

BISHOP'S ADDRESS TO SYNOD 2004

The real war against terror

We now live in a world in which, in the eyes of a growing number of its people, acts of terror are acts of God.

We now live in a world in which extremists turn articles of faith into articles of war.

Almost suddenly, some of the major fault lines in our global political landscape run along religious divides.

The West calls it terrorism. There are militant religious fundamentalists who call it holy war.

It is a new challenge for the secular West, as we grapple with a threat of terror capable of touching every land. Already it has assumed a place on our international horizon not unlike the preoccupations of the Cold War. Already it has rattled old alliances and changed the way we think about defence. Already it has affected the way ordinary people think about their world and their neighbours.

Two years ago I expressed my deep anxiety about the long-term implications of the invasion of Iraq. I had profound reservations as to whether even a quick military victory would deliver the ongoing stability so much needed in the Middle East. Like many Australians, I was far from convinced that this action would reduce the threat of world terrorism.

My deep concern then was that if Iraq was not assisted to recover quickly and well, there was a massive risk that ongoing instability and strife would be used to confirm the Islamic fundamentalist line on the USA and the West and encourage a growing religious and political polarisation in the world.

As events have unfolded in Iraq, so my anxieties have heightened. That said, though, I suggest the answer is probably more complex than simply "pulling our troops out by Christmas". We joined the invasion of Iraq. We are there now. The country is in chaos and we have responsibilities.

Speaking with perhaps few more qualifications than common sense, I venture the view that the military aspects of the "war against terror" will only make sense in the Islamic world when overshadowed by the economic and human development aspects. Many of the nations where Islam is dominant are the poorest nations on this planet and not uncommonly Western colonial intervention or economic agendas have contributed to that poverty. Beyond the Battle for Baghdad, the real war against terror is barely engaged.

We can make a difference

It is easy to feel paralysed by such massive global issues. Gippsland is a very small diocese. Globally, the Anglican Communion itself is small. But we can make a difference internationally. We can make our own contribution to redressing the imbalances and providing hope for the future.

This year we formalised a companionship relationship with the Diocese of Gahini, in Rwanda. Here is one of Africa's poorest and most traumatised countries. Ten years ago Rwanda was in the middle of a genocide that resulted in nearly a million deaths over just a few months. The Diocese of Gahini includes that part of Rwanda that was perhaps most thoroughly pillaged and looted.

We have been moved and deeply enriched as we have shared the stories of suffering and hope that have emerged from that land and as a diocese we have responded. St Paul's Grammar School is establishing an educational relationship with Gahini Secondary School. We have two Gippslanders, Neville and Lyn Beaty, helping to develop the youth employment and

tourist centre, “the Seeds of Peace”. Our “Cash for Cows” project will help make local ministry sustainable and a project to draw on Gippsland’s diary technology to introduce more productive bloodlines to Rwanda has the potential to bring a sustainable improvement to life in a number of villages.

Across all the divides and barriers that leave the poor of this planet so savagely poor, in all the constraints and imbedded imbalances that keep them that way, there is probably nothing more subversive than relationship. Through relationship, in partnership, and without massive financial resources, we can make a difference out of all proportion to our size and resources. We can change things. We will certainly be changed ourselves!

Religion and Politics

While on the international scene the terror threat has confronted us with a worrying welding together of the religious and political, in Australia there is a disturbing rhetoric about their separation.

In recent times, when church leaders have sought to comment on issues such as the treatment of refugees, levels of overseas aid, or involvement in the war in Iraq, a common response by politicians has been to suggest that, in Australia, religion and politics are separate and church leaders should stick to their piety and prayers.

Quite frankly I believe statements like these are nonsense. They are less than accurate historically and they diminish the place of both the religious and political in the life of our land.

Of course, in Australia, as in most other liberal democracies, Church and State are formally separate. This means there is no established religion and that the State itself does not accord preferential status to any denomination or religious tradition. People are free to worship as they choose. It does not mean that there should not be healthy dialogue between the religious and the political.

Christianity cannot be diluted down to some kind of private piety held only in the privacy of the believer’s breast, without concern for public affairs, public morality or public truth¹. The political realm itself is diminished if it cannot be informed by the deep values and spirituality of the people it is established to serve.

In multicultural Australia, Churches have as much right as any interest group to express their views and press their case. Religious people of all persuasions have as much right as any other citizens to participate in public affairs and to involve themselves with public issues.

Synod provides the opportunity for us to struggle together on important matters, and to express a shared viewpoint so that we can contribute to the discussions and debates of our wider world. Synods should concern themselves with debating public issues and I trust the tradition of robust debate on public affairs will not be lost in the Synod of the Diocese of Gippsland.

Anglicans in Communion

There has been much talk about the risk of fracture within our communion following a decision by the Canadian Diocese of New Westminster to authorise a public rite of blessing for those in committed same sex relationships and the confirmation by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church (USA) of the election of a priest in a committed same sex relationship to the office of bishop.

The Primates of our Communion met in Lambeth during October to discuss these issues of tension in our communion and expressed regret that the Diocese of New Westminster and the Episcopal Church (USA) may have preempted a conversation in the Anglican Communion on

¹ Here I echo comments by our Primate, the Most Rev Dr Peter Carnley.

the important subject of human sexuality. They reaffirmed the cautious approach taken by the Lambeth Conference in regard to the ordination and ministry of homosexual clergy, while encouraging further listening and understanding.

However, no binding decision or clear answer emerged from the meeting. There is no way it could. The Primates' Meeting has no jurisdiction. It is not a supreme court of the Communion and each Province of our Communion is largely autonomous.

So issues around human sexuality will continue to be difficult and divisive for the Anglican Communion, as they are for many Christians. These issues will continue to cause pain and misunderstanding within the Australian Church.

There are other important issues about which we are divided as well. In this Synod we will look at draft legislation to be considered by the General Synod later this year to remove barriers to the ordination of women to the Episcopate. I convene the working group that has been given the task of bringing options back to the next General Synod on this matter. I know well enough the strength of principled conviction on both sides of this debate, and the passion often evoked.

Anglicans have long stood for the principle of "unity in diversity" in church life. In all the stresses and threats to our unity, this might sound a bit like making theological virtue out of unavoidable necessity. Indeed, as we wonder about the future of our fragile unity, we might well be tempted to look with envy on those churches or religions where this untidy diversity is definitely discouraged.

However, the excruciatingly inefficient, frustrating, wonderfully glorious thing about being Anglican is that we are held together, not by strong hierarchical structures or enforced uniformity, but by relationship. It is our folly, but it is also our glory. Whether by accident, or as I prefer to think, by design, we have a church that stakes its very being on maintaining relationships.

So here, in our Anglican fragility, is a principle I am prepared to call "good news" for the world. When growing religious or ideological fundamentalism turns everyone into "us" and "them", then the capacity to embrace diversity in unity is something worth struggling for. When fanaticism enforces uniformity on pain of death, then the principle of diversity in unity is liberation and freedom. When military or economic power turns the world into "haves" and "have-nots", then I am reminded that diversity is not meant to divide, but to be a gift and bring unity.

Here in our fragility is a gift worth preserving.

Women in the Episcopate

The General Synod of 1977, after receiving a report from the Doctrine Commission, endorsed the view that "the theological objections which have been raised do not constitute a barrier to the ordination of women to the episcopate, and the consecration of women to the episcopate, in this Church".

In the General Synod of 1985 a canon to provide for the ordination of women to the priesthood failed by two votes in the house of clergy. That General Synod did pass a canon to allow for the ordination of women to the diaconate.

The debate about women in the priesthood then began a complex and, for some, difficult journey through the 1980's. Painful divisions developed as the question was debated in successive General Synods. Complex legal issues arose involving both the secular courts as well as the Appellate Tribunal of our Church.

For many of those in favour of the ordination of women the only way forward seemed to be through local diocesan legislation. Eventually there was an ordination in Perth in 1991.

Against this background, in 1992 General Synod passed the Law of the Church of England Clarification Canon, clarifying the law of our Church to ensure there were no barriers to the ordination of women to the priesthood.

The question of the ordination of women to the Episcopate remained and a Working Group on Women in the Episcopate, established by the 1998 General Synod sought to chart a way forward. The working group, through General Synod Standing Committee, brought to the 2001 General Synod a Bill for a Church Law (Further Clarification) Canon 2001, presenting the legislation as a “principled compromise”.

The compromise referred to was in the form of a schedule attached to the bill. It provided for alternative episcopal oversight through a set of protocols. As it turned out, these protocols were the sticking point and it was clear the legislation would not get through. General Synod did pass in principle support for the ordination of women to the episcopate, but then the legislation was withdrawn.

Following debate of a Bill for a Church Law (Further Clarification) Canon 2001, the General Synod asked its Standing Committee to:

1. prepare a report on some of the issues raised in the debate and some of the possible outcomes for consideration by Dioceses, Provincial Synods, Provincial Councils and the Bishops’ Conference, seeking their responses by February 2003; and
2. in the light of responses received, prepare amended legislation and accompanying material in consultation with Dioceses, Provincial Synods, Provincial Councils and the Bishops’ Conference for the next session of General Synod."

Standing Committee established a Working Group to complete this task. The group, which I have chaired, has been meeting over the past two years. The working group has engaged in conversations with gatherings and individuals throughout Australia. In terms of legislation, the working group is suggesting that General Synod consider another clarification canon.

This approach does not involve legislation specific to women as opposed to men. Rather, it clarifies that no barriers exist beyond those that apply to both men and women and makes it clear that those dioceses that wish to elect a woman as bishop have the power to do so.

The draft legislation does not contain a detailed protocol, as in 2001. The working group was convinced that complex protocols would not commend themselves to the General Synod. However, it retains the obligation for the bishop of a diocese to put in place and maintain arrangements for alternative episcopal ministry. It specifies essential elements of that ministry, while providing some flexibility for its application in the circumstances in each diocese.

It is important to note the differences between this proposal and that considered in 2001. The differences can be summarised in these ways:-

- *Episcopal ministry as opposed to episcopal oversight.* This small shift in wording signals an important change. The 2001 legislation provided for alternative episcopal ministry, but also an element of alternative episcopal jurisdiction. In the 2004 legislation the integrity of the diocese and diocesan bishop is held more fully. The diocesan bishop retains oversight, but is obliged to put in place measures for alternative ministry.
- *Responsibility is focused on the diocesan bishop.* Given the rather federalist constitution of the Anglican Church in Australia, there are limitations on what the General Synod can require of a diocesan synod. The wording of the 2001 Schedule probably reflected this reality. It simply affirmed that a protocol should be observed. The legislation proposed for 2004 puts the focus on the bishop because the working group believes that this not only retains the integrity of the episcopate, it also provides the strongest assurances. The bishop is bound by the Canons of General Synod and in the end, can be taken to a special tribunal.

- *Flexibility is provided within an agreed framework.* No protocol, no matter how complex, is likely to cover every situation or circumstance. The approach proposed avoids the possibility of having to come back to General Synod for amendments and adaptations. Within its framework, it allows dioceses to respond to the needs of specific communities, possibly including indigenous people or particular ethnic communities.

The working group believes that these provisions are in many ways as strong as those proposed in 2001, are simpler and have greater flexibility. At the same time the group recognise that the success of any provision lies in trust. The provisions in the legislation, and the responses of individual diocesan synods to them, would lay down the normative behaviour expected. By endorsing them, we would make our strongest commitment to care for each other. While technically, it could be that failing to adhere to an agreed protocol could be an offence, the reality is that a bishop who did so would have lost the trust necessary to make any protocol work.

The process followed by the Working Group and the legislation proposed have emphasised the significance of *koinonia* (fellowship/being in communion) for our life together as Australian Anglicans. The working group does not believe that any other basic approach is sufficient to preserve our communion within this Anglican Church of Australia. I commend the approach proposed.

Mission or missing

On one Sunday in 2001, the National Church Life Survey took a snapshot of congregational life of Australian Churches. On that Sunday there were 2900 Anglicans at worship in the Diocese of Gippsland. This was a decline of 17% from the previous survey in 1996. The average age of those worshipping in our diocese on that Sunday was 63. More than half of those present who had children under 15 said that their children did not come to Church.

This pattern is repeated with minor variations through most of the dioceses of the Anglican Church of Australia.

While trying to project the shape of the Church into the future always runs the risk of human reason being ambushed by the surprising Spirit of God, ABS figures combined with some reflection on the latest NCLS figures would suggest that there are particular challenges before the Province of Victoria. They suggest that by 2020:

- Melbourne will have grown to about 4.2 million and the population in the rest of the State will have experienced little growth.² One projection is that in 2021 75% of Victoria's population will live in Melbourne and 66% of the population of NSW will live in Sydney³.
- Growth outside Melbourne will have occurred in a few major centres and local government areas bordering Melbourne.
- The growth of the few larger regional centres will have been at the expense of smaller rural towns. Parishes in many of these smaller towns will have become unviable.

² The following table provides a range of ABS population projections for Melbourne and the rest of Victoria (www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@nsf/94713ad4455ff142ca2568200192af2/3ef0ff4f...)

	1999			2021			2051
	Actual	Series I	Series II	Series III	Series I	Series II	Series III
Capital city/balance of State	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000	'000
Sydney	4,041.4	5,143.2	5,039.7	4,986.9	6,215.8	5,857.8	5,704.7
- Balance of New South Wales	2,370.3	2,696.0	2,560.7	2,493.7	2,785.8	2,390.0	2,206.0
- Total New South Wales	6,411.7	7,839.2	7,600.4	7,480.6	9,001.6	8,247.8	7,910.7
Melbourne	3,417.2	4,101.6	4,081.8	4,177.5	4,492.6	4,393.2	4,638.8
- Balance of Victoria	1,295.0	1,324.9	1,337.3	1,371.5	1,135.5	1,154.0	1,238.3
- Total Victoria	4,712.2	5,426.5	5,419.0	5,549.0	5,628.1	5,547.2	5,877.1

³ See Series III above.

- Church attendance in the traditional denominations will have declined dramatically as older attenders die or become disabled.
- The median age of the broader community will have increased (from about 39 now to the mid-forties in 2051) but will still be lower than that of the average Anglican.

Victoria's country dioceses will face a crisis, if the number of viable parishes decline as these projections suggest. Clearly a certain number of viable parishes is needed to ensure sufficient resources are available for episcopal ministry and effective Registry functions. With present day wage structures and costs and an increasingly demanding compliance environment, these costs are ever increasing.⁴ Beyond this, we need more than ever, resources to invest in new possibilities. We need not just to pay for the what is; we need to invest in what might be.

As a Province we are probably still in a position to make some important strategic moves for the future. The following is little more than an indication of the options that might be considered:

1. *Redrawing the Map.* Is there one diocese too many in country Victoria? Should there be another diocese (existing or new) planned to include parts of greater Melbourne. As the suburban expansion of Melbourne is increasingly felt in nearby parts of country dioceses, are there smaller adjustments to the boundaries between them, which might secure greater viability for those smaller country dioceses? Is a more radical approach needed?⁵

2. *Redefining old distinctions.* In what ways are the distinctions we make between "dioceses" and "regions" still valid? When most of the Melbourne "regions" are numerically bigger than country dioceses, should we look afresh at these old distinctions? Can we do so in a way that maintains local identity and an appropriate level of self-determination in the country?

3. *Reworking provincial cooperation.* We have a good history of working together as a Province in areas such as clergy selection and training. Anglicare is increasingly becoming a provincial operation, as Government seeks to deal only with the larger players. There are other important areas of support for mission that, with modern technology, can be shared. With the increasingly complex compliance regime in which we work, the demanding protocols and processes in areas such as child protection and sexual abuse, a greater level of sharing becomes a necessity. It may be that there is value in regarding the whole province as one staffing pool. Other areas that might be considered include a provincial ADF, payroll, accounting support, insurance and investments. Clearly there are legal and constitutional issues to be considered, but the opportunities are manifest.

These are but indicative options. If nothing more, they show us that we still have possibilities to explore, opportunities to grasp. The most important question is whether we have the commitment and will.

If this is true of the Province, it is true for us as a diocese as well. The statistics, the trends are confronting. We could see them as a reason for resignation. I want us to see them as a call to mission. I do not want us to ignore them, but nor do I want us to see them as inevitable. There are enough examples within this diocese itself to prove that the growth of a church is much more determined by ministry than demography. So let me make some provocative statements.

I believe every parish in this diocese can grow and be viable.

⁴ While the evidence is almost entirely anecdotal, there seems to be a body of opinion to suggest that in Australia the lower limit for the long term effectiveness of a diocesan unit is around 40 parishes. Clearly this is an assertion that is hard to evaluate and is at best a generalisation. Nevertheless it would seem fair to suggest that if we were starting afresh to plan dioceses within Australia, we would probably be looking at units containing more than the 20-35 ministry units that we now find in country dioceses across the land.

⁵ One such radical proposal would be to divide Melbourne into five segments and merge four of them with the country dioceses.

I believe that the next Church Life Survey could show growth in worship attendances across the Diocese of Gippsland.

I believe we have the resources we need to serve our mission.

I believe that Churches die because they choose not to live.

We are in the place of radical choice. The writer of Deuteronomy describes the sense of choice before Israel as it looked towards a new land that could be either wilderness or promise:

*See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity ... choose life...that you may live...!*⁶

This is our situation. Whether we like it or not, a new unfamiliar place stretches out before us. Whether we like it or not, we will choose whether that land is wilderness or promise, life and prosperity or death and adversity.

Churches die because they choose not to live...choose life...that you may live

Following this Synod, I will be writing to each parish, asking that you inform me of your mission strategy for the next three years. I will not be asking for a copy of the parish vision statement, or one of those vague unachievable wish lists that we often come up with in church planning sessions. I want parishes to be realistic and specific about where they can begin and what they can do.

During the next 12 months I want to sit with the leadership of every parish as we struggle, share and pray about our particular mission challenge. This will be the major focus of my episcopal ministry for the next 12 months and I would like you to understand that I will fit other requests and demands, both within the diocese and beyond, around this priority.

As Bishop, I will be asking you what it is that you want me to do to help you achieve your mission goals. As I move around the diocese I am going to be asking parishes with special experience or gifts to companion others in the journey to mission.

I hope you sense my urgency.

Churches die because they choose not to live...choose life...that you may live

As part of their mission strategy, I want every parish to look afresh at how it does Sunday worship.

In previous times Sunday worship was part of a web of connection many had with the Church. We now live in a society largely disconnected from the Christian story. At its best Anglican worship is culturally rich and subtle. This is one of the reasons I like it. However, for the outsider it can be alienating and impenetrable. Our heritage, our liturgy, is rich in allusion and nuance, but it presumes a knowledge and context most Australians no longer share.

Our disconnection is also generational. Most worshipping Australian Anglicans have reached the age of the longer belt and shorter breath. Australians under forty are conspicuously absent from our Churches and the myth that, with age, they will change and come back has little to support it. Generations do not change that much; they just get older!

Research tells us that younger Australians in particular are looking for an authentic experience of the transcendent, the numinous. Most of them have busy lives, with nearly all adult family members working full time. They are heavily committed and often heavily mortgaged. When they come to Church they want a transcendent connection and they want real relationships. They are wary of institutional belonging, committees and rosters, yet very much open to an experience that will demand a life-changing commitment. They want a lot from Sunday Church.

⁶ Deut. 30. 15-20

My fear is that while they are looking for burning bushes, we are growing potted geraniums!

All this means that our worship services need to bear more of the burden of our mission than ever before. People want a lot from that very short time on Sunday.

Without surrender to the superficial and shallow, we need to reconsider what worship should be like in a mission environment, so that people find it immediately accessible and arrestingly transcendent. Again, there is new unfamiliar territory stretching out before us.

Churches die because they choose not to live...choose life...that you may live

Mission and healing

Over the life of this Synod we will spend much time putting in place new measures for child protection and handling sexual abuse complaints. I hope this session of Synod will pass a resolution encouraging me to put in place a new interim protocol for dealing with complaints of abuse by church leaders.

Much has been done at a national level. There are two streams to the national approach, as will be evident during presentations tomorrow. There are measures to proactively ensure safe ministry practice. There are the more “reactive” measures to ensure we deal appropriately with complaints.

In both areas there is still work to be done, leading to General Synod later this year.

Melbourne has a new protocol that is in place, but it is clearly still evolving and has not yet been adopted through synod legislation. There is national model legislation, but it too, is a “work in progress” and has not yet been widely adopted. A Provincial Working Group has just begin considering the relationship between the Melbourne protocol and the proposed national protocol with a view to ensuring that the Province of Victoria acts with a large degree of commonality and in concert with the national church.

Because our existing protocol is patently inadequate in the new environment in which we find ourselves, I would like to put in place an interim protocol, only until we are able to take the next step towards a national protocol. I have sought advice and looked at both the Melbourne and National protocols. The material we will consider during this session is based on the Melbourne Protocol, with some adaptations from the national material.

A significant characteristic of the Melbourne protocol is that it uses the fact that the diocese has regional bishops in order to keep the Archbishop almost entirely at arm’s length. Clearly this is more difficult to achieve in a diocese where there is no assistant bishop and we have adapted the protocol accordingly. However, the role of the bishop in the process is minimised. The other important addition is to include a paragraph concerning our Board of Reference and Tribunal. Again, this reflects discussions within the province.

I have asked Ms Cheryl Russell, a psychologist from Trafalgar, to act as our Director of Professional Standards. Ms Russell is well qualified for this role and has particular experience relevant to our needs.

As material is presented in the course of this session of Synod, you will begin to appreciate how much time and energy these matters will consume over the coming years. A close look at our budget would tell you that we expect the costs in the coming year, including increases in public liability insurance, to total somewhere around \$45,000.

We might be tempted to resent all the energy and resources necessary to put all these measures in place as detracting from our mission. But these are matters of the Kingdom of God. They are about the healing of the injured. They are about ensuring that “the little children” come unhindered⁷. They are about spiritual healing and restoration for our Church. These are not matters peripheral to our ministry and mission, they are necessary for it.

⁷ Mark 10.14

People and places

Each year we recognise important changes to the diocesan team. This evening we collated the Venerable Heather Marten as Archdeacon of the Latrobe Valley. Heather grew up in Gippsland and it was good to welcome her back as Rector of Morwell. Archdeacon Clem Watts will continue as Vicar-General and Archdeacon of South Gippsland.

It was good also to welcome back the Reverend John White (Bairnsdale) and the Reverend Graeme MacRobb for a term as our Ministry Development Officer. Other new members of the clergy team include: The Reverend Doug Bannerman (Orbost) The Reverend Robin Elliot (Bass-Phillip Island), the Reverend Lyn Porritt (ordained Deacon and Chaplain at Monash University's Gippsland Campus) and the Reverend Barbara Logan (ordained Deacon and in Omeo). During the year the Reverend Canon Graeme Winterton retired from full time ministry in the diocese to take up a part time position with the Victorian Council of Churches. The Reverend Graeme Walker retired for health reasons. The Reverend Elwyn Sparks (Croajingolong) retired. The Reverend Russell Jones (Boolarra/Yinnar) moved to take up another position. Principal of Gippsland Grammar, Mr Tony Horsley, has resigned and will shortly take up a new position with The Illawarra Grammar.

Amongst members of the diocesan family that have passed away since Synod last met, we remember: Peter Howitt, from Maffra Parish; Betty Moore (wife of Canon Percy) and Cyril (Jim) Farndon, from Paynesville; Elaine Pickburn, from Traralgon; Rose Freeman/Grey, from Briagolong, and Peg Stothers from the Parish of Stratford; Ken Reiher and Joyce Savige, from Warragul Parish; Lorna Davies (formerly Warragul), Shirley Somerville, from Yarragon, Glad Healey and Ross Bishop, from Thorpdale, Hazel Ashby, from Trafalgar Parish; Dorothy Withers and Peter Thornhill from the Cathedral Parish; Jim Best from the Drouin Parish; Anna Wright and Audrey Bell from the Parish of Corner Inlet; Robert (Bob) Egan from the Parish of Westernport; Stan Gaudion and Ron Eagger from the Parish of Leongatha.

In the context of this Synod we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the building of Bishops court. May God inspire the 34th Synod of the Diocese of Gippsland with the vision, commitment and energy of those who laboured in the early days to establish this diocese that we gather to serve.

Thank you for your prayers and support over the past year.