

The Link

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

2023 MAY/JUNE

Strength for the family

Steph Hunt

I WAS 48 WHEN I BECAME A GRANDMOTHER. PERHAPS THIS is young for our culture, but not for most of the world. Is it harder or easier for parents today? I love to spend time with my two rambunctious grandsons and I'm sure it's harder for my daughter than it was for me – they never stop running!

Was it harder or easier in 1876 when Mary Sumner first became a grandmother, also at age 48? She remembered how hard she had found motherhood and invited women from every social class to all come together for a meeting (radical for England!) about the importance of

parenting and keeping prayer central to the life of the family.

Perhaps the question is not was it harder or easier? The question is from where do you draw your strength for this difficult task? Mary knew where to look and God blessed her endeavours as the Mothers' Union (MU) was born and grew to what is now a global Anglican organisation with over four million members in 84 countries.

The motto is *Sharing Christ's love by encouraging, strengthening and supporting marriage and family life*. This is especially vital at a time

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when the definitions of marriage and family life are being re-defined in an unbiblical way, as our culture moves away from God's good plan for human flourishing.

There are two main ways you will see MU active in our diocese: in its two branches and our diocesan events. MU operates as an adjunct to local church ministry and as a leadership team we work with and under the umbrella of the local Anglican church.

Each branch meets monthly (Armidale every second Thursday and Inverell every third Friday) for prayer, encouragement from God's word, fellowship and works of service. In Inverell, there are two 'MU Grandmas' who help at Little Stars Playgroup each week – what a blessing for the kids and carers in this group! Both branches provide baby baskets to their local hospitals or to church families to welcome and show support for families of new babies. The handicraft skills of these ladies are much appreciated. The Armidale branch has purchased Christian books for children in the church and seeks to support and welcome new families.



Inverell's 'MU Gandmas', Christine Miles-Mercer and Kaye Toole show they haven't lost the magic grandma touch.

Diocesan events

Four to five times per year the executive team and interested members meet to discuss MU diocesan business and to pray for, plan and execute the yearly event. The pattern has been one year a focus on strengthening marriages and the alternate year equipping parents and carers. These Diocesan events are open to all – men and women, church and non-church.

Last year, Ann Cunningham from Sydney MU visited six centres for events aimed at equipping parents and carers in some hot topic issues of parenting and was hosted by the local Anglican church in each centre (Inverell, Armidale, Tamworth, Moree, Narrabri and Wee Waa).

The MU annual general meeting is held each year in October. Alongside the AGM is an event with a panel or speaker that aims to encourage those attending with God's good wisdom for marriage and families.

Membership is only \$25p.a. and provides a quarterly magazine *MiaMia*, MU global prayer diary, voting rights and discount ticket prices to diocesan events. Importantly, membership also expresses our support for the biblical definition of marriage and family life as God intended.



Steph Hunt and Rose Kasemire in North Kigezi.

North Kigezi Partnership

Our diocese is privileged to have an ongoing partnership with the Diocese of North Kigezi in Western Uganda. MU is strong and well-supported in North Kigezi as in many parts of Africa and we're so encouraged to see the gospel-informed work there.

I was thrilled to be able to visit the MU shop and Canon Beatrice Ruhindi Training Centre when in Rukungiri this last January. This vital work supports and trains at-risk girls in vocational skills so they can live and work independently.

I especially enjoyed getting to know Mrs Rose Kasemire who is the principal of the training centre and a returning delegate at the NextGen conference. She describes how helpful the conference has been in understanding the big picture of the Bible and "how to minister and how to teach the students how to minister to the other students using the Bible."

DAWN

Diocese of Armidale Women's Network (DAWN) is a public facebook page administered by the MU executive with announcements of events and links to resources and organisations we believe will be helpful for upholding Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and families.

It's a network enabling us to support one another as we seek to live for Jesus and make Him known in our families, workplaces and communities.

Our God has made marriage and family a central pillar to any healthy society. But keeping marriages and families strong and healthy is just as challenging now as it was back in Mary Sumner's day. In our own day, both institutions are constantly being undermined and devalued.

Prayer for marriage and families is vital. So, whatever your age and stage, child, parent, grandparent, single, or married, please pray for the marriages and families in your own circles. Your prayers will strengthen your local church as well as the wider community.

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At home and beyond

Rod Chiswell

GREETINGS FROM ARMIDALE WHERE God's grace in the beauty of creation is everywhere to be seen in the superb autumn colours. It was a lovely setting for our daughter's wedding the weekend before Easter, and Jenni and I thoroughly enjoyed the celebration. God's goodness continues to be evident as Jenni and I travel around the diocese and see the fruit of faithful gospel ministry in every parish.

Of particular encouragement to us was our time with Oxley Vale Anglican Church on their Green Valley Farm church weekend away. I had the opportunity to speak from John's gospel chapters 1,4 and 9 about the life transforming effect of meeting, trusting and following Jesus. The weekend was a reminder of the relationship building value of getting away together as a church family, with both long-term and newer members.

Also encouraging to us was our visit to Baradine at Easter. Good Friday saw 24 people gather to remember the atoning death of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Then Easter Day saw, many of the same in church again at Baradine with about 30 more at a shearing shed just out of Bugaldie gathering to reflect on the living hope that is ours through faith in the risen Lord Jesus. It was a reminder to me of the good work to be done in our special districts and the need to find solutions that work for ongoing ministry in those places.

In recent weeks Jenni and I have also been at North Tamworth for a service in which three new believers were confirmed and three more were baptised. It is marvellous to see the way that God continues to add to the number at that church plant.

All of these visits follow a very busy first term involving a couple of big weeks outside the diocese.

Uganda Consecration

The first of these was the consecration of the newly elected Bishop of the North Kigezi Diocese in Uganda. Bishop Onesimus

Asiimwe's service was held on Sunday 12th March in Rukengiri and was attended by 7000 people! These came mainly from within the diocese, but also in attendance were bishops from all over Uganda and some from surrounding African countries as well.

I was the only white-faced bishop in the throng and felt very privileged to be there amongst our African brothers and sisters in Christ. The day before the consecration I was able to visit the local Bible College where Margie and Andy Newman are serving with CMS.

On the afternoon of the consecration, I was also able to meet briefly with Bishop Onesimus to discuss the diocesan partnership. We spoke of the three levels of partnership being Next Gen training each January, the Canon Ndimbirwe Bible College with CMS and Armidale support, and Clergy Conference training support from our diocese every second year. The bishop seemed very positive and eager to continue these things in partnership with Armidale. He then asked me to pray for him, which was a great joy and privilege. I continue to uphold him in my prayers. I'm grateful to Brian and Sharon Kirk for accompanying me to Uganda for the consecration. It was a short but valuable journey.



Bishop Rod with Bishop Onesimus in March this year at his joyful consecration.

Australian Bishop's conference

The timing of the Uganda consecration was not ideal in that it meant I got back on the Thursday and had to fly to Hobart on the Friday for the annual Australian Bishop's Conference. God was kind in that miraculously I did not get jetlag at all at either end of the Uganda trip and so was able to function fairly well at the bishops' gathering. The week was not as enjoyable as the Uganda trip, but it was a valuable time of building relationships with some bishops, and of understanding where the different sides are coming from.

The Bible studies each morning this year were on topics that had relevance to the divide between liberals and evangelicals on matters concerning human sexuality. The topics were: the gospel, judgment and blessing. The format was for an evangelical then a liberal bishop to present a ten-minute Bible study on the topic followed by discussion in mixed small groups.

It quickly became evident that the way evangelical bishops use and interpret the Scriptures is very different to the way liberal bishops view and interpret the Scriptures. Regrettably, I cannot see us ever coming to a common mind regarding the current serious divide over human sexuality and what constitutes wilful sin. This division has prompted the call from some evangelical clergy and their congregations in liberal dioceses for alternative episcopal oversight. This has led to the emergence of the Diocese of the Southern Cross under the GAFCON umbrella. I've said before that I believe this was a sad but necessary step given that alternative episcopal oversight from within the Anglican Church of Australia seemed unlikely if not impossible.

The worldwide Anglican church

Meanwhile divisions in the worldwide Anglican Communion continue to grow fuelled by the recent decision by the General Synod of the Church of England to allow the blessing of same sex unions in their churches.



Scott Dunlop, Vicar of North Tamworth Anglican church baptises Chloe Hitchcock.

GAFCON considered the state of the worldwide Anglican Communion at its recent gathering in Kigali, Rwanda. I was unable to attend due to my trip the month before to Uganda, but from that gathering has emerged a document called *The Kigali Commitment*. It represents a united voice from 85% of the Anglican communion worldwide and I think is a good response to what has happened in the Church of England. It strongly affirms the authority of God's word and underlines the failure of the Archbishop of Canterbury to uphold it. The Kigali statement therefore rejects the Church of England as the mother church and Archbishop Justin Welby as the head of the worldwide Anglican Communion. I wholeheartedly support *The Kigali Commitment* and commend it to you.

Apart from *The Kigali Commitment* itself, another announcement made at the Kigali gathering was the handing over of the chairmanship of GAFCON Australia from Bishop Richard Condie to Reverend Peter Smith who is the rector of Dalkeith Parish in Perth. Peter is the son of Bishop Ray Smith who formerly served alongside my father and others in the Armidale Diocese. He is an ideal man to take on the job, located as he is in Perth where the current archbishop continues to pursue a "progressive" path with regard to matters concerning human sexuality.

Gospel worker recruitment update.

Interest in the Armidale Diocese continues to be strong, in Moore college particularly. We currently have three men signed up as candidates but have strong interest from nine more, scattered over the next four years. While there are a number of loose ends at this stage, I am hoping to place at least five curates in 2024 and have new vicars in two or three of the smaller centres.

Early this term Reverend John and Ronnie Costin and their family moved back to Sydney where they will serve in the parish of Northmead, and in July Neil and Steph Hunt will move from Wee Waa to Walcha. I am in the process of following up a locum who has shown strong interest in serving at Wee Waa in the second half of this year. We continue to search for a chaplain for TAS. Please pray that God will provide the right person for that job soon.

Coming up

On the 3rd of June, the Commission for Education and Discipleship will be hosting a Lay Preacher's Conference in Barraba. Reverend Bruce Bennett will be the speaker and it promises to be a very fruitful time of input and encouragement for current and would be lay preachers from right across our diocese. Please promote this gathering

in your parishes at every opportunity. Every conference we run is designed to help the clergy team equip the saints so that together we more effectively *Introduce all people to Jesus and help them home to Heaven.*

Finally, on Tuesday 13th - Friday 16th June we have the Annual Armidale Diocesan Clergy Conference which will be held at Keepit Dam. All ordained gospel workers are expected to attend, and all other paid gospel team members have also been invited. Dr Simon Gilham who is the Deputy Principal of Moore Theological College is our main speaker, and he will be addressing the theme of local and global mission. We will also have Stephen McAlpine speaking to the clergy once again about how to minister in a climate of growing opposition to Christianity in our culture. Please pray that this week away will be one of refreshment, where clergy can be fed well from God's word and enjoy great fellowship and encouragement.

After all of those good things this term, Jenni and I will be heading on Long Service Leave for six weeks for July and half of August. We're hoping to have a road trip to Cairns and looking forward to enjoying more of the beauty of God's creation. May God continue to strengthen you all in his service as we look forward to Christ's return.

With love in Christ, Rod Chiswell.

Focused on the future



Elliot Chapman
Youth Encourager

ON THE 22ND OF JULY, 2023, THE FIRST *FUTURE FOCUSED* conference will be running in Armidale at St Peter's Cathedral.

Future Focused is a conference which encourages young adults aged 16-30 to think seriously about how they will serve God for the rest of their life, no matter where God places them in the future. Over the day, attendees will hear two talks and then have the opportunity to go to one of three workshops on either year 13, evangelism in the workplace, or MTS.

This year Scott Curtis will be opening the book of 1 Corinthians, helping us to think deeply about how God has equipped us to serve Christ with our whole lives. Scott is a minister at Hunter Bible Church, Newcastle, where he lives with his wife Meryn and their two daughters.

Attendees will have the chance to consider opportunities to complete MTS or a year 13 traineeship. MTS (the Ministry Training Strategy) aims to recruit and train gospel workers through ministry apprenticeships, for the vital task of gospel ministry. Year 13 traineeships provide the opportunity for school leavers to get a taster for full-time ministry at local parishes as they get involved in ministry and complete some Bible training.

At *Future Focused*, attendees will also have the opportunity to complete a workshop on evangelism in the workplace. This workshop will challenge and equip young adults to thoughtfully engage people around them with the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Please be praying that this is an encouraging event for many young

adults. Pray that God would challenge many to think deeply about how they can be serving him. Pray that some would consider the call to go into full-time ministry.

If you are seeking to think hard about how you can be serving God in all spheres of life, come along to *Future Focused 23*. It's going to be a great day, don't miss it!

Register now for *Future Focused* by heading to
<https://armidaledioceseyouth.com/future-focused/>





Ask for help. Change your life.

Fay and Linda at Anglicare in Tamworth.

Claire Dunlop
Regional Manager

FOR OVER 160 YEARS, ANGLICARE HAS BEEN SERVING PEOPLE in need, providing care to older people and services to the vulnerable. But it is only when you hear the stories of individual people that we can begin to comprehend the life-changing power of the organisation.

One afternoon an older gentleman, Gordon, came into the Tamworth office looking for some help with sorting out his financial situation, marriage problems and memory loss. He didn't know where to access any help in Tamworth. Fay, an Anglicare staff member, assisted him with referrals to the Anglicare Financial Counsellor, Donna, who quickly realised that Gordon had been providing his bank account details to people overseas who were promising him a return on his money. Of course, it was a scam and Gordon lost thousands of dollars out of his bank account.

Gordon's wife Jane was from a different cultural background and had limited English. Fay and Donna needed to ascertain support needs and issues that Jane was desperately trying to express. Fay and Donna were able to communicate affectively by using a Mandarin translation app on mobile phones. This enabled everyone to get to the bottom of the underlying problems. These included profound financial and social isolation.

Gordon and Jane were able to join *Anglicare At Home - Respite and Wellness Centre (Aged Care)* on a Wednesday, where they met new friends and enjoyed a healthy lunch. Both celebrated Christmas with the other participants and staff. This was a joyous occasion as they had not celebrated Christmas for many years due to their financial situation.

Gordon and Jane have begun to shop at the Anglicare's Mobile

Community Pantry operating in Tamworth. This has allowed for the purchase of more affordable groceries for the couple and the opportunity for a healthier diet. Previously Jane had said that the couple did not have enough money to buy food.

Fay contacted *MyAgedCare* and both Gordon and Jane are now being assessed for a Home Care Package which will provide them with ongoing supports into the future. Fay arranged a translator to assist Jane with the assessment.

Once their Home Care Package was approved, they were able to receive support in the home from Anglicare including meal preparation support, housecleaning and medication prompting. Life became so much easier in their later life, all because Gordon asked for help.

Anglicare's Home Care services for seniors in Tamworth can provide peace of mind for older people who can be confident that their health and support needs are in caring, professional hands as they age. Anglicare offers compassionate and specialised home care services, well-trained, Care Workers, as well as registered nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and other health care professionals.

Anglicare works in partnership with the individuals themselves to develop a comprehensive care plan focused on improving quality of life. You can choose from a wide range of products and services such as:

- Housework; which can include light cleaning, changing bedsheets, washing and other day-to-day tasks. Garden maintenance services are also available.
- Meal support; a care worker can give you a hand in the kitchen or, if needed, can prepare the whole meal for you!

Meet the faces of Anglicare

Anglicare is a big organisation, but its purpose is to help individuals where they are. Within the area covered by the Diocese of Armidale there are many people in many places with many roles. But they all have just one job...to help.



Sarah Atkinson lives in Tamworth and is passionate about helping people live and thrive beyond a mental health issue.



Carmen Cudmore wants to deliver the caring and compassionate aged care services which can transform an older person's life in her home town of Tamworth and beyond.



Claire Dunlop is Regional Manager. She lives in Moree but is happy to travel many kilometers to use her social work and management skills to empower the communities around her.



Team Leader for Foster Care, Candy Malcolm from Narrabri says, "Having worked in the Child Protection system for many years, I value using the skills I have developed in a Christian organization that sees children and foster carers through the eyes of Jesus."



Team Leader Scott Bates lives in Tamworth. He told us, "Working alongside disenfranchised people in our community, and seeing them make positive changes in their circumstances is what drives me to give my best."



Counselling Manager Julianne Lilley lives in beautiful Uralla. She says, "It is a privilege to live out Jesus' love as I support people in their healing journey."



Team Leader Michelle Patch who lives in Inverell said, "I have the honour of working with some of the most vulnerable people in our community, and I cannot think of a better way to serve Jesus."

- Transport services, whether it be to the shop, appointments or socialising with friends
- Shopping support, which means a care worker accompanies you to the shops or even does the shopping for you.
- Personal care which includes showering, dressing and grooming.
- Products and home modifications can be purchased or leased using your package funds. Products can include anything from walking aids, personal alarms and motorised scooters to continence aids and health supplements. Minor home modifications can also be arranged to help you remain independent and keep you safe.
- Dementia care is supported by a professional team of registered nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and care workers.

You will also have access to the Dementia Advisory Services Unit which supports those living with dementia and their families with education and social support programs.

- Pastoral care, while the last on the list, it is far from the least important. If you need someone to pray or read the bible with you, or just be a kind ear to listen, Anglicare's pastoral service is free!

Did you know that all these services are available to you, or to someone you love? Perhaps it is time you picked up a phone to ask for help. Gordon and Jane are living proof that, at Anglicare, you have only to ask for help and it will come.

Following the family footsteps

Matt and Chloe Hearne, along with Elise and Kate have come home to the diocese that first taught them about the love of Jesus. Chloe, from Boggabri spent her high school years in Gunnedah, and Matt, through his parents Geoff and Catherine Hearne (who now minister at Moree) spent his early life in Tamworth and Quirindi.

“During my time at Moore College I was a part of a prayer group for rural Australia, and we often prayed for the Armidale Diocese,” Matt said. “Having grown up in the diocese, with family still there, and a conviction to see rural churches grow and the lost saved, we made the decision to chat with Rod Chiswell about what serving in Armidale would look like. After lots of catch ups, Rod suggested a couple of ministry locations, including Barraba. Initially we said no to Barraba because we were keen to have the two years being a curate and getting trained up before being sent out on our own. But Rod continued to suggest it as a good option and asked us to prayerfully consider whether it might be something we could take on. After lots of conversations with people we trusted, and lots of prayer, we decided that although it may be challenging, God could use us despite our weaknesses and so we said yes to serving at Barraba.”

But Matt and Chloe were not left on their own in Barraba, to sink or swim. Instead, the bishop asked Dave Fischer, Vicar of Manilla, to act as a mentor/trainer for Matt. “He’s sort of like my senior minister but in a different church 30 minutes away,” Matt said. “We meet up once a week and read the Bible, pray together, and chat through any ministry issues that have come up. As well as that he has been a great help in training me for practical ministry tasks such as safe ministry procedures, how to run a funeral etc. It is working out well and I’m very thankful for Dave and his willingness to take time out of his own busy schedule each week to help me learn and grow. He has lots of wisdom and is very generous in passing it on to me.”

To return to a place where your parents are extremely well-known could be a bit of a problem for many people. So far, Matt has not found it so. He told us, “I think overall it has made it easier. Having grown up in the diocese has meant I feel a bit more equipped in understanding the nature of the ministry in this context and the way of life for those in the community. I also know lots of the clergy already which has meant I feel well supported already. It has also been very helpful having Dad only a phone call away when I’ve needed help with something ministry related. I learnt from my parents that ministry is fairly relentless, that there is always more to do, and that ministry doesn’t



work in a nine-to-five way like other jobs. I learnt that it is very relational and people focused. We often had people in our home, strangers knocking on our door asking for help, and lots of phone calls with people wanting to speak to Dad. I also learnt that there are hard times, but lots of joys, seeing people grow in their faith and come to know Jesus as their Lord. I learnt that in small town ministry there are great opportunities to be a big part of the community where people know you and come to you for ‘spiritual’ things.

You essentially become the town chaplain, and people quickly know you as the minister. You have lots and lots of opportunities to connect with people through baptisms, funerals, being on sporting committees and through the schools. You quickly get to know the cafe owners, the postman, the dance group teacher. Already I have had the chance to give the local ANZAC day address and do an Easter service at the aged care facility. These connections with people in the town allow you to be a part of people’s lives, to invite them to church, to preach the gospel to them.

As well as that, it’s a beautiful part of the world, the pace of life is slower and really there’s no place I’d rather be. As with lots of places, there is a great need to continue to raise up workers for the harvest in rural areas, so ask yourself whether God could use you in this context for his glory.”

Sunday School to City Bible Forum



Angus Martin, along with Olivia, Ted, Annie and Lily have come home to Tamworth. For Angus it’s the same but different.

“I’m serving on the ministry team at St Peter’s Anglican Church, South Tamworth. I’m also working for City Bible Forum which seeks to reach the world for Jesus through workers, and for me the mission is to help workers in Tamworth reach their colleagues.

I grew up in Tamworth! I was born in the Base Hospital and went to Carinya Christian School, my family brought me along to St Peter’s South Tamworth where I was baptised, went to Sunday School, youth group, and owned my faith for myself. As a child, I saw it as a church full of friends and grown-ups. Now I see it as a church of fellow citizens, saved sinners, broken people who have been redeemed by the blood of the lamb – and by God’s grace, that includes me as well! It’s a place that’s close to my heart with many people whom we love, but it is a place that continues to need the gospel because there are still thousands heading for an eternity of judgment. So this is a return home to work alongside God’s people in preaching the gospel, but it isn’t home – we long for our eternal home

I think that the greatest challenge for regional clergy is hearts of stone in the people we are seeking to win for Jesus, in-fact that’s the greatest challenge for all. We all must pray, clergy and lay, for God to give people a heart of flesh.

Please pray for juggling two roles, church and City Bible Forum. Pray that my family would cherish serving Jesus and the privilege it is to be set apart to be doing the work of the Lord.

Give thanks to God for our family in Christ at Tamworth and the joy it is to work alongside them. Pray that many more across our region would come to trust and follow the Lord Jesus.”

The long road to Moree

Philip and Jessica v'ant Spyker have recently moved to Moree where Philip is the Assistant Minister. Though Sydney born and bred, they had thoughts of serving God in Darwin, or even China. But the Lord had other ideas, and has brought them (along with Jasper, Tabitha, Otto and Corin, as well as Chilli, the cattle dog who has never actually rounded up cows, but feels that opportunity is now just around the corner!) to the north-west of New South Wales.

Before Moree, they were serving in Yeppoon, Queensland with Bush Church Aid; Philip as a families' minister, and Jessica right alongside him, and at a local primary school as a chaplain.

"There remains a great need for people to serve the Lord in Queensland," Philip said. "There are many churches that desire to be faithful to scripture and to share the gospel, but they need to find the right workers who can serve in a sometimes challenging church."

The move to Moree has brought them closer to family in Sydney and Newcastle.

"As our nieces have pointed out, Moree is only six hours from Newcastle, which is far closer than the 15 hours to Yeppoon," Philip said. "We love being in Moree. Instead of talking about mining and FIFO, (Fly In Fly Out work done by many in the mining industry) we now talk about how many



millimetres of rain came in, or how much tonnage of sorghum per acre came in during harvest."

Philip was employed with the mandate to expand ministry in Moree. "We are currently working with the Youth group, preaching, visiting, teaching scripture and praying through the best way to help the congregation to reach out to the many in Moree who need the life that Jesus died to give us," he said. "Please thank God for the many in

our Moree Anglican church who are so well taught. The fruit of many years of good gospel centred ministry.

Please pray that our children continue to grow in their faith and confidence to share Jesus with the people they meet at school, sport and the neighbourhood. And please pray for us; for wisdom to use our limited time to grow ministry in our parish.

Supporting your independence with home care



Anglicare At Home is here to support you with quality care that is tailored to your needs.

Our care workers are carefully selected and expertly trained to help you live a full life at home and in the community. If you are aged 65+ years or 50+ years and of Torres Strait or Aboriginal descent, please give us a call. Services range from help around the home to high care nursing support. We also offer complimentary pastoral care services. New England services are available in Tamworth only.

Call 1300 111 278 or visit
anglicare.org.au/at-home



a kid like me
needs someone
like you



If you... have time to care for a child, have experience in working with or caring for children, can instil hope in a child and help them have a better future...**YOU** could be that someone!

We'd love you to start this conversation with us on **9890 6800**, or email us at foster.care@anglicare.org.au to be that someone.

anglicare.org.au/fostercare





In May this year, around 130 people gathered at St Peter's Cathedral in Armidale for the Next Phase Ministries conference. David Cook, former principal of Sydney Missionary and Bible College gave four talks, and a range of workshops was offered. Bishop Rod Chiswell interviewed Simon and Julie Blake about their ministry involvement.

Simon and Julie live on their farm between Walcha Road and Kentucky and they go to church in the Walcha parish. Simon still runs the farm, though he likes to think of himself as semi-retired, while Julie works as the manager of the aged care facility in Walcha. We asked Simon and Julie to reflect on the conference.

“AS WE GET A LITTLE BIT OLDER WE THINK MORE ABOUT the possibilities of either doing some form of ministry or helping other people to do ministry. We were really encouraged when we found out that Bishop Rod was planning to run these *Next Phase* conferences because it gives us ideas of what other people are doing and gives us opportunities to speak to and learn from other people involved in different ministries. We think it is incredibly important to encourage people to look for new opportunities to serve in the diocese.

There are many different fields in which people can become involved, and the *Next Phase* conference is a great opportunity to discover and explore these opportunities. With age comes experience and that experience can be beneficial for making Jesus known to people. We have people from all walks of life in our diocese, and those of us with a little more free time can share our experience and skills in well organised diocesan initiatives.

Julie and I were approached in 2021 to go to the Tingha church once a month to help out with the service, preaching and leading the service. We see our role as being encouraging and giving the people at the parish a break from having to do everything every week themselves.

We want to encourage people to pray that those available to serve will have opportunities made known to them, and that many people will take up those opportunities.”

Also attending the day was Liz Inglis from Inverell. This was her second conference and she is as enthusiastic about *Next Phase* as she was a year ago.

“I learned about *Next Phase* last year. In November 2020 I returned to Australia as a 60-year-old having worked at Hebron School in India for 17 years. I felt useless, unskilled, and out of my depth in every area of life. I fell back on a life-time of reading the Bible, praying and going to church as the fundamentals of life.

So, when I heard about a conference for over 50's who wanted to keep being involved in ministry I was excited and terrified, but I signed up.

And I took the billeting option because I hoped that, if nothing else, I would meet someone in a similar situation. The conference was amazing, I was really surprised by how many people I knew, even if only vaguely, and how many encouraging conversations I had. And billeting was way better than I could have dreamed, I have made a friend.

All believers are part of the body of Christ, we each have a part to play and gifts to use, there's no age barrier to this. We have skills, experience, perspective, hopefully character: why wouldn't we want to continue to serve, encourage, build up the body? And often we have a bit of spare time, although we can be a bit inconsistent as we duck for holidays or to spend time with family. I'm really glad to see the concept of inter-generational churches and ministries coming to the fore. I help with our Youth Group. I love it and I'd love to see more older people involved.

I think many older people have come from a tradition of being pew-sitters, they don't see themselves as ministers to others, in the church, although they often have a wealth of skill and experience of caring in their professional fields or families. I think we all lose confidence as we get older, we need encouragement. Ephesians 4:1-16 is a beloved passage about ministry. We can all be equipped for the work of ministry, and if we realised it, we probably are equipped already. We can all have a part in building up the body and speaking the word to each in love.

And Philippians 3:12-21 where Paul encourages us to press on, not to think we've made it, but to keep going. If anyone had an excuse for taking a break, Paul did, but he didn't think of it. His concern was always outward: God's glory, those who hadn't heard the gospel, and all the churches.

We need to work on our hearts, whatever our situation there are people we can love, build up, care for, pray for, write notes to, we can all let God's incredible flow through us to others. And it is such a joy!

The Link

Not alone

Tom Melbourne

IN MID-APRIL I HAD THE JOY OF ATTENDING THE FOURTH GAFCON Conference, held in Kigali in Rwanda, which brought together over 1300 delegates representing Anglican churches in over 50 countries.

Armidale is a long way from Rwanda, or England, or Brazil... or just about anywhere, really. But across the past few weeks I've been deeply reminded that, despite being separated by physical distance, we in Armidale diocese are tightly connected with Christian brothers and sisters from all these places and more. We are not alone in wanting to be on mission to our neighbours. We are not alone in wanting to hold fast to the faith as given to us by God through his Scriptures. We are not alone in feeling rejected by many in our culture because of our Christian convictions. We are not alone in any way – and this is a big comfort, a gift from God, one that we in Armidale Diocese should treasure.

GAFCON is a movement within the Anglican Communion which, together with the closely-aligned 'Global South Fellowship', represents an estimated 85% of the believers who make up the 'Anglican' family worldwide. (You realise just how non-Western the Anglican Church truly is when you attend an event like GAFCON, and the vast majority of those you are rubbing shoulders with are from Africa, or South America, or Asia!). GAFCON was formed in 2008 in response to failures of Christian leadership in North America, where Bishops who had promised to uphold the Biblical faith persisted in teaching things contrary to Scripture. A Conference was organised, the 'Global Anglican Future Conference' (GAFCON), to bring together likeminded Anglicans for mutual support, and to call on all Anglican leaders worldwide to be faithful to God's word.

What started as a single Conference quickly evolved into a movement. Local GAFCON 'branches' have formed all across the globe, and across the past 15 years GAFCON has been a network which allows for mission-minded, Biblically-faithful Anglicans to support and encourage one another in challenging times. It has also provided 'safe harbours' for Anglicans who have felt compelled to leave their 'traditional' Diocesan structures but who desire to remain part of the wider global Anglican family. The recent formation of the 'Diocese of the Southern Cross' in Australia is one expression of this. These brothers and sisters of ours find it incredibly comforting that they are still recognised and welcomed by the majority of Anglicans worldwide.

A common criticism of the GAFCON movement is that it is solely focused on the issue of same-sex sexual relationships. I've now attended two international GAFCON Conferences, and I have to say that the criticism does not ring true for me. While the particular issue that has initially brought this group together has been the embrace by Church leaders of relationships which are contrary to scripture, for all those present at GAFCON the real issue is Jesus' mission to seek and save the lost, and the critical importance of us reaching the nations with the gospel *as taught to us by Jesus in his Scriptures*. And so, at GAFCON this year we were revved up for evangelism, to get on with sharing Jesus from the Bible. We were challenged by the need for deeper theological education across the globe. We were driven to our knees in prayer for our brothers and sisters who are facing immense



Tom had a chance to pray with people from many nations during the frequent conference prayer times.

societal pressure to give up their faith and their witness. GAFCON is, at heart, a mission movement – one which recognises that our mission will be severely set back if we fail to teach what Jesus calls us in his word to teach.

A statement was written throughout the Conference, to capture up the mood of the meeting – the 'Kigali Commitment'. It's a helpful read – you can find it on the GAFCON website (gafcon.org). This statement speaks into recent events in the Church of England (the Anglican Church in England), where the General Synod has recently been led by the Bishops to change the doctrine and practice of the church to bless same-sex sexual relationships. The fallout from this decision is immense, as traditionally the Church of England has been the 'mother church' in the Anglican Communion, with the Archbishop of Canterbury leading the Communion. As such, the Kigali Commitment calls on the Church of England to return to its Biblical roots, and expresses that until this happens, the majority of the Communion does not consider the Archbishop of Canterbury to be a suitable leader for the global church. There is nothing triumphalistic about this – the Conference was in deep sorrow over this point – and we ought to pray earnestly that godly repentance would be forthcoming.

In Australia we are a long way away from these events, and are shielded in many ways by our structures, where each diocese has a huge amount of autonomy from the rest of the national and international church. All the same, in our own Anglican Church of Australia deep relational cracks are forming, over the topic of the authority of the Bible. In Armidale diocese we can thank God that we have been blessed with a series of Bishops who submit themselves to God's word and are determined to ensure that we remain on-track in our mission to share Jesus and his Scriptures with our region. However, the coming years will see many likeminded Anglicans across the country struggling, as they find themselves in dioceses and under the leadership of bishops with whom they vehemently disagree. Some will choose to stay in their dioceses – and they will need our support and encouragement as they do so. Others will decide to leave their diocese and join the 'Diocese of the Southern Cross' – and they, too, will need our support and encouragement.

We are not alone. And it is so important that our brothers and sisters logging it out in tough circumstances around Australia know that they are not alone, either – that we in Armidale Diocese stand with them.



Anna practises country life

Anna Parker, Hannah Goh, Clare Eley, Sophie Gillan

Moving to a new place where you don't know anyone is always hard. To come from the city to a country town is particularly hard.

But for Anna Parker, who arrived in Inverell in January

this year to take up a job in Allied Health, the story took an unexpected turn when she discovered that her new workplace was where she would form connections with not one, but three other Christians!

I HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO DO RURAL HEALTH CARE practice after finishing uni. There is so much need for allied health services in rural areas and it is a great way to learn lots after finishing uni. I was applying for jobs in rural areas, and a great opportunity came up in Inverell to work in a private practice.

I was a little worried about moving here, but I did have some connections with people I knew of in town which really helped. I was a bit concerned that it would be difficult to make friends, and especially with people my own age. But it turns out there were people who welcomed me to town and there are lots of young professionals living and working in Inverell.

I found out through a family friend that Sophie was at my workplace and was also a Christian. I got her phone number and had a chat to her about life in Inverell, which helped me feel more confident in my decision to move here. I found Hannah on social media and we had several text conversations. Through our conversations we found out that we were both Christians which was very exciting. We planned to check out churches in town together once we moved there. I didn't know Clare was a Christian until I got to town, which was a lovely surprise. So it has been amazing to not only find out people at my new workplace were Christians, but also that we all ended up at the same church.

Sophie invited us all to St Augustine's on our first Sunday in town, which was lovely. I looked around in other churches in town, but

decided that St Augustine's was for me.

I know that people at the church had been praying for more young people to join. I seemed to have landed here at the same time as other young people and so it looks like those prayers are being answered. Being part of a church community is really important to me, and I knew that moving to a new place that my church family would be a big part in helping me settle in. I hope I can contribute to the church community as I settle in more and find areas to serve.

I would encourage other city workers to think about moving to the country. Just give it a try! There is so much need in country areas for graduates to come and contribute their skills to the community. People are welcoming and keen to invite new people into the country community.

Country life is different, but I love it! No more traffic jams or trouble finding a parking space. Coming from the city, people tend to think not much happens in country towns. But I have had no shortage of finding things to do after work or on the weekends. I have enjoyed new experiences like going to a country show and seeing my first rodeo!

Country churches are different in that there are often more older people than younger people in the congregation. But that means I can develop friendships with people of all ages, and have a reflection of all God's children. I have made connections faster at this church than other city churches that I have been a part of. People are so keen to get to know you and support you, which is amazing.

"...there's no discouragement shall make him once relent his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim..."

John Bunyan