The Anglican Church in Central & Western NSW
Diocese of Bathurst

President's Address

The Right Reverend Ian Palmer,

Special Session of the 49th Synod of the Diocese of Bathurst

Saturday 16th February 2019

Welcome

Friends in Christ, it is my delight to welcome you all to this the Special Session of the Forty-ninth Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Bathurst. Thank you for making the time to be here. Liz, who normally attends Synod with me as a visitor sends her apologies. She is not here today as she is enjoying a passion she has – playing the harp.

Thank you, Daryl for the welcome to country and Bob and the people of St Barnabas Orange East for your hospitality.

Possibly predictably I've prepared a bookmark! **"A tree planted by the water."**

Our readings for this weekend the 6th Sunday after the Epiphany (Jeremiah 17:7-8 and Psalm 1) are most appropriate for this time when we are still in drought – and some places in increasingly severe drought. Please continue to pray for rain.

The image of a tree planted by the water is part of our landscape and we feel the power of the image in the great red gums that line our waterways. They, like us, need flooding rains to survive and flourish. We, as people who trust in the Lord, need the flooding rains of God's mercy, peace, joy and hope so that we can continue to be faithful in the dark or difficult times, where there are trials to our faith or uncertainty in the way ahead.

As children of our loving Heavenly Father, we are a blessed people. We are blessed to live out our calling as people made in God's image, reconciled to God, in Christ, who, through God's grace, live by faith and trust in him.

Even in tough times we want to fulfil our calling, to shine the loving wisdom of the Trinity into a world that is broken, sinful and hurting, and then to reflect the praises of the whole creation back to God. Yet, we look forward to that time when the "birth pangs" are over and the whole creation is "liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of

God.” (Romans 8:20-22) Our shout of praise is indeed that, **“Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again.”**

So I invite us to pray:

**Teach us Good Lord,
to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to ask for any reward,
except that of knowing that we do your will. Amen.**

Looking Forward, Looking Back

My theme for this Synod address may well pick up the lines of the last song written by Slim Dusty, **“Looking forward, looking back”**.

Last September, we focused on taking our Diocese in a new direction, but one which would preserve it as a Diocese. To do this we agreed a resolution and amendments to our *Bishop Election Ordinance* that would allow the Diocese of Sydney, if their Synod so agreed, to support our Diocese.

This Synod:

- 1. Commits to proclaiming Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord through its people in the Anglican Church in Central & Western NSW.*
- 2. Recognises that sustainable Gospel ministry in our Diocese cannot continue without outside financial help.*
- 3. Signals its willingness to accept the proposed financial support from the Diocese of Sydney, for the office of the Bishop and Registrar, of \$250,000 per year for six years to help revitalise Gospel Ministry in the Diocese.*
- 4. Understands that this financial support is contingent on the Bishop Election Ordinance being amended so that nominees for the position of Bishop of Bathurst must have the support of the Metropolitan, but also understands that the Diocese of Bathurst will retain its independence, identity and integrity.*

The *Bishop Election Ordinance* was amended to allow for the written support of the Archbishop of Sydney for those being considered for the position of Bishop.

Clause 22(1) now states – *The names of any persons nominated as candidates shall only proceed to a vote with the written support of the Metropolitan,*

provided that there must be at least 2 candidates who have the written support of the Metropolitan in order for voting to proceed.

The next part of the process was the decision of the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney meeting in mid-October. The Sydney Synod was asked to consider a motion which if passed would give its support for the proposed arrangement.

In a detailed paper prepared for the Sydney Synod Bishop Michael Stead, who had attended our Synod, wrote this:

In recent years, Bathurst has fallen on hard times. This has been in part due to the flow of people from the bush to the city, especially among young people, and the lack of employment opportunities in many parts of the State. Drought and bushfire have added to the woes of rural NSW. However, the poor administration of the diocese this century through its ill-advised spending beyond its means, most notably highlighted by its mounting debt with the Commonwealth Bank, plus the scandal of historical cases of child sexual abuse by church workers in the diocese, has brought the diocese to its knees, both spiritually and financially. The diocese is no longer able to pay for its Bishop or its Registrar from central funds, nor can it call upon its parishes to increase the significant contribution they currently make to fund these central services.

Bishop Michael continued,

In February 2018 Bishop Ian Palmer met with the Archbishop and the Diocesan Registrar to talk frankly about the situation, knowing that the Diocese of Bathurst would be unable to fund his successor. From these frank discussions a level of trust developed, which enabled a plan to be developed. The overriding concern of the Archbishop and Registrar, endorsed by the [Sydney] Standing Committee, is that we do not want to see the demise of Anglican ministry in Western NSW ... However, for this to take place, it is necessary that a bishop has the leadership skills and evangelistic passion suitable to foster the spiritual health of each and every parish, which in turn would restore the financial health of the diocese. To this end, it was suggested and agreed that if the Diocese of Bathurst were willing to elect a new bishop, with the approval of the Metropolitan, then this would be a tangible expression of partnership between our two dioceses, breaking down the symbolic 'Great Dividing Range', whereby we [the Diocese of Sydney] would reciprocate by investing in the funding of the Bishop of Bathurst and Registrar for a period of six years.

In all our discussions the autonomy of the Diocese of Bathurst was talked about and preserved. The independence, identity and integrity of the Diocese of Bathurst has been assured and this includes the ordination of women to the priesthood and the placement of ordained, divorced people in parish ministry.

The Sydney Synod went onto debate a resolution to include a provision of \$250,000 for six years, for the purposes of, *'funding the costs of the Bishop of Bathurst and his Registrar.'*

This resolution and appropriate "flow-ons" to their budget were agreed.

Archdeacon Brett Watterson, as Vicar General of our Diocese in October, wrote a letter of appreciation and thanks to the Sydney Synod. He quoted Psalm 133:

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! ... For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life for evermore.

Then Brett continued in his letter, *"Your act of caring support speaks to us far more than money in our time of need. It embodies what Psalm 133 gives voice to, the generous love of our Father in Heaven who gives so freely to the point of giving His own Son, Jesus our Lord and Saviour upon the cross, to live, die and be raised to new life! So, that we might have new life through his victory over sin and death!*

This is Good News! This is why we are grateful for your support. It enables us to continue to speak of God's great love. To proclaim it from the mountain tops, so that others too will come to know Jesus as Lord! Thank you, and God bless."

I am told that the Sydney Synod received this letter with loud applause.

It is worth noting that this support for Bathurst is significantly more than the support Sydney gives to any other Diocese. Thanks be to God!

Where does this take us?

We are called by Christ to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). Maintaining our existence, cherishing our identity and developing bridges that link us to the wider community will always be a challenging endeavour for the Christian minority. Yet, the presence of the Church in the world is a sacrament of Christ: a very ordinary body of people who even in their frailty are signs to others of the glory of God which will, one day, transform all things.

We are privileged to have many opportunities to share the Good News by our presence, compassion, advocacy and message, and be a blessing to others. So first of all:

Our Commitment to the Gospel.

We have committed ourselves to being a Gospel people. Last September we changed the draft resolution put to our Synod in such a way as to place the responsibility back on us. We added "through its people," so the resolution read,

*This Synod Commits to proclaiming Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord **through its people** in the Anglican Church in Central & Western NSW.*

St Francis of Assisi is reputed to have said, “Always preach the Gospel, and if necessary use words.” The San Damiano crucifix was hung in the Chapel at Bishopscourt and is now in the room we use for prayer in the Rectory at Dubbo – and remember that Rectory is still known as “St Francis House”. It was towards the end of the 12th Century that, in prayer before that crucifix, Francis heard the Lord calling to him, “Francis. Restore my Church”. Francis learnt quite quickly that the house of the Lord is not restored just by money, but by prayer; singing; joy and laughter; embracing the leper; crossing enemy lines – talking to Muslims about Jesus; acts of forgiveness and reconciliation, preaching the gospel wherever people gathered; loving animals and all God’s creatures; caring for children and those who were oppressed; enduring suffering with patience; embracing poverty and gathering people around him who would share his love for Jesus and tell of God’s saving grace.

I understand that this theme of “Where and Who Jesus is wanting us to be?” has run through the consultations organised by the Bishop Election Board and I am very grateful to Archdeacon Brett Watterson and Canon Tim Fogo for their leadership in this. (But you know far more about this than I do!)

We committed ourselves to being a Gospel people – not in a political sense but in a pastoral sense, doing it in a way that is rooted in the Scriptures and God’s grace; and a way that reaches to people in the context of lives lived in Central & Western NSW. I want to thank you for doing this and to encourage you in your commitment to continue doing it.

Stewardship

The financial difficulties of many of our parishes is something that I, and the Registrar deal with on a daily basis. There are lots of reasons for this but one has been repeated to me time and time again during my six years as your bishop. It goes something like this, “We don’t know if what we put on the plate will go to the Commonwealth Bank and we are not sure what it is being used for and how it is accounted for.”

Thank God, this argument is now dead in the water. We have fulfilled our responsibilities to the CBA. No more money goes to the CBA. That is over and done with.

Secondly, for the last four years, thanks to Karen Trafford, you have received properly audited accounts of our financial position. These have been presented to Synod members in good time so that they can be scrutinised, questions can

be (and are) asked, and members should be satisfied with our accountability and transparency.

Thirdly, I want to say that the support we have received from the Diocese of Sydney is a powerful affirmation of trust in our Diocese. They undertook a thorough investigation of our finances before agreeing to this support; they believe that money given to our Diocese will be used wisely and in a Godly manner; they exhibit a generosity that we can copy.

Their generosity has almost halved the amount that each parish pays to the Synod Management Fund each month. This is an amazing help to each parish and it is an obligation for every parish to consider how to use the money they are saving to enhance effective ministry in their area.

I know a little of the great generosity of some of you here. The Lord sees it and he is the one who will, and does, pour blessings upon us. I am also aware of a reticence from some people about giving. However, the gracious support that we have received should encourage each member of Synod and each person in our churches to be generous in their giving.

There is something else as well. We take up a collection in the middle of our Eucharists, the money is brought forward so that thanks can be given and it is set aside for the work of ministry to the glory of God. This offering is part of our worship. If we fail to give generously, we are failing to give God the glory. Generosity is a sign of our own discipleship and worship.

When King David received the offerings of the people for the building of the Temple he famously prayed over these gifts, *“Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours ... Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”* (2 Chronicles 29:11-14)

Our lives are complex, and we have personal and family financial and monetary responsibilities and constraints. But God in Jesus Christ is generous to us. *“Though he was rich [he] became poor, [so] that we through his poverty might become rich.”* (2 Corinthians 8:9)

I commend the Parish of Coonamble. Their generosity is astounding. In the worst drought in living memory they have re-roofed their church, painted it and paid for the whole lot.

When we give generously for the Lord’s work we criticise less and rejoice more. Our gift of money becomes a symbol of the giving of ourselves. If I have a loaf of bread and give two slices to you (that is a tenth – a tithe – of an average sliced loaf, I have the rest for myself. But that is not the Biblical pattern of giving. If I

ask Tim to come forward and he gives his arm to me – I take the rest of him as well! Giving from what we have, is a sign of giving ourselves as well.

Godly stewardship is far more than keeping the church going, it is so that we can organise, prioritise, conduct, encourage and advance Gospel ministry. This includes evangelism so that people will come to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and works of compassion so that they will experience the generosity of God in practical ways.

One of the secrets of the growth of the early church was their compassion for the poor. In the very early church they created deacons to care for the needy. By the year 250AD the food program of the church in Rome fed 1,500 each day and this was replicated around the Roman world. Compassion is the hallmark of Christ's people.

In this regard, the ministry of Anglicare is growing in our Diocese. I am grateful to those who have led the way in this, not least to Sue West, Therese Garnsey and Natalie Quince. Mal Dunnett with the support of Jeremy Halcrow (CEO of Anglicare Canberra Goulburn and Western NSW) is doing significant work through Anglicare in his Parish, Holy Trinity Orange. Other parishes are following in the same way.

The mission of the church is like a pair of scissors with two blades evangelism and compassionate care – if we lose either blade then we lose our cutting edge. One of the gifts that Sydney has modelled for us is a call to be joyful and generous in our stewardship.

Thanks and Appreciation

As this is my last Synod I want to say something to all of you, by way of **thanks and appreciation** – to you and the people you represent – and then to reflect a little on **what makes a good life before God**.

But before that, you have a balloon and a sharp stick. I'd like you to inflate it, tie a knot in the neck and then using the stick deflate it without popping it!

Anyone can deflate a balloon by bursting it – congratulations to those who found a different way!

Like bursting a balloon, people are often insensitive to others. We express our opinions and even force change in a way that hurts and damages people. It takes gentle strength to do something different! St Francis de Sales said, *"Nothing is so strong as gentleness; and nothing is so gentle as real strength."* (How I wish I could really be like that!)

Six years ago, in the morning of Saturday 9th February 2013 I was consecrated and installed as your bishop. That afternoon I presided over a Bishop in Council meeting at which we agreed to sell Macquarie Anglican Grammar School and Orange Anglican Grammar School. The next morning, I preached and presided at two services in the Cathedral – the pace has not slackened much since then!

But pace and intensity have been one thing; the stress of dealing with an unpayable debt has been another. Listening to the stories of those whose lives have been broken by physical and sexual abuse is heart-wrenching. It's so sad to close churches where over decades people have worshipped God and grown to be more like Christ. Trying to remedy the further financial difficulties of our Diocese is very difficult. I have found it really hard to ask parishes first to surrender their assets for a legal case, then to settle with the CBA and now to pay redress. (Don't forget I have been a parish priest for 30 years.) Telling eight people who worked in the Registry that they no longer had a job was awful. Becoming acquainted with lawyers in a way I had never even dreamed of gave a fresh understanding of the humour about there being few lawyers in heaven!

However, getting to know the geography and people of Central & Western NSW has been a true delight – Liz and I are going to miss these hills and valleys and plains and above all we will grieve the loss of our relationships with you and the people of our Diocese whom we have come to love and appreciate so deeply.

I have so enjoyed preaching and presiding in different churches week by week, thereby connecting with so many people. It's been a privilege to confirm people who have come to faith in Jesus and to know that you some of you have brought them into a life-giving relationship with God. Thank you for your faithfulness to Christ and his gospel.

Once upon a time, there was a bishop who was waiting with the priest and the wardens of a church, in the vestry before the confirmation began. Filling in time, and uncomfortable with the silence, the warden said to the bishop, "You know bishop this church is very friendly and all the people here are welcoming." The bishop, being rather taciturn by nature, replied, "Yes I know. All the churches in my diocese are warm and friendly. Those who don't find them so, have left!"

The greatest burden I shall carry away from here is the memory of those people who have walked away from the church, walked away from friendship, possibly walked away from Christ, because of what I have done. I remind myself often of what the bishop says to priests being ordained. *"Remember that you will be called to give account before Jesus Christ: if it should come about that the Church, or any of its members, is hurt or hindered as a result of your negligence, you know the greatness of your fault and the judgment that will follow."*

I am deeply sorry that I have been the cause of the stumbling of some, for I know that often it has been “through ignorance, weakness, and my own deliberate fault.” Although I have aimed to be consultative, some have disagreed profoundly with decisions I have made, or actions I have taken, and as a result we have gone in different directions – sometimes with bitter feelings.

I have hurt and damaged people by thoughtless, sinful and bad actions – which is why I offer this apology to them.

Sadly, on the road of life there is only one way to go, that is forward. There is no retracing our steps and no reverse gear. We cannot undo what we have said or done. That is why we long to be forgiven, and need to be a people who willingly forgive and are reluctant to judging, no matter how hard that might be.

God has called us to be leaders: people who carry responsibility in family-life, the church or the community and we are accountable for how we exercise that leadership. So how then do we live?

It’s tempting to want to live in a bubble of unreality when people tell us to, “Have a good day, a nice day, a happy day.” But they know and we know that we all live in a world of deep misery, fear, anger, unresolved guilt, difficult and painful relationships in the home, work and social groups. We cannot escape the tragedy of human existence. Happiness is elusive and if we try to seek it we will not find it. “The good” is almost as elusive.

St Augustine (5th Century Bishop of Hippo in North Africa) in *The City of God* says that in the end people do not want a good life, or even a happy life but what we long for is peace. He says this, “*peace is a good so great, that even in this earthly and mortal life there is no word we hear with such pleasure, nothing we desire with such zest, or find to be more thoroughly gratifying.*” (p. 620).

We fight wars for peace, we engage in mediation for peace. We marry someone with whom we want to live peacefully, but people change. We seek good relationships and work for peace. But even as we live and make decisions, we become estranged from those with whom we would most desire to be at peace.

We cannot be at peace because we are fundamentally people who are war within ourselves. So, to keep chaste we fight against lust; seeking prudence we wage war on our inordinate desires; we long for calmness but we are unsettled by deep fears. The tragedy of humanity is that there is no peace because we are not at peace with God.

There is no way back to the Garden of Eden. But in that Garden, there was peace: the perfect harmony of a relationship with God. There was no mastery there, no domination, no lordship, no submission, no slavery, no fear, no guilt, no anxiety. They were shepherds, not kings!

We have difficulty in comprehending the radical and catastrophic effects of evil – all is broken and damaged. All needs to be redeemed. Not just people, not just you and me, but the whole of creation.

But, by grace we have glimpsed the heavenly city – where Christ reigns in love. And we long for that peace which Jesus promised, *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you, I do not give peace as the world give; don’t let your hearts be troubled, don’t be afraid.”* (John 14:27) St Augustine captured our dream of peace saying, *“The peace of the celestial city is the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God, and of one another in God. The peace of all things is the tranquillity of order.”* (p. 623).

If that peace, “Shalom” is the tranquillity of the celestial city, we are not there yet, for in this life we are pilgrims, so that to live and ordered life, *“even those who rule serve.”* Then Augustine continues, *“they rule not from a love of power, but from a sense of the duty they owe to others—not because they are proud of authority, but because they love mercy.”* (p. 626)

As a bishop Augustine had a first-hand knowledge of the abuse of power within the church and tells those who want to rule, that is not the way of Christ. On the contrary, any position of authority is only to be for the welfare of others. He says, *“he who loves to rule rather than to do good is no bishop.”* (p. 630)

But the tragedy of living in this broken, sinful world is that we do not know who is good, or what is good. We can only at best aspire to know. Certainly, we do not have complete knowledge and even the incomplete knowledge that we have is filtered through our own perceptions, desires, fears and failings. (Try getting some committees to make a decision and you’ll see what I mean!)

So, given this crippling condition in which we find ourselves, should we just opt out and go for the quiet life?

No! The Christian must give leadership, must make decisions and act, even though we cannot always know the outcome and consequences of our actions. In a fallen and sinful world people need to be governed well.

But I have found that I as a leader bear a very great burden because I know that some decisions I have made have hurt people. Some of my actions and judgments have been thoughtless, poor, unkind – wrong in hindsight; but they cannot be undone.

Some may feel that this or that had to be done, but I want to say that some of my actions disrespected people and hurt people. Let’s be clear, when I have taken “the lesser of two evils” I am still left doing evil.

Let me explain with a human dilemma. A mother in her late twenties who is a deeply sincere Christian, has three young children and is heavily pregnant with her fourth child. She is unwell and visits the doctor who is alarmed by the seriousness of her condition. The doctor warns this young mother that while she may be able to give birth to a healthy child, probably doing so will mean her own death and he advises that in order to save her life, she should have an abortion. The mother and her partner agonise over the enormity of the decision they have to make, and after much heart-searching decide to terminate the pregnancy. Perhaps no one would blame her, but she lives daily with the anguish, "I killed my baby."

Humanly speaking I often want to justify my actions, but I need to remember that I am answerable to God.

This is a great burden. The Bible teaches that one day I will stand before the One "to whom all hearts are open ... and from whom no secrets are hidden." I find it daunting to know that my actions will be judged by the opinions of others, and history, and then by One who knows all and judges all. This is a sobering thought!

Please do not think I'm trying to excuse myself, or seek your pity. I am not! I'm trying to take you to know that place where, even though what has been done is wretched and deeply hurtful, yet, through the healing love of God – who alone can see the whole picture – there is forgiveness, redemption and hope for us all. Me for those things I have done wrong, and you for the pain you have suffered.

Driving across the wide-open plains in the south west of our diocese last weekend I was contemplating these matters. I was conscious of how small and insignificant I was in my car, while driving a great distance along a ribbon of road in such a vast landscape and under the great arch of the cloudless sky. As I looked out I saw two low-flying planes leaving trails of coloured smoke. They created several shapes and then their smoke trails intersected leaving the shape of a cross.

Many people imagine that when we come to the end of our lives here on earth it will be like a plane leaving the runway and going into the sky, not literally, but somehow, when take-off occurs all will be well. The Biblical view is much richer than this.

To be with our Lord after our physical death and at the end of time, is far more than leaving the pain of this world behind; it is to be in that place where we see everything made new because we see the grace of God in all things and all is redeemed. There is a new creation. I echo St Paul, "Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation; the old has gone and the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Everything is seen clearly through the eyes of grace and infused with the love of God. There is peace because all is forgiven.

Only then will we understand how complete is our redemption. Nothing is discarded or wasted not even our mistakes, nor even the hurts we have borne. It's not just that we are saved for eternity with Christ, but every moment of our life is redeemed; all is made whole. Since Christ died for our sins upon the cross, and there offered himself for our redemption, every sinful action is redeemed, all hurts are transformed by Christ's atoning death and the triumph of his resurrection.

Let me try putting it like this, just a small glimpse. In life we are hurt by words and things done to us. We are angry and we blame. Then as time passes we become more aware of the reasons behind the actions of the other person, and of the foolishness of our response. Then the hurt no longer hurts; indeed, we might see it as a place of growth.

Imagine this on a grand scale, to be where all relationships are reconciled; all broken lives are made whole; all hurts are healed; all sin is forgiven; and all wrongs are put right.

Imagine with me, there, in the presence of our Lord we, for the very first time, are complete and whole. Death is defeated, evil is no more, and Christ is head over all and reigns in glory. Then we shall indeed rest in his mercy; then when we rest in his mercy we will see clearly the great grace that has been bestowed upon us, then in seeing that grace we will love our Lord as we have never loved him before, and in loving him we will want to praise him for all eternity.

In conclusion

Thank you for the enormous privilege and responsibility of being your tenth Bishop. The people of Bathurst Diocese will remain in my heart and in my prayers, with gratitude for all that has been and hope for all that lies ahead for you.

I have every confidence that the God who has led us together through this difficult journey, will take you forward with a fresh vision, and with your new bishop and the Diocesan leadership team, you will re-imagine how Anglican ministry is to be done and sustained from Bathurst to Bourke.

And so, unto him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.