

**The President's Address
to the
51st Synod of the Diocese of Melbourne**

Wednesday 15 October 2014

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Archbishop of Melbourne*

Let me first acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations, the traditional owners of this land on which we meet, and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

Welcome to the second session of the 51st Synod of the Diocese of Melbourne.

Why are we gathered here tonight? Let us take a fresh look at our first principles. In the pressure of daily life and of the immediate issues this synod will consider, it is easy to forget the most basic and important aspect: we are here because God first loved us, as John's first epistle reminds us. We are here because we love God who set his love upon us, redeemed us, brought us into fellowship with him and with each other through his Son, gave us the Holy Spirit and equipped us for the task he set us: to love and serve him and each other.

We are here to pursue the mission of the Anglican Church in Melbourne, that same mission that belongs to Christ's body everywhere. Influential theologian and missiologist David Bosch says the Christian faith sees all humanity across all time as subjects of God's plan of salvation. He writes that the reign of God which has come in Jesus Christ is intended for "all humanity". This dimension is not an optional extra: Christianity is missionary by its nature or it denies its very reason for existence.

David Bosch's brief definition of the missionary character of Christianity is but one of many that affirm the enduring character of mission at the centre of God's concern for humanity. His point is obvious but is one that we should not skip over too quickly. If we dismiss his plea for us to understand what God intends, we easily lose the sense of the divine mission and end up with something which is sociologically informed but alien from God, something that reflects our own aspirations and culture, but has nothing to do with the sending of God's son into the world or the death of Jesus on the cross.

The challenge that we embraced here at Synod last year committed the Diocese of Melbourne to work to become more mission-shaped. This means that we examine how we do things and how we organise our efforts and work to ensure that they are better fitted for the work God has committed to us. A big focus of my attention is enabling us to respond to the growth of the Greater Melbourne and Geelong area. We have some helpful policies in place but our capacity to be present among these new communities lags far behind the rate of growth. Whether in greenfield sites to the north and west or to the south east of Melbourne or in the infill of industrial land closer to the city, we have challenges at a massive scale.

At its heart, seeking to be mission shaped is about the truth that the Good News of Christ is as necessary for the people who are not in our churches, or any church, as it is for those who freely acknowledge Jesus as the Lord of their life. It is to believe that God intends the renewed relationship that is made possible through Jesus to be available to people everywhere. But just consider the greater Melbourne and Geelong area for a moment. If it is true that God's love urges us to reach out to everyone around us, and it is true that this love must be shared person to person, we clearly need presence in all of the communities, not just those where we are currently placed, for this to be done.

Becoming more attuned to our mission as God's people is not just a matter for our leaders, or for those specially charged and equipped to the various callings. It is a matter for all of us, all Anglicans in every parish. We together are the body and as St Paul tells us, God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. To paraphrase Bishop Tom Wright, the beatitudes are the agenda for the Kingdom people Jesus has called together as his church; or to quote him: *"They are about the way in which Jesus wants to rule the world. He wants to do it through this sort of people."*¹

There are many members, but one body and we are all called to proclamation of the Good News in Jesus Christ and to service in his name. For the body to flourish, each member of the body must do its part. That is why, if the church is to flourish, we must share the same vision, the same commitment, energy and passion. God has entrusted the mission to all of us.

Many things are already happening. There has always been 'much good' happening in the diocese and over the last four years the pilot program parishes attest to the signs of renewal, new pathways for people to find the church and be drawn to the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. TMA - The Melbourne Anglican - has regular good news stories from the Vision. The September edition has a splendid lift-out which you will have seen, a 4 page spread which sets down some of the many initiatives and responses to the vision and directions we - you - adopted here in this cathedral last year. At the suggestion of our community service agencies a small brochure has been prepared that puts together all of our Diocese of Melbourne activity in one place. It should be available here and we will be sending multiple copies to each agency, parish, school and other area of ministry. Please use it to explain to people you know, about our Church.

One of the most successful and fast growing church planting movements is happening right now in Melbourne. City On A Hill, the authorised Anglican congregation led by Guy Mason, began seven years ago in Docklands and now has three large congregations in Melbourne Central, in Highpoint Maribyrnong and in Geelong. City on a Hill does not have its own property, is less traditional in style than most parishes and it needs a more flexible approach BUT we can all learn from each other as we carry out the mission of Jesus Christ. Whether in fresh expressions that are different or in doing the familiar better, we should all take heart from God's grace working amongst us.

I am convinced that through making mission our organising principle, as we have determined to do, we will revitalise our structures. Policies and budgets have begun to achieve this in the last couple of years, with intentional building up of the Church Extension and Development Fund, to enable start-up funding for parishes where we are seeking to minister in places with no existing Anglican presence.

¹ N T Wright, *Simply Jesus*, p218

Investing in the Anglican Development Fund is another vehicle for growing diocesan funds for mission. Continuing to improve its customer service focus and responding to requests from parish treasurers, the ADF will be offering cheque book accounts from the end of October. Parishes and other Anglican organisations as well as individuals are supporting the church's mission by investing in the ADF. In fact in 2013 a net benefit of \$420,000 has resulted from the ADF's discounted lending rates alone.

Theological education is an enabler of the vision, shaping our future through the many facets of continuing professional learning from the colleges, theological study, formation and pastoral programs right through to post ordination training, the equipping of priests in charge program and to the highly regarded coaching. More is required! I commend the research projects of the Bishop Perry Institute, which will inform best practice, and its website with a wealth of resources for continuing education. In so doing, I stress that we have to find resources to fund ongoing professional learning for all of our ministers, clergy and lay.

Multicultural ministry is one of the four strategic directions and you will hear more about it during Synod. We need to affirm cultural diversity across the diocese, celebrate it where it exists and encourage it where it does not. Walk around the cathedral at any time and the cultural diversity of Melbourne is both self-evident and immense. Our more than forty congregations where a language other than English is predominant demand our attention, our flexibility and building up resources to equip leaders for ministry. The Asian Century was the overarching theme for our diocesan conference. What does it mean for the Anglican Church as the world focus shifts to Asia? How do we respond? These are big questions and important ones to explore.

Building reconciled relationships comes from our goal of a culture of hope. Used in the particular it refers to building better relationships, between the wider Australian community and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, for the benefit of all Australians. During Synod a presentation is scheduled to enable every Synod member to deepen his or her engagement in this process. Bless our Indigenous people! They have blessed us by welcoming into friendship people who are in a way the successors to those who killed and displaced their ancestors. In a world where people have long memories that fuel unforgiveness, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia are remarkable in their application of Jesus' teaching and in their willingness to seek restored relationships with the non-Indigenous people of this country. Using the words of prayer in the *Woi Wurrung* language first sung as a hymn at the Merri Creek School more than 150 years ago:

I pray: *O God, Lord God bless your Aboriginal people always.*

***Pundgul Marman, bar marnameek
Nerrembee borun, yellenwa nulworthen bopup Koolinner***

Using reconciliation in a wider sense, we are charged as followers of Christ to build reconciled relationships, to develop trust and break down difference and ignorance of tradition, language, ethnicity. We are to be reconciled with God and each other. God's desire is that his people flourish.

The visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury was a highlight of this year. When I made the request to him, he generously altered his demanding travel program to fly to Melbourne for 24 hours, to meet with the Australian bishops, to engage with the media and to preach at the service in the Cathedral.

In one session he spoke of reconciliation which, to be clear, he said does not mean reaching agreement but rather respectfully finding unity in diversity. In our rapidly changing world and within the Anglican Communion Justin Welby is seeking through personal engagement to foster reconciled relationships which epitomise our unity in diversity. So too for the Diocese of Melbourne, in which we celebrate diversity and our unity in the body of Christ.

Putting people in ministry as the central purpose of all our structures is a crucial strategic direction. Professor Martin Seligman is one leader in the wellbeing movement, the field of positive psychology, which is impacting on the western world. Indeed he advised Geelong Grammar School on its establishment of a Wellbeing Centre and some of us have interacted with him in his visits to Victoria. I believe it is time for the diocese to explore how we might learn from positive psychology and other disciplines, to enhance the experience of our clergy, to better support them in their ministry to us. Senior leaders of the diocese have frequently urged additional support for clergy in their place of ministry. Bishops and archdeacons already support their clergy and strongly desire to do more. The demands on bishops' and archdeacons' time under the current resourcing and structures, however, mean that engagement with clergy too often occurs when there is a particular issue or a problem to solve.

We are imperfect human beings. Nevertheless in general parishes exemplify respectful relationships but when there is break down the time involved in conflict resolution can be immense taking bishops, archdeacons and others away from mission and pastoral care to rounds of consultations and meetings hoping for a restoration of good relationships. Most clergy and lay people are untrained in dealing with conflict. I want to commence a scoping project about conflict resolution, and explore how we form a team that can intervene when relationships are not working and bring about healing and a positive way forward. I have pondered on what we can do and know that we can do more to build rather than repair relationships. The early Church was not without its conflict. Conflict arises but in Christ we can resolve conflict by being more open to deep listening and to find new ways of considering matters where we might have a polarised position in a situation of conflict.

Bringing our corporate efforts to bear with a unified focus is what we need at every level of our activity.

Evangelism and discipleship are both essential parts of the one mission of God that is enabled through our Lord Jesus Christ and the church's mission is both individual and corporate. To distinguish between these may sometimes be useful to make a particular point but, again, they are aspects of the one mission. To these we could of course add compassionate service. My point is that the mission of God declared through Jesus Christ and embraced by people like us is a big project, as big as the renewal of all creation.

A good place to begin is the baptismal commitment that makes a person a Christian and brings them from darkness to the light of Christ. In baptism the candidate affirms that they turn to Christ and reject all that is evil. I turn to Christ, I repent of my sins, I reject selfish living and all that is false and unjust, I renounce Satan and all evil. You have said these words or similar yourself at baptism or at confirmation and no doubt heard others testify to this foundational Christian assertion. These affirmations are the individual starting points for the mission of the Church and all of our institutional programs.

It is the church's task in each generation to bring people to a position where they can make these decisions; evangelism is the means by which this happens. It does not stop there. As the baptismal profession continues each by God's grace affirm that they will strive to live as a disciple of Christ and will love God with a whole heart and their neighbour as self until life's end.

Out of these dual realities of conversion and discipleship the individual follower of Jesus finds fellowship with others who share this reality and the community of the Church is thus strengthened and reproduced in each successive generation.

It is abundantly clear that such evangelism happens through personal contact and that personal contact takes place within the context of community. We all deepen our discipleship as we live in Christian community and serve beyond it. This is why I say it is ultimately a false distinction to contrast, say, diocese and parish as so often we do.

We Anglicans have the parish grid over the whole of the Anglican Communion. Our mission is throughout the geographical parishes and dioceses, and beyond. We are in the world, a world which has recently thrown up quite unexpectedly a major conflict in the Middle East between the aggression, violence and persecution of those supporting the Islamic State against all who do not. We grieve with the people of Iraq, Syria and Turkey, with the Christians and other minority groups being subjected to displacement, terror and death, and so we pray for peace.

In Australia we are grateful for government vigilance and the emphasis on the rule of law, but let's not forget that the most effective tool is the willing cooperation of the Muslim communities who despair at what is being done in their name. Muslim communities in our country deserve our support and understanding. It is notable that our political and community leaders have sought to separate the condemnation of violent extremists from the wider Muslim community. As Christians, we are called to be good neighbours, indeed to treat our neighbour as we ourselves would like to be treated.

Which brings me to those who seek asylum in our land, refugees from circumstances from which, were we experiencing them, we would to hope to flee for a safer and better life. This is irrespective of circumstance, whether to escape poverty, hunger, war or persecution. Our nation has to do better, to tell the story of our recent history, about people from diverse ethnic backgrounds who have come to settle here and prosper either through an immigration quota or in seeking asylum. As Christians we must advocate for the welfare of men, women and children detained for lengthy periods in circumstances where their physical and mental wellbeing is jeopardised. The Australian Government and Opposition believe that they are carrying out the wishes of the nation in applying tough policies to the people in immigration detention. Let our voices be heard in assuring our nations' leaders that this is not the way to treat refugees and asylum seekers. At noon on Saturday we will have a practical opportunity of telling the community what we think, by taking our place in supporting the message "*Let's fully welcome refugees*". It may make us unpopular! The Church is not here to be popular but to carry out Christ's mission on this earth.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse continues its work at the same time as the outcomes of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry are considered for implementation. It is harrowing, when listening and reading, to learn of the experiences of victims of abuse in institutions including the Church. No institution can ever guarantee the behaviour of all its members, that none will exploit in various ways or abuse others who are vulnerable, but we must be unstinting in our efforts.

We deeply regret any abuse which has occurred through the wrongful or criminal behaviour of any Anglican clergy or church workers. In recent times we have spent a lot of time and effort in seeking safeguards and behaviour that minimise the risk and provide a better, fairer and more effective pathway for the victims of sexual abuse by Anglican workers. Be assured that we will work with the Victorian Government and the Royal Commission to create a scheme with genuine independence, to provide closure for survivors which addresses the harm caused and which in time will earn the trust and confidence of the community. We pray for justice and peace for all victims of abuse.

I return to mission, mission as our organising principle.

It would be ideal if the resources we have today were adequate for us to take every opportunity to proclaim the gospel and gather disciples. But we know that is not true. And sometimes we don't make the best use of the resources of parishes, schools and community service agencies that we do have. Too many resources are aligned with the demographic patterns of our community of 40, 60 or 80 years past. We still need them there but these centres seldom overlap with the areas of greatest urban growth. And many of our parishes on the fringe of these areas of rapid urban expansion are unable to stretch their ministry and evangelism at anything like the speed with which houses are being built and suburbs are being formed.

As I often say, it's not wildly complicated! We should aim to have Anglican Church members actively engaging with each household in each new street of houses that is built or high-rise tower. Even small sectarian groups seem to achieve that. We could be the first to arrange a worship service in each new school that is built on our vast suburban expansion. Why this does not happen I cannot say for sure. It could be to do with our culture or that what we are doing already absorbs all our energies. Or it could be that we desperately need mission shaped structures to stir our concern for those who live in Rockbank North, Manor Lakes or South Morang and even more 'soon to be' suburbs such as Fishermans Bend, Lockerbie, Merrifield West and many more that you have not yet heard of.

The real power of the church is at the local level. Most decisions about evangelism and nurturing people's discipleship happen at the most immediate level of their encounters in their local congregation. In that way, our local communities formed in parishes, authorised congregations or chaplaincies are the front line and public face of Christian ministry in our church. It is through them that people are brought to faith and nurtured as disciples. It is through the teaching and pastoral care of their clergy that they are nurtured and their discipleship deepened. Mission-shaped structures seek to make this historic presence in community more effective as can be seen in the pilot program initiatives whose value is now generally accepted. It also means streamlining decision making, improving customer service and offering the kind of support in property, payroll and bookkeeping that we have rolled out over the past decade.

It does not devalue our present parish work and our potential to renew and revitalise it to say that even so there is still more that we can do. The demands on our leaders from our existing operations leave little space for a concerted focus on new initiatives, yet the pace of growth in the greater Melbourne and Geelong area means that we must have that focus. I want to see our senior ordained leaders, bishops and archdeacons, with more time and opportunity to focus on the most strategic opportunities for mission.

The most important part of my role is to enable and empower you in the parishes and agencies to carry out the mission entrusted to us all. I am committed to our shared journey, and I trust you are too. I want to thank everyone who is part of this journey, including the teams of people, lay and clergy, who share in and support my leadership of the Diocese of Melbourne.

As you know I have a new opportunity to be involved with the wider life of the Anglican Church of Australia in my additional role as Primate. I hope that some of these same aspirations for mission will find allies in other parts of our Church so that we can be truly effective in Christ's mission right across this country. Be assured that I will remain entirely engaged with my leadership responsibilities in this diocese as I carry out the work of primacy.

Thirty years ago Joy and I went as missionaries to a far north Queensland Aboriginal community. We didn't go alone, but were part of the network of prayer and support of the Australian Board of Mission. We didn't go alone, but were accompanied by our two small sons who shared the joys and struggles of ministry in that place. I am pleased that thirty years on, Michael is a member of the Synod with us here tonight and David is teaching in a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory. That is all to say that decisions we make have lasting consequences. The decision that Joy and I made to offer ourselves for missionary service was of course not just an act of personal decision but a discernment of God's will for us.

Think of all the acts of faithful obedience to God's call in Jesus through the Holy Spirit that are represented amongst us here tonight! We are the people to whom God has entrusted his Mission. We are abundantly blessed and should expect lasting consequences in each of the faithful discernments we make as we meet together over these next days. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

I am excited to journey with you as we develop the trust and confidence that bring us to that place where Jesus showed our service of God begins. Personal and corporate prayer, mindfulness and care for others, always looking to enable others in ministry and the continual development of leadership are habits of discipleship that we can celebrate. I feel just as resolved as I did eight years ago when I came to Melbourne, as I did thirty years ago to serve God and his people through leadership in the church.

Mission - we must grasp it.

Hope - we must have it.

May our Lord Jesus Christ bless you and make you all he wants you to be for the world and for the church.

The future lies open ahead of us! Join with me to shape it for God and the kingdom.