

# The Link

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

DECEMBER 2020 – JANUARY 2021



## Our new bishop- Rod Chiswell

*Ready for the task, in God's strength: Jenni and Rod Chiswell.*

**ON SATURDAY, 12 DECEMBER, THE Reverend Rod Chiswell** was elected the next Bishop of Armidale. Rod is married to Jenni and they have two grown children: Georgia who has just completed the HSC, and Sam who is 26 and married to Clare with three children; Rosemary, Norah and Harriet.

Rod has lived in the Armidale Diocese almost all of his life. He was born in Bingara to Peter and Betty Chiswell, the youngest of three children. He completed his early school years in Gunnedah then went to high school in Armidale. At the age of eight, at a Scripture Union Camp, he was convicted of sin, and prayed for forgiveness asking Jesus to be Lord of his life. At age 18 he went to the University of NSW in Sydney where he completed a Bachelor of Civil Engineering and had some formative Christian growth years under the ministry of Philip Jensen.

He then moved to Moree where he worked as an engineer for five years with Moree Plains Shire council. During that time, he married Jenni and both became solidly involved in serving at All Saints Anglican church.

Prompted by the question “how can I serve God best with the gifts He has entrusted to me”, he returned to Sydney to study at Moore Theological college where he completed the Bachelor of Theology degree. Rod and Jenni were sent to Mungindi where he served as Vicar for five years, before moving to Walcha where they served for seven years and then to South Tamworth where they have ministered for the last 13 years.

Rod was asked by Bernard Gabbott to consider allowing his name to go forward to an Election Synod. He was concerned about leaving the ministry at South Tamworth, about leaving family, and about feelings of inadequacy in taking on the bishop’s job. Because his father, Peter, was a previous bishop of the Diocese, he knew a bit about what a bishop does and the burden that comes with the job. It was daunting.

The timing however was interesting because he was preaching through Judges and the sermon he was preparing the week he needed to decide about letting his name go forward, was the one about Gideon. Gideon was a reluctant judge who needed lots of reassurance. While Rod didn’t lay out a fleece like Gideon did, he realised three things that were helpful and reassuring.

Firstly, the fact that God can use ordinary people to accomplish his purposes: secondly, that those God calls to a task He equips for the task: and thirdly that leadership of God’s people is essentially about trusting God and obeying His word.

In the end he realised that though he felt inadequate, if God was to call him to the job of being bishop of the Armidale Diocese then he needed to trust that He would empower and equip him to do it. Jenni agreed that this was true and found the timing of having to prepare the Gideon talk strangely reassuring as well.

Having grown up and served in the Armidale Diocese all his life, Rod has a heart for the people of this patch. He longs to see as many of them as possible introduced to Jesus and helped home to heaven.

Having served God’s people as a Vicar in this part of the world for 25 years he also has a fairly clear understanding of what ministry in the Diocese is like and the challenges clergy face in small, medium and larger parishes.

He wants to connect with laypeople and help clergy to get on with the job of proclaiming the gospel to the lost, preaching God’s word faithfully to his people, and loving them in His strength.

Now the job lies before Rod. He can do it only in God’s strength. Let us pray that God gives him wisdom, courage, compassion, a clear vision, and strength to do this task. 

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## About

The Link, Number 76  
December 2020 / January 2021

ISSN 1834-0741

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Art direction and assistance from Stephen Mason and Anglican Media Sydney. Thanks to all photographers who contributed to this issue.

The Link is published by the Anglican Diocese of Armidale as part of the Diocesan vision to “Introduce people to Jesus and help them home to Heaven”.

# For such a time as this

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Rev. Brian Kirk

Vicar-General

**SATURDAY** DECEMBER 12TH MARKED THE Election Synod for the Diocese of Armidale, where (under God) we chose the Reverend Rod Chiswell to lead this Diocese as its bishop in the years ahead. The decision before us was a weighty one, and it will have a bearing on the Anglican Church at local, diocesan and national levels.

We had before us two quality nominees, for which we thanked God. What were we to look for in the person we chose? While I cannot speak for all clergy, I can speak from a personal perspective about what I think is important. It is from this perspective that I issued the Synod charge on the election day.

“Above all,” I said, “I am looking for a man of God. A man who will uphold the priority and necessity of God’s word for salvation, who will be humbly dependent on the Lord, who will exercise wise and godly leadership, who will care for the poor, needy and vulnerable amongst us, and will seek to exalt the name of the Lord.

The New Testament clearly, repeatedly and unapologetically lays out the qualifications of a pastor. I believe a bishop is a pastor to the pastors. What is so remarkable, yet so often overlooked is this: pastors are called and qualified to their ministry not first through their raw talent, their finely-honed skills or their great accomplishments, but through their godly character.

Tim Challies wrote: “Of all the many qualifications of a pastor laid out in the New Testament, there is just one related to skill (ability to teach others) and one related to experience (not a recent convert). The rest of the nearly 20 qualifications are based on character.” As we elect a new bishop, I am looking for someone whose life is centred on the Lord Jesus in faith and deeds.

I am also looking for a person to lead our Diocese at such a time as this. These are challenging times for the Christian Church. As Christians, we are facing unprecedented challenges in light of our society’s growing secularism and opposition to Christianity. Just as God raised up Esther for a particular role at a challenging time in the history of God’s people, I am also asking God to raise up a bishop to lead our Diocese through the challenges that are before us.

At a diocesan level we face numerous challenges: the ongoing impact of climate on farming communities; declining populations in some centres; special districts struggling to sustain viable ministry. Many difficult questions are before us: how do we sustain viable ministry in marginal areas? What will ministry look like into the future in rural areas as we seek to introduce people to Jesus and help them home to heaven? We face the challenges of raising up and/or attracting ministry workers to rural areas, and appropriately responding to the stresses on ministry workers and their families in isolated contexts. There are increasing administrative

and compliance demands brought about by things such as Royal Commissions, safe ministry and professional supervision. Societal views on gender equality, gender fluidity, same-sex marriage and women in leadership are influencing the church and we ask ourselves: 'How do we respond?'

At the national church level, I am looking for a leader who can and will engage constructively, meaningfully and biblically into issues such as human sexuality, biblical authority, and the future of the Anglican Church in Australia, whilst building co-operative relationships with like-minded Dioceses.

We have come through drought, bushfires and a pandemic and I am looking for a man of God for such a time as this – someone who is full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit, who has been shaped and raised up by God to lead this Diocese through further difficult times ahead, keeping our eyes *'focussed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith'* (Hebrews 12:2)."

We give hearty thanks to God that he has raised up Rod Chiswell for such a time as this and ask you all to uphold him in prayer. 

## From a farmer

*Lesley Hathway from the Tambar Springs/Mullaley area is a laywoman who was part of the Election Synod Committee charged with organising the election Synod to choose a new bishop. We asked her to outline the qualities she was seeking in a bishop.*

"He needs to be a man who clearly sees and believes that God and God's word as given to us by Jesus and the whole bible, are the most important and trustworthy things in his life.

He and his wife must endeavour to live godly lives and work to glorify God in all that they think, say and do. We want a man who is an honest teacher and encourager from God's word in both public meetings and private conversations.

Being a regional Diocese, the next bishop (like our past bishops) will need to be a bible reader and very dependent on God's strength through prayer, reading and the help of fellowship and the prayers of others. Also, as with city ministries he will need to be able to read maps. A previous Bishop's wife used one of the Armidale Anglican Women's Diocesan tea towels to find her way around and Google isn't always listening in some far-flung parts of our Diocese! Most parishes have incomes that are predominantly from parishioners involved in primary production and its service industries. This can mean that church 'bonus' incomes can be seasonal. However for me in our situation of the Tambar Springs Special District the biggest issue is a shrinking population in the area as a result of changes in industry and technology. In the shift from sheep to cropping and cattle in the late '60s we lost the shearers and reduced farm labour. Then in the '70s we changed from two-wheel drive tractors to much bigger four-wheel drive tractors and wide scarifiers and so reduced labour again and the bakery shut. From the '80s on there has been a gradual increase

in Notill farming with less cultivation and more spraying and even more labour reductions. Parts of our district are an hour's drive to the nearest town so we need some ideas on how to maintain mission and ministry here and in other similar districts.

The most recent Church Life Survey showed that we need to do more to reach men and the Indigenous community in our Diocese. Our new bishop needs to take that on board.

Being a bishop means he is a defender of the gospel and the supremacy of the whole bible in a bigger arena than just our parishes. He will be up front in Diocesan leadership, encouragement, discipline and recruitment, but he is also an undeservedly forgiven sinner, just like the rest of us. So, he and his family will also need us praying for, forgiving and encouraging them.

I hope that he will set a helpful example in all sorts of areas. But he should not feel alone or isolated in the reverses, hard slogs and joys of ministry. We all share in that. Help us all to keep our eyes on Jesus as we run this race of endurance!

I prayed that we would have godly and wise men with supportive families nominated. God answered that prayer with two excellent men, Rod Chiswell and Sandy Grant, and I forgot to say thank you!

So, I am now thanking God for the clear result and I am praying that as a Diocese, parishes and as individuals we will continue to introduce people to Jesus and help them home to heaven.”



*Answered prayers: Lesley Hathway and Brian Kirk at the election Synod.*

# Clergy moves

*At this time of year, we can always expect to hear of movement among the clergy. 2020 may have been a difficult year, but it has not stopped the usual packing up and heading off that many clergy families experience.*

## Steve and Louise Cimarosti – from St Peter’s, Armidale to Warialda

In January 2018, Louise and I, along with August who was one year old at the time, moved into the Diocese of Armidale. On Christmas Eve of that year, we welcomed Marcus into our little family.

Prior to 2018, we were ministering in an independent church on the coast. By the time my ministry finished up there, I was pretty bruised, and not even sure that we would continue in formal parish ministry. I was not actively looking for Anglican ministry positions and didn’t know what 2018 would hold, but we knew one thing – that there was no way we would consider moving to Sydney. At that time, I did not know anything at all about the Armidale Diocese, and didn’t know much about specific Anglican ministry either. But out of the blue, I received a call from the Diocese, and was asked to consider coming to minister here as a curate. As we explored our options, it became clear that this is where God wanted us, and I was offered a job at St Peter’s Cathedral in Armidale as a curate under the Dean, the Very Rev. Chris Brennan.



On Father’s Day, this year, the Bishop asked me to move to Warialda to become the vicar there. When he asked me, I was slightly shocked but ready to go, and that is in no small part due to the hard work of the Cathedral parish and the Dean. You need to understand that throughout my years of Bible College and ministry elsewhere, I have never aspired to be the vicar (senior minister)

of a church. But the Cathedral has a great privilege of training and sending people out into the Diocese and further afield, and they have done their job well - They have loved and cared for me as a minister - and us as a family - incredibly well.

Through this God has always had a plan. His trajectory for us has been to more and more rural places...from Sydney to Port Macquarie, to Armidale, to Warialda! Ten years ago, I would have laughed in your face if you told me that I would end up as the vicar of a little church in Warialda, NSW! In fact, my first response would have been, 'Warialda? Where is that?'

When we do get to Warialda in the new year, on one hand I do not quite know what to expect. Running a parish for the first time is a bit like having a baby - there is only so much you can prepare for it, and we will just have to jump in and figure it out. On the other hand: the gospel of Jesus doesn't change, so I expect that we will continue knowing, trusting, serving and sharing Jesus and His gospel in this new place, just as we have in a bigger context.

I suspect that Warialda will be a bit quieter than the Cathedral and will also lend itself to being more personal and community focussed. No doubt this will bring its own challenges.

One of those challenges is that we will be the youngest family in the parish. This is particularly apparent for Lou, as there will be no other young mums in her stage of life (yet!).

Of course there will be sadness both for us and for the Cathedral parish when we leave in January but we know that, in the Lord, goodbyes are never forever.

If you are a praying person, please pray that I spend lots of time listening to and serving the saints and wider community in Warialda to the glory of Christ. Pray that the Cathedral would continue to keep an outward focus, and they would faithfully raise up ministers for the harvest, despite the hardship of seeing a change in their ministry team every few years. Would you also pray that we as a family might cope with the change to a smaller country town, and that we would find friends in the parish and the local community. Finally, please ask God to bring more younger families to church as they are drawn to Jesus.

## Neil and Steph Hunt- from Narrabri to Wee Waa

I've been ministering in Narrabri as a member of the clergy since the beginning of 2019. I was born in Tamworth, and I and my family spent most of our years in Armidale, so I guess you could include those as years in the Diocese too. Early next year, we will all be moving a little further out west to Wee Waa. That's me, Steph, and our son Seamus who is 17. Our three other daughters live back in Armidale.

Wee Waa Anglican has had a long history of Jesus-loving, Bible-loving, church-loving blokes and their families: most recently Daniel and Erin Hayes and before them my current boss Bernard and the rest of the Gabbotts, and before them Simon and Erin Carter. All those blokes and their wives

were well loved by the congregation and the community. We'll just be going as ourselves, so Wee Waa will just have to take us as they find us. We've already discovered that they're a wonderful bunch of brothers and sisters, so we know we'll get a warm welcome when we arrive. So yes, we have some big shoes to fill, but I'm sure that we and the Wee Waa congregation will all just plod away together in His service.

We've never lived in Wee Waa or in a town of that size (about 2000), so I am not sure what specific gospel opportunities there will be for us. Like many rural towns, it's seen some hard times in the last decade. I'm sure that has opened up many opportunities for the good news of Jesus. I'll certainly keep proclaiming the gospel to our congregation, but of course the whole community needs to hear who Jesus is and

what He has done, don't they? They also need to see how He transforms the lives of His saved people. I know this has been happening in Wee Waa for years and we pray it will continue. I guess we'll pick up the nitty gritty of how gospel proclamation best works in Wee Waa as we go along.

We're praying that our Lord will enable us to build on the solid foundation of His word that's already established; that we can be an encouragement in Him to a congregation that's kept a steady course over many tough years; that we can help our people keep reaching out with His gospel to the various different circles in the community. On a more personal note, we're praying that we'll get to know the Wee Waa way without too many blunders. We know that in small towns people tend to know all about what others are up to. It's something we haven't experienced so we'll need to get used to being 'on show'; but then all Christians are 'on show', aren't they? This feature of small-town life has great benefits of course, and we're looking forward to the famous Wee Waa hospitality. One phrase we often hear is 'Oh, we had a great time when we lived in Wee Waa. Such a close-knit community, so friendly!'

We are praying that this close-knit community might see their desperate need of the Saviour Jesus Christ and turn to Him in faith.



## John and Sarah Cooper - from Tenterfield to St Peter's, Armidale.



We began work at the Cathedral on the 12th of October 2020. As always, our focus is on sharing the good news of Jesus and growing His disciples. With Steve Cimarosti moving to Warialda and a new curate (John Costin) beginning in 2021, our particular ministry focuses will be worked out next year. For the moment, I am preaching, visiting and getting to know this church family.

We are glad to be here and are excited to serve amongst this church family. We are all unpacked and are getting to know our neighbourhood.

I'm looking forward to working with the other staff, putting down roots as a family and seeing what God has in store.

Pray that we would walk closely with Jesus, teach his word faithfully and that God would bring many people to himself.

## Simon and Jenny Waller left Warialda to move to Gunnedah

After 15 years in Warialda (2005 - 2020) we moved to Gunnedah on the 1st October 2020.

We are still finding our feet and trying to get our heads around a bigger, busier parish. We do have our boxes all unpacked (none sitting around to be opened in five years' time). The church people here have been absolutely fantastic in welcoming us and making us feel at home. The house is lovely and we were greeted with a huge basket of goodies to get going. Lots of people have made the house and garden like new. Thank you Gunnedah! We still miss our friends from Warialda and wish we could be helping them set up the place for their new minister.

I think the biggest difference between Warialda and Gunnedah is how busy it has been and will be. We were not mentally prepared for that! I must have become very comfortable in a quieter smaller place without realising it. There are some interesting things we noticed, like traffic. Lots of cars. That may sound strange to some, but it was the first thing we both noticed. It is also true that I don't have to do everything. There are other people here running ministries and I don't have to



run them. That is great because the body is supposed to work that way. I will need some time to adjust my thinking in that area.

But, of course, there are similarities. The people are similar. I love being with God's people. They are kind and warm and generous. Warialda is a lovely place with lovely friendly people. It has a family feel. So does the church in Gunnedah. It is such a pleasant experience to be among believers and to see them live and love. I would much rather be with God's people than anywhere.

Like every place in the world, Gunnedah has been affected by COVID-19. It has made life more difficult for people, but it has also helped us to become more flexible. Meeting together has not been the same because the congregations were spread out across more services to meet Government requirements. Friends miss each other. People who would normally mix have not been able to mix so they miss their friends and their news. Many of the church fellowship and outreach events are on hold. There is a sense in which this a period in which we can re-evaluate. We are longing to sing and have morning tea together!

Please pray that we will use the opportunity we have to evaluate. Give thanks for David and Joanne Piper and the church who kept things going in that very difficult period. Please pray for us as we continue to adjust to what is new, and as we try to get a sense of what we have here so we can articulate a vision and strategies for outreach and encouragement.



# Singing behind the mask

**THERE HAS BEEN A GREAT** change in what we are allowed to do in church. Singing is back! After months of warbling along as we sat at our computer screens, then sitting in church watching the music team sing, at last we can rise our voices in praise again...albeit behind a mask.

David White (left) who attends church at St Peter's in Armidale was glad to be able to sing again. "I grew up singing," he said. "I recently read an article that said singing is physically good for you, and I'm sure that is true. Who cares if it's behind a mask? It doesn't matter."



Adam and Erinn Simpkins (right) have been long-term member of the Cathedral's congregations.

"COVID has been a rollercoaster," Erinn said. "It was so hard when everything stopped; I have just been grateful to meet in any capacity. The best thing has been just seeing people again. Lockdown was difficult with three small kids and we really missed our church community. I was a bit dubious about the thought of singing with a mask, but I could have cried when the music started! I realise now that it is so special being able to sing together. It is something we easily take for granted. I guess singing seemed like just a habit, but now it has re-instilled how important everything we do in church is to us.



I am really grateful to our ministers and how they have handled this hard time. They have managed so well and tried their best to encourage us. I appreciate all the effort they have put in. So much thought goes into our services anyway; it is hard for ministers and normal for us to take things for granted. This year we had the carpet ripped out from underneath us. I certainly appreciate what we have now."



# Mission despite COVID

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Nick Stone

CMS Northern NSW Representative

**AS WE ALL KNOW, THIS** year has been one of change and many challenges. Our CMS Missionaries have felt the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic so much more than we in Australia.

Gillian Law (right), who is currently serving in Italy, has reflected on the second wave of COVID-19 that is currently being felt across most European countries. The severity of the pandemic and state of the health systems have made it tough. Her day-to-day life is still impacted by strict restrictions, so she continues to hold bible studies online. Thankfully, they are starting to build some momentum among the students.



Gillian isn't the only missionary feeling day-to-day impacts of the pandemic. We have heard other missionaries reflecting on similar themes, like 'M' who is serving in the Middle East. Her last update mentioned that at least 25% of the population in her country has COVID-19. Because of lockdowns and other restrictions, many people are struggling financially.

Amidst updates like these, we are thankful that we are still seeing God at work in many lives.

The following is a recent update from our missionaries Andrew and Margie Newman (right) in Uganda, a great perspective on unpredictability in our current situation:



“We weren't expecting our life routine to be what it is. Often, we struggle to adapt. What should we expect from everyday life? If you asked Margie lately she would say she is expecting God's mercies to be new every morning because His faithfulness to His people is great (Lam.3:23 24). If you asked Andrew on the same day, he would say, he is expecting some kindness to come his way because the Lord is present in every day (Ps 139:5). Why do we say this? This is our conviction: Life is so unpredictable. We can say that with 20/20 vision now, can't we? Like stunned mullets, 'we've got nothing'. The one constant is a faithful God. Every day, He is bringing blessing to the nations. That is His promise, fulfilled historically, through Jesus. What is that blessing? Having Him declare us righteous based not on merit but by turning and trusting him. How counter-intuitive! Trusting is a challenging road.”



We ask you to partner with us this Christmas and summer period by donating to our Christmas Appeal, to ensure our missionaries can continue their work in this challenging time.

Visit [cms.org.au/christmasappeal](https://cms.org.au/christmasappeal) to donate today. One-off donations can go much further than you think in a year like this.

We would also love you to check out our Summer Series content (available online soon) with Bible teaching on 1 Samuel from Rev Dr Andrew Reid, and inspiring mission input from our CMS missionaries. Find out more online [cms.org.au/qnsw/summerwithcms](https://cms.org.au/qnsw/summerwithcms)