



The Anglican Diocese of Gippsland

First Session of the 39th Diocesan Synod

Sale
17-19 May 2019

Presidential Address

Bishop Richard Treloar

18 May 2019

Changing World, Changing Church, Unchanging Gospel

We gather on the traditional lands of the Gunaikurnai people, and respectfully recognize their elders – past, current and emerging – committing ourselves to the ministry of Reconciliation entrusted to us, and acknowledging all First Nations people present.

Welcome to this First Session of the 39th Synod of the Diocese of Gippsland. There are a number of people participating in Diocesan Synod for the first time; myself included! For others, it has been 18 months almost to the day since you gathered for Synod.

It is good to come together as members of the Diocesan family; thank you to those who have travelled long distances, found accommodation, and made arrangements for Sunday services so that we can do this. Welcome to each and to all.

It is one of the blessings of our Anglican polity that we are synodically governed – a reminder of the foundational place of baptismal ministry in our Church, and in the Church. As the Dean of Melbourne would remind Synod members, we come not to be an ‘ecclesial parliament’, even though some of our processes are parliamentary; we come to walk together – *syn-odos*, in the Greek – and what a joy and privilege that shared journeying is.

That said, today sees us in election mode, in more ways than one! As well as electing those who have generously nominated for various Diocesan roles, we will be making decisions together – this year, next year, and the year after – decisions and choices that will have a significant bearing on the shape and the scope of our mission.

May we choose wisely, may we listen carefully, may we reflect prayerfully.

Saturday, 18 May 2019. Exactly nine months on from Saturday 18 August 2018, the day I was installed as your bishop. It has been a gestation period of sorts. I don’t want to press the analogy too far by likening Synod to the labour ward, although I am surrounded by some experienced midwives here!

At our Dinner this evening we will thank our Registrar, The Revd Brian Norris, for his outstanding ministry to us these last sixteen years or so, this being Brian’s last Gippsland Synod – in that capacity at least. As it happens, this 39th Synod of our Diocese is – between the Dioceses of Canberra & Goulburn and Gippsland – Brian’s 39th Session of Synod as a Registrar, and Brian we salute you!

Alongside him today is our Registrar-designate, Mr Richard Connelly, who Brian has been mentoring and who we welcome as a Synod member in his own right. Likewise our Deputy Chancellor, Mr Roger Blythman, takes his place alongside the Chancellor, Ms Rowena Armstrong AM, who continues her extraordinary service in that highly responsible office.

The Hon. John Delzoppo OAM, has graciously accepted my invitation to work his magic as Chair of Committees one more time, assisted by Mr Mark Woods, Deputy Chair of Committees. This will be the 40th consecutive year that John has fulfilled this role at Synod, and we will also acknowledge his skills and generosity this evening. John has promised to pass me lots of little notes that explain what I should be doing next, and I have pledged joyful obedience!

Not only here, but also in the Registry Office, new and old, the support has been tremendous, and I thank all those who have got us to the start line, including Mrs Sue Court, Mrs Annette Hollonds, The Revd David Perryman, and Mr Tim Gibson, who achieve amazing things with very modest resources of time.

We enjoy the hospitality of our Cathedral Parish this weekend, both in church and in the Delbridge Hall, and we're grateful to the Dean and her team for preparing our worship and our fellowship.

As I move around the Diocese I see the quality of that fellowship everywhere I go, and the welcome that we and others receive speaks volumes about the culture of this region and of its faith communities. At this Synod we will reflect on aspects of our culture as a Diocese, and our engagement with the wider culture of which we're part.

In his provocative book *Red Alert*, subtitled *Does the Future Have a Church?*, Gil Cann argues, 'We must not conclude, as many do, that the massive changes taking place in the world are the major causes of the death of [some] churches. The causes of death are the changes *not* taking place in the church.'¹

The unchanging Gospel has always been enculturated, contextual, which is why we have four canonical accounts of it: not beholden to culture, or captive to it; but attentive to culture, responsive to culture, and engaged with culture.

As one Australian reviewer of Cann's book observes,

The world has changed . . . radically . . . such that any church committed to "business as usual" will find itself on the road to irrelevance . . . The gospel, on the other hand, is always relevant and the church's mandate has not changed. Gil Cann's appeal to the local church to acquire understanding, demonstrate flexibility, exercise creativity and generate energy is, in essence, an impassioned appeal to choose life.²

Or, in the words of one of my favourite hymns:

O changeless Christ, forever new, who walked our earthly ways,
still draw our hearts as once you drew the hearts of other days.

As once you spoke by plain and hill or taught by shore and sea,
so be today our teacher still, O Christ of Galilee.³

Our commitment to Safe Ministry is integral to our kingdom-shaped culture: a kingdom with a child-sized door. Apologies for past failings are an important part of the journey, along with redress and compliance with new standards arising partly out of recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. But apologies and compliance are hollow without the will to effect real and lasting cultural change.

We will hear a report from the Chair of our newly constituted Safe Ministry Authority, and be encouraged, I'm sure, to embrace the opportunity we have for renewal in this area, in all of its complexity and administrative demands.

¹ Menangle NSW: Albatross Books, 2018, p.24, original emphasis.

² Elizabeth Kendall, in Cann, *Red Alert*, frontispiece.

³ Timothy Dudley Smith, *Together in Song* 254

The report of the Working Group on Ministry to the Dying is thorough, and timely, with legislation on Voluntary Assisted Dying set to come into effect in Victoria in June. How will we respond to that new reality of the society we're called to serve?

The Report honours the diversity of views represented in the 2017 Synod which commissioned the work, and offers some recommendations of a "bi-partisan" kind that we would like to see more of in our parliaments.

Perhaps part of what we have to offer the culture around us is our capacity to disagree well, to hold together in our differences.

Yesterday was IDAHOBIT: International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia.

At Gippsland Grammar of which this campus is a part, the Year 12 student leaders made a focus of this global awareness-raising exercise, and I was asked to contribute to reflections on this theme in Senior School Chapel during the week.

My own children – one of whom was dressed as the Inn-keeper for last year's Prep Nativity Concert in this hall, and the other who has murdered several perfectly good pop songs in various choirs at chapel assemblies from this very spot – have friends from this school and from their previous school who have two mummies or two daddies. This is normal for them; they have no fear of it, although I guess they could learn that.

In the Anglican Church of Australia there is currently no authorized rite for the blessing or solemnization of a marriage between two persons of the same gender, notwithstanding recent changes to the Marriage Act.

Last year, as was widely reported, the Synods of two Dioceses in the Province of Victoria resolved to commend 'the pastoral value of the Bishop authorizing a form of Blessing for optional use within the Diocese [] alongside or in addition to a wedding conducted by a civil celebrant'.⁴ If such a rite were to be duly authorized, it would open the way for the blessing of same-sex civil marriages in those Dioceses, in line with several Anglican Provinces overseas.⁵

Our next Session of Synod will take place on the threshold of a General Synod that will certainly address this issue, ahead of a Lambeth Conference that seems already consumed by it.

And whichever party forms government later today, there will be federal legislation on religious freedoms that will reflect the prevailing expectations of society around us with respect to appropriate limits on exemptions from anti-discrimination laws.

There will be a wide diversity of views on these issues in this Synod. Be assured, when the time comes for us to have some of these conversations as a Diocese, as it surely will, all voices will be heard, and all voices will be respected.

⁴ This is the text of part of the motion passed by Wangaratta Synod in June 2018; Ballarat's Synod passed a very similar motion in October 2018.

⁵ Anglican Provinces or Churches that authorise the marriage and/or blessing of the union of same-sex couples include: The Episcopal Church (USA); The Scottish Episcopal Church; Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia; and the Anglican Church of Canada.

At their consecration, bishops promise to guard the unity and discipline of the Church; and as your bishop, I will always seek to uphold that commitment.

You will also no doubt be aware that I too have a personal view on this issue; one that has been no secret before or since my consecration. It has emerged from years of reverently wrestling with the Scriptures, with Tradition, and with the ongoing revelation that comes through human experience and reason, governed by the Holy Spirit at work in the Church and in the world.

If it would be helpful for you to know how your bishop came to the position he holds, I have included in the printed text of this Address the details of two book chapters published in edited volumes that set out the reading of Scripture and theological reflection which informs it.⁶ If you have trouble accessing these, please contact the Registry and we will be sure you receive a copy.

Earlier in May a United Nations report sounded the alarm that nature ‘is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history’.⁷ Again, members of Synod will receive that report variously, ranging no doubt from skepticism to alarm.

The fact remains that according to the trusted Lowy poll, 84% of Australians support the statement that ‘the government should focus on renewables, even if this means we may need to invest more in infrastructure to make the system more reliable’. In Gippsland we live with the uneasy juxtaposition of non-renewables as a major economic driver, and the effects of climate change on our farming and tourism industries.

We have a wonderful resource with which to facilitate engagement with environmental stewardship from both a practical and theological perspective, namely The Abbey.

The Abbey’s vision continues to sharpen in focus and gain traction with school students, parishes, and visitors alike. Last Saturday I admitted the first 12 members of its Dispersed Community. The Abbey program is busy, and broad. Operationally this Diocesan facility breaks even; but it costs money to provide the human resources needed for its ministry to grow, and to reach more people within and beyond the Church.

As we approach Reconciliation Week we can give thanks for and be proud of our Aboriginal Ministry, and the wonderful – if often necessarily less visible – work of our two Indigenous priests in their communities. Yet, as I indicated in the latest *Gippsland Anglican*, existing funding for these positions is about to run dry, leaving the Bishop-in-Council budget – already under pressure – to absorb those costs.

Two weeks ago I could barely get in the door for Café 123’s third birthday celebrations. The stories that the new Management Committee has been hearing about this social enterprise’s engagement with the community – and especially with young people – are of the sort that would gladden Gil Cann’s heart, reflecting the agility and connectivity that comes with awareness of our surroundings. But it costs money to cover the deficit between staffing costs and trading revenue.

⁶ Treloar, Richard. ‘On “not putting new wine into old wineskins”, or “taking the Bible fully seriously”’: An Anglican Reading of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.’ Pages 13-30 in *Five Uneasy Pieces: Essays on Scripture and Sexuality*. Adelaide: ATF Press, 2011. See also Treloar, Richard. ‘Esther’s “Coming Out” as Costly Redemption: Living Through and Beyond the Violence of “Othering”.’ Pages 53-69 in *Pieces of Ease and Grace*. Edited by Alan H Cadwallader. Adelaide: ATF Press (Theology), 2013.

⁷ From the Inter-governmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

Investing in Episcopal Districts in growth corridors like Nar Nar Goon, or in ecumenical chaplaincies like that at Federation University, or (with Anglicare) in the Anglican Criminal Justice Ministry we upheld earlier in May – all of these cost money. And yet which of them is a space we think we don't need to be in?

Supporting some of our most remote parishes sometimes costs money. And yet if we did not have authorized ministry and buildings in some of these places, there would be no visible Christian presence in those communities.

Our financial position as a Diocese will be a focus of this 39th Synod, and there are some very real challenges on that front. In August, Bishop-in-Council will spend a whole day in facilitated conversation on our mission priorities and our budgetary constraints, which can often seem to be in tension. Bishop-in-Council will be looking to this Synod for guidance in making hard decisions, hard choices about how to return the budget to surplus over the next five years, as we absolutely must, for being fiscally responsible is also part of our stewardship.

We have no shortage of people, however, lay and ordained, who are looking to exercise ministry in every part of the Diocese, in all of these sectors and more. The skills and generosity of our clergy – including our wonderful retired clergy – of our Chaplains, Lay Readers, agency staff and volunteers, and dedicated church workers right across the region and the spectrum of activities we support is such a blessing.

The Vocations program is bearing fruit. We have a number of people in active discernment with respect to ordained ministry, and two ordination candidates, with a prospect of several others to follow. The Royal Commission made a number of recommendations with respect to the Church's selection processes and the professional development and supervision of clergy. At a national level there are moves to put in place a much more rigorous and consistent approach to these areas, which is to be welcomed, and needs to become part of our organizational culture here in Gippsland in the years ahead.

The opportunity to be trained and licensed as a Lay Reader is being taken up enthusiastically, and I look forward to the Lay Readers training days in June. Our Diocese has such a strong heritage with respect to the often pioneering work of Lay Readers, and it is heartening to see that tradition continue.

As well as raising up ordained ministry locally, clergy from other Dioceses have responded to a call to serve in Gippsland, in some cases in part-time capacities – an aspect of the flexibility needed to maintain a visible presence where full-time stipendiary ministry cannot be sustained. We need to be strategic about how we deploy the rich human resources that we are fortunate to have.

One way of achieving this is through partnerships. We already enjoy good and productive partnerships with Anglicare Victoria and other Anglican agencies and missions; with our two Diocesan schools; with our ecumenical partners in the Gospel, especially the Uniting Church of Australia; and with our sister Diocese in Rwanda, where I'll be next weekend for Bishop Manasseh Gahima's Installation as Bishop of Gahini.

All of these and other existing partnerships have potential to deliver greater mutual benefit and can be strengthened and deepened.

We also need to develop new partnerships: partnerships with community groups; with businesses that are looking to contribute to community projects; with philanthropic organizations; at a provincial level; in local government; with other faith traditions, as has been welcomed in recent vigils for Christchurch and Sri Lanka; with media outlets, in addition to the award-winning *Gippsland Anglican*, which is an excellent communications vehicle both online and in print, and delivers great value for subscribers and the Diocese's investment alike.

Building these relationships, these pathways, takes time. Some of them also require expertise, including those that might assist us to address the recent pattern of budget deficits. It may be that we need to employ someone who can source opportunities, apply for grants, develop bequest programs, set up foundations, and so on – a position that would, ideally, more than pay for itself.

Perhaps the most important choice we face has to do with the way we approach the complex issues and challenges before us. It's human nature to operate out of what I would call 'the principle of scarcity', that is, the fear that there is not enough to go round: enough money, enough land, enough food, enough love, enough truth. The principle of scarcity creates a world of zero-sum economies, where the more I have the less you have, and for me to be right you must be wrong.

We have another polity, however, a different dispensation. The economy, the *oiko-nomos* or the law of the house we are to build in the Church is one of grace. Not because the Church is better than the world, or more naïve, but because the Church exists as an instrument of the kingdom of God, and not for itself. In answering his own question, 'does the future have a church?', Gil Cann's answer is 'yes'. But he reminds us that the Church is to the kingdom what scaffolding is to a building.⁸

Let us not be too wedded to the forms of scaffolding we've come to know and love, and which have served their purpose well. Let us rather identify those forms which are fit for purpose now. And let us be so wedded to the kingdom of God that fear has no place in our decision-making.

Our Diocesan Vision 2017-2020 underscores this, inviting us – among other things – to be confident in our proclamation, to share our resources, and to learn new ways of being church. Not, in Cann's words, 'a new way of "being church the old way", but a new way of being church altogether'.⁹

Our Diocesan Vision also calls us to recognize and celebrate what we have. There are so many great things happening in Gippsland. If the local church is being urged to 'acquire understanding, demonstrate flexibility, exercise creativity and generate energy', then I see examples of these attributes everywhere I go. These days are an opportunity for us to acknowledge this as we receive reports and encourage one another in the ministry we share.

On this federal election day, and less than a fortnight after the State funeral for Eric Kent OAM, former Victorian Minister for Agriculture and member of this Synod for some 44 years, it seems fitting that the most ambitious piece of legislation before us in this Session has to do with the retirement age of clergy. This topic was a favourite of Eric's, who at 65 in his final speech to parliament referred to having reached the age of 'statutory senility', and proceeded to live to within 65 days of his 100th birthday!

⁸ Red Alert, 42.

⁹ Red Alert, 27.

You will make of that Bill what you will, but from my perspective, I see scores of people in their late sixties and early seventies – and beyond – who are at the height of their powers, and – in a time where the State has moved away from prescribing an arbitrary retirement age, it seems odd that our Church would continue to do so, especially when we consider that the English word ‘priest’ is derived from the Greek *presbyteros*, meaning ‘elder’.

I’m sure Eric will be voting from heaven, if not asking St Peter a sharp question or making a stirring speech! He would certainly have shared Gil Cann’s conviction that ‘Christian hope is not an escape to another world beyond this world. It is the most powerful of all motivators for a wholehearted response to the needs of *this* world.’¹⁰ So it proved to be for Eric Kent.

We’re mindful also on this federal election day of the death of our third longest-serving Prime Minister, Bob Hawke AC GCL, just two days ago. Whatever our own political leanings, I’m sure this Synod would want to acknowledge the public service of a man who, even as an anti-apartheid campaigner, fought passionately for things, rather than against them, always seeking consensus,¹¹ and thus a more inclusive Australia.

Others from our Diocesan family whose earthly pilgrimage has ended since Synod last met, and that members of Synod have asked be mentioned by name, include:

- Alan Knowles, Warden at Swan Reach in the Parish of Bruthen;
- Albert James (Jim) Smethurst, former Shire President of Buln Buln and longstanding Parish Councillor at Drouin; and
- Edna Mynard from St Mary’s Trafalgar, who taught Sunday School and served on the Ladies Fellowship and Op Shop team for many years.

There will be good and faithful servants whose lives of sacrificial ministry you will know, and may want to bring to Synod’s attention, alongside these four souls whose dedication to our Lord shaped all they sought to do and be in the Church and in the world.

May the choices we make, and the quality of our life together as the 39th Synod of this Diocese honour their memory, bring glory to God, and support the divine project of the kingdom: that present and future polity in which there is a Church . . . though perhaps not as we know it.

¹⁰ *Red Alert*, 39, original emphasis.

¹¹ See Toby Crockford, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 May 2019, online at: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/bob-hawke-flags-to-fly-at-half-mast-as-tributes-flow-for-the-former-prime-minister-20190517-p51o9g.html>