



ADDRESS

by

The Most Reverend Jeremy Greaves KCSJ

Archbishop of Brisbane

to the

First Session of the Eighty-First Synod

of

the Diocese of Brisbane

Saturday 22nd June 2024

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Welcome to this First Session of the Eighty-First Synod of the Diocese of Brisbane.

Because this is the first session of a new Synod, there will be some of you who are here for the first time. Welcome to you... and if you think it is bewildering being here for the first time as a Synod representative for your parish or ministry unit, spare a thought for me along the way as I stand here for the first time as your Archbishop, thankful to have the Chancellor and the General Manager within easy reach.

When I was installed as Archbishop, I was asked at the door of the Cathedral, by Ethan and Georgia, “How do you come among us and with what confidence?”

I replied then, as I might reply now, “I come, despite my fears, trusting in the love of God, knowing that the Christ walks beside me and the Spirit surrounds me with grace to give me courage.”

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... and I would add, that I also come sustained by the prayers of so many people, which is equally important.

Week by week as I visit parishes around the Diocese, I am encouraged that prayers are being said for me and for the other bishops and for the parishes and schools and other ministries in the diocese. When we feel like there is nothing more we can do, we can pray – we can turn our hearts and minds, intentionally, day by day in prayer for one another.

If you don't already keep a copy on your fridge or bedside table, I would encourage you to print out the Diocesan prayer diary, **Pray Daily** to assist in focussing your prayers for the church around the world, our nation and this Diocese. It is easy to find on the internet and is one more tool that can assist intentional prayer for each other.

The day after my installation I was stopped at the back of a church I was visiting and asked, “So, what is your plan for your first 100 days in office?” and I've been asked many variations of this over the past several months. “What's your vision for the Diocese?” “What's your plan to reverse decline?” “What are you going to do?”

And the temptation is always to come up with something.

My first hundred days coincided with the first hundred days of the Premier and he listed dozens of things he'd achieved in the three months he'd been premier. Another hundred days have passed and I still don't have as impressive a list, but I am here and I am doing my best to be faithfully present in all that I do.

Part of that faithfulness is recognising that I don't have all, or even many of the answers, to the challenges we currently face as a church – I am depending on all of you, and the grace of God to shape, together, this next season in our life as a diocese.

The Trappist monk, Thomas Merton once wrote, "What I wear is pants. What I do is live. How I pray is breathe."

I think the basic message here, and one I need to hear on a regular basis, is to stop trying so hard to be spiritual, deep, and profound. Wear your pants, live your life, and feel the wind... and yes, don't forget to breathe.

Plans are terrific but often the best we can do is, "Get up and show up, as faithfully as possible, with as much love as possible and be open to that first next place to where the Spirit might be leading us."

My hope is that over the next couple of days of Synod and through the next few years that might be our work together: to get up and show up, as faithfully and as fully as we can, as we discern the first next place to where the Spirit is leading us.

Part of that discernment will be about the shape of ministry in a season where we continue to decline in numbers and where our finances are stretched more and more. The legacy of abuse through redress and compensation payments, along with the increased costs associated with everything from keeping the lights on through to stipends and insurance, means that we must find new and creative ways of being the church along with new and creative ways of funding and sustaining ministry.

In the midst of the challenges we face it would be easy to turn our focus inward. However, it is important that we don't do this. We are called to participate in God's mission in the world by turning our gaze outwards to the needs of the world and the people amongst whom we live. As hard as it is, this means sitting lightly with our internal problems as we live by and share the good news of Jesus Christ, serve our communities and continue being God's people for God's world.

Living in a world riven by conflict and ravaged by the impact of climate change we must continue to ask, "What is our calling?" as God's people who have a Gospel of hope to share.

At the time of writing there are 25 ongoing armed conflicts around the world. While many of these conflicts have all but disappeared from our newsfeeds, innocent people – usually women and children – continue to be killed and displaced by ongoing violence not of their making.

We are particularly mindful at this time of the ongoing conflict in Gaza where (at the time of writing) close to 34,000 people have been killed since the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023. This has been grimly documented each day in world media.

But in Sudan, the suffering continues in its second year without nearly as much attention—even though the scale of Sudan's agony makes it perhaps the worst humanitarian crisis in Africa.

Almost 15,000 people have been killed since fighting began between two competing military groups last year - a figure that is almost certainly an underestimate, according to New York-based Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch reports that Sudan now represents the world's largest internal

displacement crisis, with more than six million uprooted from their homes and communities inside Sudan's borders. Much of the country's infrastructure—homes, hospitals and schools—has been reduced to rubble.

UN Secretary General António Guterres recently told reporters, "The world is forgetting about the people of Sudan,"

However, amongst the Sudanese and South Sudanese people in our Diocesan family there is no one who is not touched by these things. Recently Bishop Daniel visited South Sudan. He said that the situation of Sudanese / South Sudanese refugees in Kakuma Refugee Camp (Kenya) is so dire at the moment that he won't be visiting: he doesn't want to give people 'hope' – he said that if they see him they will think he has come with solutions.

Members of our Sudanese and South Sudanese communities have not only had the violence from the other side of the world to deal with. At the beginning of this year I met with community and church leaders and heard about some of the other challenges they face as they try to establish themselves in this country. Many Sudanese and South Sudanese people have arrived in Australia traumatised and unprepared for the dissonance between secular Australian culture and their own.

One South Sudanese church leader has said, "The culture of Australia has made us the enemies of our own children" and cited a number of difficulties, including with police and child protection agencies, language and employment.

Bishop Philip Huggins from Melbourne recently talked about some of the challenges faced by the community in Victoria, "Some parents now wish they'd never come to Australia...such is the shame and grief of losing their kids to gangs, and feeling powerless to prevent this happening. Then to now feel humiliated in the media and the streets, as if they are all criminals!"

In the lead up to an election this year, when youth crime will be a focus for politicians and the media alike I hope that we can work together to build friendships and trust across cultural divides so that we can continue to seek ways of supporting Bishop Daniel in his work along with the Sudanese and South Sudanese congregations and communities with whom he works.

At the end of April, the United Nations reported that in the conflict in Gaza there were already 1.7 million people displaced, 33,634 Deaths and 76,214 Injured. According to UN estimates, more than 10,000 women have been killed to date, among them an estimated 6,000 mothers who left 19,000 orphan children behind. According to the World Bank, over one million Palestinians are without homes, close to 90 per cent of health facilities have been damaged or wrecked and schools have been destroyed or turned into shelters for the newly homeless.

Into all of the violence in our world Jesus speaks words of peace.

Jesus said, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over [to the Judeans]. But as it is, my kingdom is not here." (John 18:36)

In other words, according to one scholar: "Your soldiers hold me, Pilate, but my companions will not attack you even to save me from death. Your Roman empire, Pilate, is based on the injustice of violence, but my divine kingdom is based on the justice of nonviolence and peace."

Between the two kingdoms stands one stark difference: Jesus' nonviolence as opposed to Pilate's violence.

The challenge for followers of Jesus is to work out what it means to be active peacemakers in a violent world, to discover how we might cooperate in establishing the Kingdom of God “on earth as in heaven.”

This will always mean standing against violence in all its forms – the violence of war but also the violence of persecution and hatred. Just as we condemn the violence unfolding in theatres of war across our globe, we must also be clear in our condemnation of the violence of anti-semitism, Islamophobia and the persecution of any group or individual.

It is a good thing that, following the passing of a motion at last year’s synod, a working group has been established, in line with the 3rd Mark of Mission, “To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation” to do a number of things including,

- Explore the theological bases for peacemaking
- Make recommendations on how to disagree well, how to build peace at all times, and being willing to lead true reconciliation with an enemy (Luke 6.27)

In the face of ongoing violence across our world this is important work and I look forward to reading more as the Working Group continues.

But violence is not restricted to overseas conflicts or within one particular cultural group at home.

Bureau of Statistics figures suggest that an estimated 831,400 women in Queensland (42%) have experienced violence (physical and/or sexual) since the age of 15, including:

24% (479,900) who experienced sexual violence

34% (671,500) who experienced physical violence

Of women more broadly in Australia, 27% (2.7 million) have experienced violence or emotional/economic abuse by a cohabiting partner, including:

17% (1.7 million) who have experienced partner violence (physical and/or sexual)

23% (2.3 million) who have experienced partner emotional abuse

16% (1.6 million) who have experienced partner economic abuse

In the first four months of this year 27 women were killed by intimate partner violence – 11 more than at the same time last year.

These figures are horrific and, as we discovered some years ago, they are mirrored amongst those who call themselves Anglicans. We have much work to do as a church and as a society if there is to be a change.

The Anglican Church in Australia has developed and endorsed the Ten Commitments which aim to ensure “conditions that support the prevention of violence, a church culture that promotes equality and provides support for those in our church communities who experience violence” (General Synod Resolution year: 2022, Resolution number: 64/18). We have committed to teaching about equality, freedom from violence, respectful relationships and the honour and value of every person. <https://anglican.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Ten-Commitments-April-2021.pdf> .

In Southern Queensland we have made progress implementing the Ten Commitments in several areas including the endorsement of free training for Clergy and others, updating the Domestic and Family Violence section of our website and undertaking a number of events and other initiatives during Domestic and Family Violence Prevention month and the 16 Days of Activism.

Recent resources added to the website include templates for Vigils and services of lament especially for use during May. Current work in this Diocese is focused on revising policies, procedures and guidelines associated with Domestic and Family Violence including amendments to Faithfulness in Service.

Diocesan Council has recently endorsed a proposal to “Take the (Not Now Not Ever) Pledge” whereby organisations across Queensland can stand together with the Queensland Government to work towards a future free of Domestic and Family Violence; our pledge (to be signed at this year’s Synod) will say:-

The Anglican Church in Southern Queensland pledges to work toward a Queensland where everyone is equal and free from violence.

The Anglican Church in Southern Queensland commits to playing our role, working within our organisation and in partnership with others including other faith communities, to raise awareness, improve prevention and provide practical assistance to end domestic and family violence.

The Anglican Church in Southern Queensland recognises and is committed to the promotion of a respectful, supportive, and safe church environment that does not justify or excuse domestic and family violence in any form.

I look forward to making that pledge on behalf of the Diocese.

Our commitment to end violence is one expression of how we hope to travel together as God’s people. Another expression of how we journey alongside each other is found in the motion that came to the Synod in 2022 asking for a group to be established to explore what an apology to LGBTIQ+ people might look like.

In response there has been a careful listening process going on across the Diocese over the past couple of years. LGBTIQ+ people have been invited to tell their stories of being excluded by and hurt by the church. Those stories have been painful to read – they have been offered graciously and honestly with great vulnerability. Those same people have been asked what an apology from the church, in this place, might look like. What should we say? How should we say it?

The working group has listened and consulted and worked to craft the apology that this Synod will consider. The words have been carefully chosen in consultation with LGBTIQ+ people and my hope is that the motion will pass without amendment so that we honour those who have given so graciously throughout the process.

Of course the second part of an apology is a commitment to change, and there is more work to be done as we think through what practical actions we might undertake as we live into the apology. When we offer an authentic apology it means that things have to be, and will be, different as we move forward. Already our schools and Anglicare are leading the way in this space and there are many parishes and other ministry units exploring how they might be more welcoming and inclusive of all people. Saying “sorry” isn’t the end of the conversation, and like with previous apologies made by the Synod in the Diocese, I am mindful of how much more work we have to do to make the church a safe place for all people.

Safety for some people is about having the security of a place to live. In Australia the housing crisis continues to put more and more people at risk of homelessness. However, in many parts of our world it is the impact of climate change that is forcing people from their homes.

Some figures suggest that by 2050, at least 1.2 billion people could be displaced by climate related events such as floods, drought, storms and heatwaves.

Sea-level rise is another threat. Over the past 30 years, the number of people living in coastal areas at high risk of rising sea-levels has increased from 160 million to 260 million. 90% of those people are from poor developing countries and small island nations.

The threat from rising sea levels is being felt in our own country as well. The Torres Strait Islands are among the most vulnerable regions to climate change in Australia. As sea levels continue to rise tides are more destructive, coastal erosion is happening faster and buildings, roads and even burial grounds are being washed away. Access to clean water is a growing issue for many island communities. Wells are increasingly unusable because ground water has become contaminated with sea water.

Sea levels in the Torres Strait are projected to rise by around 75cm over the next 100 years. This would lead to the loss of marine industries, increased physical and mental health issues and probably the submersion of whole islands.

Last month I visited the Torres Strait at the invitation of Aunty Dr Rose Elu who wanted me to see firsthand, the impact of climate change in the Torres Strait so that I could help raise awareness of the issues and assist with advocacy for the people there. During my visit I saw the extent of erosion on a number of islands and the work that is being done to build sea walls to try and hold back the tides. I heard about the challenge of growing food where the change in the water table has made gardens too salty for planting. I saw graves, once in the middle of a village, now being washed into the sea and the bones of peoples' ancestors exposed on the beach. And I heard the deep sadness of people who feel forgotten by other Australians as they are at risk of losing their homes and culture as their Islands become unliveable.

As a Diocese we have committed ourselves to care for creation. I am sure there is more that each one of us can do to reduce our impact on the planet and bring about change so that Island communities like those in the Torres Strait will not be forced to leave their homes.

Care for creation, working for peace, working to end violence, making the church a safe place for all people are all expressions of what it means to be called as disciples of Christ into relationship with one another so that we might journey into the future as God's people.

So, how might we journey together? And what are the challenges we face as a church?

Around twenty years ago in a book for the Alban Institute, the American writer Rick Barger wrote, "the rebirthing of an authentic church with transformational traction within the culture is not about programs or strategies. It is about bringing to life, out of the rich soil of the church, the ancient and authentic story of Jesus Christ and the construction of a faith community whose life, passions and Character are constructed from the authenticity and integrity of the story. In order to rebirth the church and conceive anew Christ for the world in this opportune time to be the church, some things will have to die."¹

And a bit further on, he writes, "Instead of giving the world deals, causes, spiritual services, programs, tactics, propositions, and arguments, what if the church instead gave the world Christ?"²

In this Diocese we have faced decline in Sunday church attendance for 70 years: COVID only exacerbated this. While Anglicare continues to grow and do remarkable things, and we have around

¹ A New and Right Spirit: creating an authentic church in a consumer culture (Alban, 2005) Rick Barger – p.71

² Ibid p.91

25,000 young people and their families associated with our schools, it is true to say that we are a church in crisis.

Year after year we have sat in this Synod and heard the statistics and, apart from some outliers and some green shoots, the numbers are grim.

There are worshipping communities that buck the trend and are growing and attracting new worshippers, but mostly we are in decline, and we find it hard to celebrate such successes and we find it very difficult to learn from those in parts of the church that are different to our own. Every part of the tradition has gifts that could benefit the others.

As a priest from Scotland recently wrote in his blog, we have failed to “communicate to local populations that something that will give them life in all its fullness is right on their doorstep...” He says, “I don’t think decline is inevitable but we need life-changing worship and a clearer narrative if things are going to change for the better.”

When we face challenges of such magnitude, we have two options: to meet them or not to face them. Meeting them involves a lot of work and giving up the comfort of continuing to do the same old things – it is uncomfortable and hard and sometimes unpleasant.

However, we are not called to conform and to sit still, the people of God have always been a people on the move. As Dom Hélder Câmara said, “Pilgrim, when your ship long moored in harbor gives you the illusion of being a house; when your ship begins to put down roots in the stagnant water by the quay: put out to sea! Save your boat’s journeying soul and your own pilgrim soul, cost what it may.”

The great missiologist John V Taylor said that “mission is an act of imagination.”

We have had a failure of imagination.

For too many of us, our only experience of church has been a church in decline and we have trouble imagining anything different. And sadly when there are those who come amongst us in our parishes with imagination and creativity there often is a resistance to try new things. Perhaps this comes out of a tiredness because, “we’ve tried that before” or perhaps many of us have come to prefer the pain of dying to the challenge of change.

Embedded in our Diocesan Vision are the values of Comprehensiveness, Faithfulness, Courage and Creativity & Imagination. We know how challenging “Comprehensiveness” continues to be – but what a gift to the world if we could work out how to flourish together with all of our differences.

Courage, creativity and imagination are just as challenging if we are tired and anxious and all but ready to give up, however without them nothing will change and it will not be too many years before we are a brilliant social welfare provider and school system with only a handful of people gathering Sunday by Sunday for worship.

Despite all of this, there are plenty of reasons for hope! We have committed and passionate people across the Diocese who continue to faithfully show up, worship God, say their prayers and do the work of being the church. Despite the challenges we remain committed to local presence and we have an abundance of assets (even if many of them will need to be re-purposed). And we are able to take a long view of things with a faith that says, in the words of Sam Wells, by the grace of God we have a future that’s bigger than our past... 2000 years is not really very long and we have a bigger, longer future than that.

As Christ calls each one of us to discern our part in God’s mission for the world we are invited to ask, “What might it look like for me to “give the world Christ”?”

In the rich diversity of this diocese, there are so many possibilities and we are in a season where imagination, creativity and courage are more important than ever if we are to make the flourishing faith communities that are at the heart of our Diocesan Vision.

As the Standing Committee of General Synod wondered about some of these same challenges they identified Evangelism as one of its strategic priorities before the next General Synod and asked the Mission and Ministry Commission to plan a season of parish-based evangelism in 2025.

“Hope 25 – Hope in an uncertain world” which was recently launched, will run from Easter Day to Pentecost in 2025 as a time of encouraging parishes and agencies all over Australia to focus on evangelism, or giving Christ to the world.

In February this year, representatives from 22 out of the 23 dioceses in Australia gathered for a workshop to plan what this initiative might look like. In a time in the life of our church where there has been such a focus on what divides us, it was remarkable that such a diverse group could come together to focus on and discuss something that unites us – the love of God in Christ and how the hope of that love might be shared.

It is hoped that every parish and agency around the country might find one new way of reaching out to their community and sharing the Gospel during the season of Easter next year. The idea is that if every parish and agency does one thing there will be a multiplying effect across the nation. There are plenty of resources being developed to assist people and parishes from every part of the tradition and locally we have our own working group comprised of Claye Middleton, Ann Edwards, Michael Calder, Catherine Govan and Melissa Conway who will be happy to answer any questions you might have. I encourage you to find the Hope25 website and to start thinking about how you might engage with this initiative in 2025.

These sorts of initiatives will not solve our current crisis but perhaps it will be one more small piece in our vision of building Flourishing Faith Communities in the Anglican Church in Southern Queensland.

It seems to me that this vision is something that would resonate with those faithful Anglicans who were here at the very beginning of the Morton Bay settlement in the 1820s.

Likewise the struggles of those early years seem to resonate 200 years later.

In his history of the early years of the Diocese, Archbishop Keith Rayner writes:

The beginnings of the Moreton Bay settlement in 1824 were scarcely promising. Throughout the twenties and thirties Brisbane Town never became more than a crude and straggling little convict village. Slowly the population grew from the 45 who were recorded in the 1825 census; by 1828 there were 378 inhabitants, a figure that had already doubled by the following year. At its peak at the beginning of the thirties the station numbered over a thousand – convicts, officers and soldiers a few government officials, and some wives and children. Spiritually the prospects of the settlement did not look hopeful. Professional soldiers were hardly the most religious men, and early nineteenth century clergy found it hard to think of convicts as potential pillars of the church... One Moreton Bay chaplain pointed out to the missionary society which supported him that “they are, on that account, as may be supposed, the worst characters”. It is true that here was real scope for a zealous chaplain who might be anxious to help individuals to repentance and reform by personal ministry to them; but most of the colonial chaplains had little taste for this type of work, nor indeed real appreciation of the need for it. The work of the church as they saw it was to provide public

worship, supervise education, and perform the occasional offices of baptizing, marrying and burying. That was sufficient!

The challenge for the struggling church was not just those outside the church. From the very beginning, the Anglican Church in Southern Queensland has had to think carefully about how ministry is resourced. The Diocese of Brisbane was established just after crown grants of land to churches was stopped and was founded without any great endowments. From the very beginning this Diocese has depended on the generosity of faithful people to sustain and grow its mission and ministry and this has presented its own challenges.

Archbishop Rayner writes...

Another issue besides the purely financial one was involved in the need to change over from an endowed to a voluntary system of support for the church. Some of the laymen felt that as their contributions were supporting their minister, he could be regarded as a sort of employee of theirs, who ought to fall in with their wishes. Gregor on one occasion complained that some of his parishioners "expect, not that the Gospel shall be preached & the sacraments administered with fidelity, but that the clergyman preaching according to their taste, shall be their tool in all political questions touching their temporal interests, & their slave in everything.

Of course this would never happen today!

It was hard times.

The official returns for 1859 showed that the average attendance at Anglican churches in the Moreton Bay district was only 640, out of the ten thousand or more who claimed to belong to the Church of England. 6.4% attendance is not that far from attendance rates today.

The latest figures for Australian Anglicans today suggest that 5% of people who say they are Anglican attend with any sort of regularity.

And like today there was a shortage of clergy and of clergy with a calling to leave the city.

Particularly in the outlying districts, where the clergy tended not to stay long, there were sometimes long gaps between the departure of one priest and the arrival of another. Roma, for example, after having a resident priest for a brief period in 1868, was then vacant for almost six years. Goondiwindi after a short time with its own clergyman waited sixteen years for its next incumbent.

In many ways we have come full circle.

Bishop Tufnell had the idea of establishing some kind of diocesan fund from which at least part of the stipend of the clergy might be paid, supplemented by the offerings of the local congregation.

In 1868 he explained the reasons for the fund to the Synod:

To be entirely supported by voluntary contributions, in my judgment, places the Clergy in a position of unhealthy dependence upon the will of the congregation; whilst on the other hand, it appears to me that the system of entire endowment is exposed to the danger of rendering the Clergy too independent of the affectionate respect and good will of those who are committed to their pastoral supervision.

It seems like it was a great idea, but it was not followed up, and Keith Rayner says that, "Finally, in 1870, a canon was half-heartedly passed for the establishment of a Diocesan Fund. Its object was to

provide a central fund to pay for the passages of new clergy, to help with the stipends of priests in poorer districts, to assist with the erection of churches, parsonages and schools, and to promote education. The income was to come from rents and interests, annual subscriptions, special collections and grants from the English societies.”

Of course the fund was never properly subscribed and never reached the corpus required to do what was hoped.

And then about 15 years ago, Archbishop Phillip Aspinall launched the “Going For Growth Fund” – a great new initiative to be used for the advancement of the Mission of the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane as deemed appropriate by a resolution of Diocesan Council. Approved use of funds may include, but is not limited to:

- support of Christian formation and education programs
- support of charitable/welfare programs
- support of new mission programs/special projects
- funding or debt servicing of property purchased to facilitate mission objectives
- maintenance/repair of Diocesan property

It was intended to be a growing endowment, over time producing a growing income stream which Diocesan Council may apply to mission activities within the Diocese.

Of course the Going For Growth Fund has never achieved the size needed to do what it set out to achieve and if it is ever to do so we must be intentional and strategic about building the fund so that we have the capacity to resource new models, new ministries, new buildings and new ideas as we open ourselves to the new possibilities to which the Spirit is calling us.

Over the next few years as we make some courageous (and difficult) decisions about closing churches and opening new schools and Anglicare sites we have a window of opportunity to really build the Going for Growth Fund. If we were intentional about making a significant contribution from every property sale or lease we could grow the fund in a way that we have not been able to thus far.

As we bring a “whole of Diocese” lens to every decision we make we will find new synergies and new possibilities between Anglicare and schools and worship communities along with new possibilities for sustaining mission and ministry.

In 1932 Franklin Roosevelt wrote of America, “The country needs and, unless I mistake its temper, the country demands bold, persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it: if it fails, admit it frankly and try another. We need enthusiasm, imagination and the ability to face facts, even unpleasant ones, bravely. We need the courage of the young. Yours is not the task of making your way in the world, but the task of remaking the world which you will find before you. May every one of us be granted the courage, the faith and the vision to give the best that is in us to that remaking.”

He may just as well have been speaking to us in this season of our life together. “Faithfulness, Courage, Imagination and Creativity” sit alongside Comprehensiveness as the values that will see us into a new future.

“Parishes, church buildings, bishops, regulations (Archbishops!!!) – these are things people have made up; Anglican episcopacy is the product of culture and history rather than theology. The Church

did fine without a parish system for 1000 years or more”³ and we have some work to do to ensure that all of our structures are fit for purpose at this time.

Cathy Ross and Jonny Baker remind us that “Reading the book of Acts is breathtaking. Here the Church is hardly able to catch breath to keep up with the dynamic explosion of growth as the news of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection ripples outwards from Jerusalem along the trade routes of the Roman Empire, and new communities form. There is no settling down – the Spirit beckons the apostles across borders they thought were uncrossable – to Samaritans, eunuchs, gentiles – and it gradually dawns on them that God is the God of the whole world, of all peoples and is concerned for the redemption of all things and all peoples. And this God is free, not contained by their religion or denomination or theology but always ahead, moving beyond.”⁴

It is this openness to the Spirit that I referred to right at the beginning of this address.

The first active verbs used of Jesus in the Gospel, are when he was in the temple debating with the teachers. We are told that he was “listening” and “asking them questions.” So listening and asking questions must be a vital part of how we engage in mission in this new season. Listening to the spirit and listening to the communities in which we are located (a bit like praying with the bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other)⁵...

A church that listens more and pronounces less, with new and flexible models of ministry will be a very different church to the one planted in Brisbane towards the end of the 19th century. A changed church will require changes to how we select and form our clergy and we are already beginning to have conversations about requirements for ordination. Regardless, the season we’re in surely requires a missional imagination and theology at the heart of training and those being trained to see themselves as leaders in mission.⁶

And as patterns of ministry change, we are already becoming mindful of the cost to clergy of living and working in these changing times. Clergy and lay people alike are under enormous pressure and feeling ever more anxious about the future: this sometimes manifests in poorly managed conflict, sometimes in poor mental health and sometimes in clergy and lay people being treated poorly by each other.

The idea of a stipend – a living – is to provide clergy with housing and financial means so they can share in ministry in the parish to which they are licensed. A stipend is not a salary paid for a certain number of hours worked and many clergy work far more hours than we would expect of anyone else. The tradition of having only one day off each week is something that is not in our Canons, is certainly not required and is increasingly questioned across the church.

A number of Dioceses have normalised the idea that clergy should have two full days off each week. The Diocese of Newcastle introduced changes there motivated by a focus on clergy wellbeing. The new model has not affected stipend rates for full-time clergy and has been strongly supported by clergy and lay people alike.

The move in Newcastle and in Bathurst where a similar thing has happened, to normalise a five-day working week for stipended clergy has enabled many clergy to improve their work-life balance, model appropriate self-care and improve effectiveness.

³Imagining Mission with John V Taylor, Cathy Ross and Jonny Baker, SCM Press 2020, p.15

⁴Imagining Mission p. 17

⁵Humility in Leadership: Kenotic Ecclesiology for a Post-pandemic Age, Martyn Percy

⁶Imagining Mission p. 38

A recent study found that the top three reasons Australian clergy considered quitting the ministry were job stress, loneliness and that their families were suffering – it is simply unsustainable for clergy to be working with only one day off each week and I encourage clergy and parishes alike to explore how patterns of ministry can be better shaped to ensure well-being, effectiveness and sustainability.

In his book *Imagining Mission*, Jonny Baker asks, “what [would] church look like if we assumed that presence in the community meant participating in life rather than being shut away in a building?”⁷ and it is exciting and encouraging to see small groups of clergy and others meeting in different parts of the diocese to explore new ways of being in, and engaging with, the communities in which they are located. Alongside these conversations, deaneries and archdeaconries are meeting to think strategically about the future and how parishes can reshape themselves for this new season. These are all signs of hope and life as new ideas bubble up, collaboration increases and individuals and parishes explore new things.

In many places, particularly away from urban and suburban centres there continues to be a focus on lay ministry and on equipping lay leaders for ministry. Like the earliest days of the diocese there are increasing numbers of parishes that have been without resident clergy for a number of years. It is only because of the dedication, hard work and faithful ministry of lay people that we are able to retain an Anglican presence in many communities.

In other places parishes are experimenting with shared leadership models where lay and ordained people work together to ensure patterns of worship continue and people are cared for. And as mentioned previously, work continues at St Francis College to explore how we form and train leaders (both lay and ordained) to do the work of ministry with God’s people in this time.

None of us know the future shape of the church: the church of Christ has changed over the decades and centuries and will continue to do so, but we do know that the Christ who continues to call us is faithful, and journeys with us into whatever future awaits.

Our vision of “Flourishing Faith Communities” and our commitment to the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God remains a central part of that future.

As we live into that vision and mission we must remember our call to be faithful disciples of Christ grounded in a Comprehensive Anglican way of being and acting.

We are called to be courageous and proactive in bringing that identity to life, recognising, nurturing and celebrating the diverse gifts and contributions of our people.

My hope is that belonging to ACSQ gives our people the courage and confidence to be hope-filled participants in our mission and to be imaginative and courageous about different forms of faith community.

In this new season we will continue to seek to understand what flourishing looks like in different contexts and to know and value each other and work collaboratively in all of those different contexts.

As faithful disciples of Christ and heralds of the kingdom, we will be known to make a difference for good no matter where we are as stewards of God's abundance and good news for generations to come.

But none of this will come without some change.

⁷ Ibid p. 20

Change is always painful and there will be difficult decisions ahead and plenty of challenges but we will “hold fast to what is good” and listen for the call of the Spirit who is making all things new.

As we respond to that call, our task is not to control, or programme, or force our way into the future but to lean on God, prayerfully discerning the next step along the way as we imagine together the sort of world and the sort of church we might be called to shape in this new season.

