

# Bathurst Diocese

SHARING JESUS FOR LIFE

**FIRST SESSION**

OF THE

**51<sup>ST</sup> SYNOD**

SATURDAY 21 SEPTEMBER 2024

**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS**

BISHOP MARK CALDER



# CONTENTS:

FIVE YEARS IN: FIVE LESSONS .....	1
1. Amazing Grace: God is able to do more than we ask or imagine.....	1
2. Ministry is hard: Country ministry is tougher than I thought .....	3
3. The Diocese is vast: congregations and clergy are isolated .....	4
4. Clergy aren't rushing: the challenges in leaving the cities are great .....	5
5. People are hungry: there is a growing desire to be nurtured with God's word.....	6
THREE YEARS TO GO: THREE PRAYERS .....	7
1. Supply our needs: raise up more workers for the harvest .....	7
2. Transform us: teach, rebuke, correct and train us in righteousness .....	7
3. Save the lost: in your mercy, draw many to trust the Lord Jesus .....	8
ONE AGENDA .....	8
THANKS.....	9
APPOINTMENTS AND ORDINATIONS SINCE LAST SYNOD .....	9
Appointments .....	9
Made deacons .....	9
Ordained priest .....	10
Resignations .....	10
Authority to Officiate.....	10

# PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS 2024

I only have one agenda.

His name is Jesus.

I want everyone in our churches to know Jesus, love Jesus, trust Jesus, serve Jesus and share Jesus.

And I want everyone not currently in our churches to hear of Jesus, turn to Jesus, revel in Jesus as Saviour and serve Jesus as Lord.

I was elected by the Bishop's election board in 2019 for that agenda.

The board made it clear that they wanted change. Not just any change, but Gospel-shaped, Jesus-focused change.

Of course, I am not suggesting that Jesus wasn't on the agenda prior to my appointment. However, the reality of the prior years, is that there were many other distressing and distracting issues which needed to be addressed.

I have now been here five years, and under our ordinances, I have three more.

So I want to share with you five lessons I've learnt in five years and three prayers I will continue praying in my last three years.

## FIVE YEARS IN: FIVE LESSONS

### 1. **Amazing Grace:** God is able to do more than we ask or imagine

In his great kindness, God has gone before us. He has provided financial resources for the work, gospel workers for the harvest, leadership to develop the ministry, a plan for the work, gospel energy for the work, and His Holy Spirit for the work. More than I could have asked or imagined.

**Financial resources:** the generous gift of the Sydney Diocese – extended through to 2030 – is the foundation for all the rest. This partnership has allowed us to continue having a bishop and registrar and has lowered the burden of contributions from our parishes, thereby providing more resources at the coal face. We must continue to be so thankful. In addition, the partnership with the Bush Church Aid Society which allows us to have a training pathway at the cathedral, and full-time clergy in Cobar, Cowra and West Wyalong (and next year Kelso), is such a significant contribution to the ministry in the diocese overall. We are so thankful! We have also been blessed by the generous support of Sydney parishes, along with that of individuals, supporting ministry at the Cathedral, Blayney, Oberon, Grenfell and next year in Dubbo and Cudgegong Valley. God is good!

**Gospel workers:** the provision in the last five years of Andrew Thornhill, Wally Cox, Steven Klouth, Kevin Simington, Roger Phelps, Sally Phelps, James Daymond (into an ordained capacity), Bec Choi, Ben Mackay, David Blackmore, Matthew Brooks-Lloyd, Cathy Brooks-Lloyd, Andy Martin, Tim Smith, Jonny Lush, James Boardman, Lizzie Watterson, Jo Watts, Levi Kowalczyk, Tim St Quintin, Stuart Border (in an ordained capacity), Luke Merriman and Josh Taylor is extraordinary! In addition, the Lord has raised up Warwick Baines and Louise Hickey in the diocesan office, who with servant hearts and amazing capacity, lovingly support me and all these workers. I am very thankful! And in most of our parishes, there are new people serving in new ways either on parish councils, in parish offices, or as children's and youth leaders, Bible study leaders and/or in some other type of significant support ministry. Thank you!

**Leadership to develop the ministry:** In Kevin Simington, we have a ministry consultant who has worked with both clergy and parishes to help them think through various challenges and issues and to respond with love and grace and wisdom. In Jono Williams, Andrew Thornhill and Tim St Quintin, we once again have three regional archdeacons. I have begun working with them on how this role may be developed to better support clergy and parishes without clergy. (I am continuing to pray through the appointment of someone to the Diocesan Archdeacon role.) Andrew Thornhill's appointment to Dubbo and as regional archdeacon meant he could no longer continue as Ministry Development Officer (MDO). With no other senior clergy person with the necessary experience or capacity to take on this one-day a week role, you will be aware that we divided the role into five critical areas. Key leaders are now volunteering as follows:

1. **Director of Ordinands** – Archdeacon Andrew Thornhill
2. **Strategic planning** – the Rev'd James Daymond
3. **Event management** – Kath Thornhill
4. **Chaplain to LLMs** – Archdeacon Jono Williams
5. **Clergy support and development** – the Rev'd Phil Howes

These five people are contributing so wonderfully to these areas and have lifted some weight of responsibility from my shoulders. I am so grateful to God, and I trust you too are grateful for their leadership.

**A plan for the work:** a further way God has provided for us, is in the provision of a strategic plan for the work. Under the catch phrase "**Sharing Jesus for Life**", the plan has been helpful in reminding us of our common purpose given in the great commission and encouraging us to review all we do so that we might be more focused and intentional in the work of sharing Jesus. I'm so grateful for James Daymond and the great work he is doing in helping parishes discern two or three key goals which will help them sharpen their ministry. Thank you to all who are working with James to that great end. As I said when we launched the strategic plan, even if a parish decides to do just one thing differently, or better, or in addition to what they're already doing, so that they may be better placed to share the amazing news of Jesus, then, that will be fantastic.

**Gospel energy for the work:** Under God, I have seen great new energy in and for the work! New contemporary services, Sunday schools, kids' clubs, youth groups, play groups, Bible studies, evangelistic courses, live music, ministry to the aged, help for the needy, new licenced lay ministers, wonderful SRE teaching, enterprising evangelism around town events (such as Bathurst Winterfest, Parkes Elvis festival, Grenfell Henry Lawson festival and so on). This is so encouraging and I'm grateful to God for all who are working energetically and creatively in these areas.

**His Holy Spirit for the work:** Ultimately all I have recorded is the work of God's Holy Spirit. He has been wonderfully at work, inspiring and enabling generosity and gospel partnership, raising up gospel workers and leaders to develop the ministry, inspiring a plan for the work, and enlivening people with a heart to love Jesus and a passion to serve him in new ways. And praise God, that through the work of the Holy Spirit, people have become Christians. The gift of repentance, trust and new life has been given to many. This is God's work – to his great glory.

Yes, as I look back over these past five years, I have seen God's amazing grace and been reminded, that he is able to do more than either we can ask or imagine. To God be the glory, great things he has done!

## **2. Ministry is hard: Country ministry is tougher than I thought**

While absolutely thankful for all the reasons I have outlined – and many more – my second lesson is more sobering. Ministry in the west is hard. It is hard because some towns are in difficult circumstances, hard because some people have been hardened to the gospel, hard because of the lack of young families in many of our churches, and hard because some of our buildings are in major need of repair.

**Some towns are in difficult circumstances:** A number of factors are at work. Farming is changing with an older workforce, the impact of technology and the merging of family properties into large corporation-managed enterprises. Mining cycles through growth and decline with many focusing on fly-in fly-out workers. Both factors mean there are less people in our towns and regions. That in turn, means that some service providers such as banks and health care workers have withdrawn. That makes just doing life; tough! The number of volunteers in many community groups has declined, the church being among them. Increasing workload falls on those with diminishing capacity.

**Some people have been hardened to the gospel:** there are a significant number of people especially further west, who either have no interest in the gospel or are opposed to at least the church, if not to the gospel itself. Recently in one of our churches, appalling abuse by a clergy person 30 years ago was openly acknowledged as a reason people continue to stay away. The reputational damage to the church – and the name of Jesus – done by those who undertook such abuse is incalculable. (Not to mention of course, the toll such abuse took on those abused.) We ought not be surprised that churches in some places are struggling to make headway, against the devil's schemes. We struggle against "the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" Ephesians 6:12.

**Lack of young families in our churches:** Even those who have not suffered abuse, are often hardened against the gospel because the last time they were in church, they were not welcomed or engaged, and church appeared to them to be from yesteryear. Which is why we must work hard at bringing the best of our traditions into the real world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century where our people live. If we have Jesus' compassion for the 'harassed and helpless', then we will do all we can to make our services welcoming and relevant to young families.

**Many of our buildings are in major need of repair:** this is so challenging! The cost for repair for buildings such as Holy Trinity Dubbo, St Ambrose Memorial Church Gilgandra, and St George's Parkes (to name only three current examples), is frightening. Major repair work required to some of our buildings is due to lack of ongoing maintenance over many years. In other places, it is more due to the method of construction at the time the church was built and the nature of the soil where the building is located. All such churches have limited resources in terms of finances or expertise. And yet that is also true of the diocese itself. We need to look to outside help for advice and for support.

Ministry is hard. Country ministry is tougher than I thought. But my first lesson informs my response and lifts my eyes. God is able to do more than either we ask or imagine! So we must constantly bring these challenges to him in prayer and ask him to go before us with the gracious help of his Holy Spirit, just as we have seen him doing!

### **3. The Diocese is vast: congregations and clergy are isolated**

A 1200km return trip to Bourke on a recent weekend reminded me of this. The challenges this reality brings include: remote parishes often feel unsupported and disconnected, sharing resources and ideas is limited, technology is a challenge, there is impact for our clergy, and the bishop has to spend a lot of time travelling.

**Remote parishes often feel unsupported and disconnected:** This is very difficult to address, and the reality is that our parishes without clergy are typically the furthest distance from Bathurst and the diocesan office. There are eleven without clergy at present being: Bourke-Brewarrina, Nyngan, Warren, Coonamble, Coonabarabran, Gilgandra, Coolah-Dunedoo, Cumnock, Condobolin, Trundle and West Wyalong. (Note that there were 13 vacant at synod last year, so we give thanks to God for the appointments of Archdeacon Tim St Quintin to Cudgegong Valley, Luke Merriman to Narromine and James Boardman to Kelso. We note with sadness, that due to ill health, the Klouths have concluded their time in West Wyalong.)

**Sharing resources and ideas is limited:** In my address to synod last year, I mentioned the idea of our parishes with clergy partnering with one without clergy to visit and share resources and ideas, but I have not followed up on that as I would have liked. Nonetheless, we are thankful for the Rev'd Stuart Border's monthly visit to Coonamble and the visit of a team from Cursillo also to Coonamble. To those without clergy – although there are times you don't hear from me, there are also times I don't hear from you. Please call or email or send a letter and keep me up to date with what is happening. Good communication is key to gospel partnership.

**Technology is a challenge:** This is so in at least two ways. Internet access in some places is limited. So although emailing resources and keeping in touch for support can be helpful, there are places in the diocese, where people are too far away from an exchange for effective use of ADSL and satellite delivery of internet services is simply too expensive. So some people are not able to undertake online training or join LLM zoom sessions. The other challenge is that despite the bishop making a sermon available every week, some churches do not have someone with the ability to access it and some churches have not set up any technology in their churches to make use of it. I encourage all churches to seek help in this regard – not because my sermons are so amazing – but because there will be a consistency in approach to teaching and it will lighten the load on LLMs to prepare a regular homily. Help and advice is available for those wanting to move this way.

**There is impact for our clergy:** the vast nature of the diocese and the isolation of some of our towns has significant impact on some of our clergy. Some have commented that they feel they have no friends or peers in the area, and that local social groups are difficult to break into. For others, the distance required when seeking medical intervention takes its toll. Even working out where it may be safest and feasible to arrange for the birth of a child is challenging! And distance from parents for support and grandparenting has its challenges and limits the possibilities of visits from relatives. We need to be aware of these issues and churchwardens need to enable clergy to travel when needed for medical services, and even from time to time, to work remotely for a week, enabling a visit to parents and grandparents.

**The bishop has to spend a lot of time travelling:** Although this was very clearly laid out in when I was being interviewed for this role, it is not until I actually began to serve here and grasp the vast nature of the diocese, that I understood what is involved. I have endeavoured to be more strategic in planning trips this year, but inevitably I end up spending more time driving and being away from home more often than I'd like. I can now more readily understand why there was once an assistant bishop in this diocese and yet we are not in position to consider that now. I appreciate access to a safe and reliable car for travel which was renewed in July this year, the previous one having travelled just over 170,000kms in nearly 5 years.

Why is all this worth noting? Because we need to note the impact on ministry, and we need to work creatively to mitigate against some of these challenges. As we become more aware of these issues, those of us in parishes *with* clergy might be more aware of the needs of our brothers and sisters in parishes *without* and so, work out how we might be a blessing and help to them. And we bring this aspect of our life together, to our great God in prayer.

#### **4. Clergy aren't rushing: the challenges in leaving the cities are great**

This point may seem out of place in that I previously identified around 14 clergy who *have* come from the city in 5 years. (We thank those who have joined us from the city!) However, we need to remember that some of our 11 parishes have been without clergy for many years and we aren't being rushed by men and women wanting to fill them. It is hard to leave the city. Hard due to the realities of leaving friends and family and hard due to the perceptions of what life in the country will be like.

**The reality of leaving family, friends and city life:** There is sacrifice involved in leaving the city, and clergy coming need to count that cost. Separating grandchildren from grandparents and not having that ready hands-on support will be costly. Not being able to duck out for a quick dinner date while grandparents watch the children is hard. Lack of access to department stores and other specialty shops and entertainment is hard. And yet, people have been making sacrifices for the cause of the gospel since Jesus was taken up into heaven. There are people from our cities preparing right now to travel to Africa and Asia and South America and Europe for missionary work where the sacrifices will be greater, the distance more significant and where cultural and language differences will be very taxing. Bush Brothers of old – single men – travelled from London to minister in Bourke on horseback! Are there not those, in these our days, who will have that same pioneering spirit to bring the gospel to people who are lost and helpless? Are there some who are too attached to modern conveniences to pay the price? And might there be clergy at the other end of ministry with children who have left the nest having completed their education, who might consider a placement in the west to finish out their active ministry life? And in time, might there be those from our diocese, who we can send for training and see return to serve here? Please pray that the Lord would prepare and call such people.



**Perceptions:** It is hard to deal with misconceptions of what life in the west will bring. Some assume there are no good schools and that children will be robbed of opportunity. Many of our clergy will testify to the opposite. Some believe that the challenges I've outlined, will simply be too hard to overcome and the context too difficult in which to minister effectively. But the Lord is able to work through all circumstances. He is able to do more than either we can ask or imagine. And clergy who *have* come from the city to enliven our parishes, will testify that ministry has never been more effective or joyful, despite the challenges!

We need to be aware of these challenges and do all we can to show those who are interested, that they will be welcomed with loving and open arms; that they will be supported and encouraged; they will be provided with a comfortable and well-maintained home; and they will find people willing to be substitute grandparents for their children. Some parishes without clergy have asked me (understandably), 'when will you have someone for us?' And the answer is, 'clergy aren't rushing to leave the city – for all these reasons and more.' So we pray and wait on the Lord of the harvest.

## **5. People are hungry:** there is a growing desire to be nurtured with God's word

Now to the final of the five lessons in five years. I have been wonderfully surprised and encouraged by hearing that people are increasingly hungry to be nurtured with God's Word. It is the word of God which will transform us and mould us into the people and church he would have us be. It is also the word of God which will pierce hard hearts and cause people to see Jesus for who he is, and to repent and believe the good news.

**The word of God will transform us:** We read in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that “<sup>16</sup>All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” I am finding all around the diocese that people are longing now for Bible teaching which is straight-forward, clear, engaging, and which is applied to their lives in a meaningful way. This is not to say the Bible has not previously been taught here! But I am saying that as whole books (or large portions) are explained and applied at a time, as the Old Testament is opened up in new ways, as an Epistle is worked through systematically, so people are seeing links and understanding larger sweeps of the Bible in a way which is enlightening and transforming.

**The word of God will help people to see Jesus:** Do you know many people have become Christians, simply because they've read one of the Gospels, or they've read the New Testament – or even the whole Bible? As we seek to share Jesus for life, it is by continuing to take people to the Bible that they will understand who Jesus is and hear his call to repent and believe the Gospel. So we must press on with clear Bible teaching in our churches, so when people who do not yet know Jesus come, they will see Jesus in all the Scriptures.

People are hungry for the Word of God. How wonderful!

Five years. Five lessons. Amazing grace! Ministry is hard. The Diocese is vast. Clergy aren't rushing. People are hungry. I pray that some of what I've learnt, may be helpful for you today in understanding a little about the current context of our diocese, about the work of God we're seeing, and the challenges before us.



Now I want to conclude quite briefly. I have three years to go, and three prayers I will continue praying in those last three years.

## THREE YEARS TO GO: THREE PRAYERS

### 1. **Supply our needs:** raise up more workers for the harvest

Although I will continue to work hard, along with Archdeacon Thornhill as Director of Ordinands and with our recruitment pathways taskforce to promote the opportunities here and invite people into conversation, it is ultimately the Lord of the harvest who will raise up workers for us – along with the finances to support them.

It is God by his Holy Spirit who will move people to see the incredible gospel opportunities here; to see the hunger for the word of God; to see the lost; to see the churches without clergy and so be moved to come. It is the Holy Spirit who will help people to wrestle with the challenges and make the sacrifices to be here. It is the Holy Spirit who will excite people to come among us and partner with us in the great work of **SHARING JESUS FOR LIFE**.

So I pray – “Please Lord God, raise up men and women as workers for your harvest. Open people’s eyes to the opportunities. Move people to be generous in their response. Open doors of opportunity for us to make the work known. Lead us to the right people and lead the right people to us. Bless the work of Andrew Thornhill, the recruitment pathways taskforce, the ordination panel and the appointments’ board, so that good and godly appointments are made. Because you are able to do more than either we ask or imagine, we boldly ask that all eleven parishes will have an ordained minister to love, serve, teach and equip them in the next three years. And we pray that they will be financially supported for full time work, by one means or another. Please Lord, supply our needs. I pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

### 2. **Transform us:** teach, rebuke, correct and train us in righteousness

My second prayer will be that the Lord will transform us.

“Lord, I pray that by your word and Holy Spirit, you would teach, rebuke, correct and train us in righteousness so that we might be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Please renew our lives, granting us humility and the gift of repentance, and enlivening and deepening our love for and trust in Jesus. I pray that increasingly we will all be on the same page in terms of our love for Jesus and our desire to share Jesus for life. I pray too that our clergy and lay ministers will be refreshed, encouraged, supported and excited in the work. I ask that the challenges we all face, will be balanced by the joy of seeing you wonderfully at work in and through us. I pray also that our churches themselves will be renewed, and that we will see continued growth. I pray the work among children and young people will multiply across all our parishes. Lord, we cannot do this work in our own strength, so I boldly ask you to transform us into the people, the churches and the diocese that you would have us be. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

### 3. **Save the lost:** in your mercy, draw many to trust the Lord Jesus

My third and final prayer is for the lost. For those who do not yet know Jesus. We live with them, farm with them, work with them, shop with them, play sport with them, go to school with them, catch the bus with them, and in some circumstances, go to church with them. We want to be about the work of **Sharing Jesus for Life** so that may find the life and hope and help and forgiveness in Jesus we have found. Our diocese will join with the other 22 dioceses across Australia next year in the program known as HOPE25, whereby we will plan particular ways by which we can share the hope of Jesus with others. We want to bring hope to the hope-less; sight to the blind; life to the dead!

So I will pray, “Lord please have mercy on the many people across the central west who do not know you. Please give every one of us, a measure of Jesus’ compassion for the lost, so that we will have a growing desire to share Jesus with others. Help us to have an answer ready for those who ask us why we are people of hope. Give us courage to invite people to church or an event where they will hear of the Lord Jesus. Lord you are able to do more than either we ask or imagine, so please go before us and soften hard hearts, open blind eyes, unstop deaf ears. Please give to many the gift of repentance and trust, so many more people will become Christians, grow in their love for Jesus, and join us in **Sharing Jesus for Life**. We ask this in his name. Amen.”

## ONE AGENDA

Thank you for the privilege of being your bishop and partnering with you in the work of the gospel. Thank you for your prayers, your support, and your encouragement.

I only have one agenda.

His name is Jesus.

I want everyone in our churches to know Jesus, love Jesus, trust Jesus, serve Jesus and share Jesus.

And I want everyone not currently in our churches to hear of Jesus, turn to Jesus, revel in Jesus as Saviour and serve Jesus as Lord.

May the Lord use the work of synod, to these great ends.

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# THANKS

In my spoken address, I referred to the incredible work of Warwick Baines and Louise Hickey. I want to highlight again the significance of their contribution to the life and work of the diocese. Alissia Galbraith worked with us in the office for 12 months and was also a tremendous blessing. I'm grateful also for the work of Alison Burge, assisting parishes with Xero, and Kath Thornhill, who is working with Warwick to develop our website and improve our communications.

Adrian Ahern, my chancellor, continues to bring great insight and support on various legal or technical matters and we offer our thanks for being at synod with us.

At our last BiC meeting, I thanked those serving for their dedication and time over the past three years. This synod will see a new BiC appointed. We note that Sue West is not standing for appointment again. Sue has served on BiC 1 for 18 years and I am very grateful for her wisdom, experience and corporate knowledge. Sue will be missed in this capacity.

I want to thank the Dean, the Very Rev'd James Hodson, for his support and his work as my commissary during my long service leave. I know many found James to be a great support during that time.

Finally, I want to thank those who have generously served as locums in the past 12 months: the Rev'ds Ross Hathway (Trundle and Kelso), Anastasia Webster-Hawes (Kelso), Jeanette Jamieson (Nyngan), David Hayman (Kelso), Bishops David Robinson (Coonamble and Cudal-Molong) and Stuart Robinson (West Wyalong). Together with their spouses, these clergy have been a tremendous blessing in these parishes and in the diocese overall. Thank you so much for your willingness to partner with us in *Sharing Jesus for Life*.

# APPOINTMENTS AND ORDINATIONS SINCE LAST SYNOD

## Appointments

1. The Very Rev'd James Hodson as Bishop's Commissary
2. The Ven Andrew Thornhill to Dubbo and Archdeacon of the North-West
3. The Ven Tim St Quintin to Cudgegong Valley and Archdeacon of the East
4. The Rev'd Stuart Border to honorary deacon, Gilgandra
5. The Rev'd James Boardman to Kelso (from 2025)
6. The Rev'd Josh Taylor to assistant minister, Cudgegong Valley (from 2025)

## Made deacons

1. Mr Stuart Border
2. Mr Josh Taylor

## Ordained priest

Nil

## Resignations

1. The Rev'd Gloria Shipp – resigned Authority to Officiate

## Authority to Officiate

The following have had their Authority to Officiate (ATO) renewed since last synod or have been granted an ATO.

1. The Rev'd Jeanette Jamieson
2. The Rev'd Bruce Kurtz
3. The Rev'd Shirley Lewis
4. The Venerable Francis Hetherington
5. The Rev'd Noel Clarke
6. The Rev'd (Patricia) Margaret Finlay
7. The Right Rev'd Richard Hurford
8. The Rev'd Rhonda Hunt
9. The Rev'd Linda Boss
10. The Rev'd Thomas Owen (Deacon)
11. The Rev'd (Elizabeth) Liesel Walters (Deacon)
12. The Rev'd Paul Woodhart
13. The Rev'd Gloria Shipp
14. The Rev'd Neville Naden
15. The Rev'd Anne Neville
16. The Rev'd Garry Neville
17. The Rev'd (Verney) Clare Percival
18. The Rev'd Kaye Colwell
19. The Rev'd (Malcolm) Jeff Tym
20. The Rev'd Ray Tickle (Deacon)
21. The Rev'd Canon Carla Archer
22. The Rev'd (Marion) Anne Younghusband (Deacon)
23. The Rev'd Greg Harris (BCA)
24. The Rev'd David Hayman
25. The Rev'd Kevin Simington
26. The Rev'd Louis Stringer (Deacon)
27. The Rev'd Tim Goldsmith
28. The Rev'd Peter King (to 30 Sept 2024)
29. The Right Rev'd Stuart Robinson