



*PRESIDENTIAL  
ADDRESS  
TO SYNOD  
2023*



## **1. Thank God for new growth**

What a joy it is to gather again for our Armidale Diocesan Synod. As Jenni and I travel around the Diocese each weekend visiting parishes large and small, it is clear that we have much to thank God for. The fruit of over 50 years of strong evangelical leadership is seen in every parish. The clergy team are faithfully preaching God's word and loving God's people, and the laity are faithfully partnering with them in seeking to introduce all people to Jesus and help them home to heaven. I feel privileged as Bishop to see God at work through his people everywhere I go.

Recently, I was encouraged to see ten young men and women publicly declare their allegiance to Christ at TAS where, despite the absence of a Senior Chaplain, Acting Chaplain Jo Benham and her team continue to do great work making and growing disciples of Christ. Two days later at St Marks Chapel, four more young people were confirmed, supported by thriving congregations of all ages. Last weekend I was at Bundara, who since I last visited have grown in number, started a once-a-month kids club, and painted the inside of the church! In the coming year they are planning to employ someone one day a week to run a Bible study group, restart SRE, and do pastoral work with families in the community. How good is that! Others are also reporting positive things around the traps. A few weeks ago, I had a great conversation with one of the Archdeacons who, following a recent Deanery meeting, reported that every one of the parishes in their patch had seen encouraging growth in recent months. The good news included new people coming to church, offerings on the increase, and a general upswing in the mood of clergy. I sense that the same has been true in varying measure across all Deaneries in our Diocese over the last six months.

I know it's a generalisation and there may be exceptions but it feels like we are finally coming out of the months of struggle following the COVID season. Looking back, I think it's probably right to say that the pandemic and its aftermath was a period of pruning for our churches. We lost some of the nominal and less committed fringe, but this has paved the way for new growth. God used that time of trial to refine and grow us in our commitment to the task at hand, and now people are putting their hand to the plough as we look forward to Christ's return.

## **2. Thank God for raising up workers for the harvest**

Another source of encouragement to me over the past twelve months has been answers to prayer with regard to workers for God's harvest. In Matthew 9:36-37 we read, 'When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" These are verses that I have written out on a card, and regularly use as a basis for prayer with specific positions around the Diocese in mind. I know many others are praying along similar lines throughout the Diocese and further afield as well. But God continues in his kindness to answer those prayers. In the coming year, it is likely that we will have four new curates join our clergy team in various parishes around the Diocese. In the following year, I expect three more to join the team as well. All of these gospel workers come with full theological training. They are godly men who are keen to consolidate their training under experienced rural clergy trainers. God willing, in years to come we will have all eleven curacy positions in our Diocese filled, so that we can continue to place well rounded clergy in our own parishes both large and small, and also train and send them further afield to dioceses like Bathurst, Rockhampton, and North West Australia. This vision of training and sending has already begun to bear fruit with Ben Connelly starting this year as the new Vicar of Cowra in Bathurst, and it will continue at the start of next year with David Thompson heading to Dongara in North West Australia. Also heading to North-West Australia to work in Port Headland with Mission To Seafarers this week, is a lay couple from the UNE chapel congregation, Matt and Kaylene Knights. I know that their willingness to go is a great answer to the prayers of Bishop Darrell Parker. My hope and prayer is that, in days to come, we will be able to train and send both lay people and clergy to rural dioceses all over Australia. In so doing, we will use the legacy of decades of solid evangelical ministry that has been entrusted to us and be a blessing to others. I'm finding as I spend time both in parishes and in theological colleges, that this training and sending vision resonates with many. Other evangelical bishops and the national director of BCA are also encouraged by the prospect of closer partnership with the Armidale Diocese. Indeed, late last year, Greg Harris organised a gathering at Moore College which he called, "Three

Bush Bishops and BCA” where he, Darrell Parker, Mark Calder, and I all spoke of ministry opportunities and possibilities for partnership going forward. I’ve had at least three conversations with possible candidates flow from that meeting alone. So, interest is good, but the recruitment task is ongoing, so please continue to pray with me for workers for the harvest. At the moment, specifically, I’m still seeking a chaplain for TAS, a vicar for Wee Waa, and a curate for North Tamworth.

### **3. Pray for the wider Anglican Communion in Australia and around the world.**

Meanwhile, divisions in the worldwide Anglican Communion continue to grow, fuelled by the decision early this year of the General Synod of the Church of England to allow the blessing of same sex unions in their churches. Following that decision, in April evangelicals from right across the globe gathered in Kigali Rwanda for the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON). The conference was attended by over 1300 delegates representing 85% of the worldwide Anglican Communion. These included not just GAFCON members and supporters, but also delegates representing the large group of Anglicans from the Global South. From that gathering came an important document called the Kigali commitment. The document affirmed the united commitment of both GAFCON and Global South members on three fundamentals: the lordship of Jesus Christ; the authority and clarity of the Word of God; and the priority of the church’s mission to the world. The Kigali commitment also rejected the leadership of the Archbishop of Canterbury, due to his failure to hold fast to the teaching of Scripture on issues concerning human sexuality. It then called upon those provinces, dioceses and leaders who have departed from biblical orthodoxy, to repent of their failure to uphold the Bible’s teaching. The tone of the Kigali commitment was necessarily strong in view of the very sad departure of Church of England from Biblical orthodoxy, but its overall tone was positive as we look to the future of the worldwide Anglican Communion. The quote that summed it up best for me was this: “Most importantly of all, we commit ourselves afresh to the gospel mission of proclaiming the crucified, risen and ascended Christ, calling on all to acknowledge him as Lord in repentance and faith, and living out a joyful, faithful obedience to his Word in all areas of our lives.”

As Bishop of the Armidale Diocese, I want to affirm at this synod that I stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in GAFCON and the Global South. Having read the Kigali statement, I wholeheartedly endorse it and want to commend it to you as consistent with our desire to uphold Biblical authority as primary for all matters concerning Christian faith and doctrine.

Another decision that emerged from the Kigali gathering was the handing over of the chairmanship of GAFCON Australia from Bishop Richard Condie to the Reverend Peter Smith, who is the rector of Dalkeith Parish in Perth. Peter is the son of Bishop Ray Smith, who served alongside my father Bishop Peter Chiswell and others in the Armidale Diocese. Peter is an ideal man to take on the job, and I commend him to you for prayer and support.

It is important that we as evangelical Anglicans here in Australia stand together against those who would seek to lead us down the errant path the Church of England has taken. Two years of attending bishops' conferences has taught me 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 with regard to the current serious divide over human sexuality and what constitutes wilful sin. This division has prompted the call from some evangelical clergy and congregations from dioceses dominated by liberal leadership 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. Having said that, I believe that there is still hope for the Anglican Church of Australia going forward as the number of evangelical clergy and laity are steadily growing. Pray that God will raise up godly bishops to ensure that dioceses around the country are led in line with the plain truth of God's word going forward.

#### **4. Partnership with the Diocese of North Kigezi**

On a brighter note, with regard to the wider Anglican Communion, our partnership with the Diocese of North Kigezi in Uganda continues strong. On Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> March I had the privilege of attending the consecration of the newly elected Bishop of North Kigezi, Onesimus Asiimwe. The service took place 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, and look forward to speaking at the North Kigezi clergy conference in July 2024.

### **5. Women's ministry.**

Closer to home, was my attendance earlier this year at a gathering in Sydney called the Priscilla Aquilla Conference. It is the second year running that I have attended this conference hosted by Moore College. Its purpose is to help both clergy and laity think about the ministry of women in the life of the church, in the light of Scriptures. This year, the Principal at Queensland Theological college Gary Miller and his wife Fiona were speaking on the topic of complementarianism and the danger of being lazy in the application of that theological position. Complementarianism is the conviction that men and women have been designed by God to be equal and distinct - and that our differences enable us to partner together in joyful service of God's kingdom in the local church. The input was very helpful and prompted me to be more proactive in thinking through how we can encourage women to use their gifts well in the life of our churches. To that end, at the annual clergy conference in June, each of our clergy received the gift of a book entitled "Embracing Complementarianism - Turning Biblical Convictions into positive church culture." The other thing that has encouraged me to think further about these matters, is the very helpful

report from the Diocesan Women's Ministry Working Group. That report sought to do four things:

1. Examine ways to support women in paid ministry positions across the Diocese.
2. Identify ways to support women's ministry in parishes.
3. Identify ways to support clergy wives in parishes.
4. Continue to assess the need and feasibility of an Archdeacon for women.

Later this weekend, we'll be considering motions flowing from each part of that report, and my hope and prayer is that those will lead to fruitful discussion and helpful steps forward.

### **5. Professional Supervision of ordained gospel workers**

One area where we have made significant steps forward in recent years is the area of Professional Supervision. Following discussion on the floor of Synod in 2021, a motion was passed that agreed to provide Professional Supervision for all ordained gospel workers in our Diocese. This action flowed in part from recommendations handed down by the Royal Commission. Having done the Professional Supervision training course through Moore College back in 2014 myself, and experienced the benefits of having Professional Supervision during that year, I was very keen to see this new level of support given to ordained gospel workers throughout our Diocese. The goal was to have all of the ordained team in the Armidale Diocese make a start in receiving 8-10 sessions of Professional Supervision each year, by March 2023. Archdeacon Simon Waller was given the task of implementing the plan and I'm pleased to say that now all of our ordained workers are receiving regular Professional Supervision from suitably qualified Christian practitioners. This is a milestone worth celebrating, and my hope and prayer is that this new level of support and accountability will be of great benefit, physically, mentally, and spiritually to our clergy team, enabling them to stay steady and keen in the gospel work at hand.

### **6. Conferences**

Speaking of staying keen, one of the real strengths of our Diocese at this point in time is the number of quality encouragement and training

opportunities we have through various conferences that run each year. So far this year there has been: The Men@Glen conference in Glen Innes (March), the Next Phase Conference in Armidale (May), the Indigenous Ministry Day in Narrabri (May), the Lay Preacher Training Day in Barraba (June), the Annual Clergy Conference at Keepit Dam (June), the Future Focussed Conference in Armidale (July), the New Life Women's Conference in Tamworth (September). Still to come are the Youth Leader Training Day in Tamworth (October), Sector Clergy Conferences at Copeton Dam (November), and the annual Youth Muster in Tamworth (November). That we have so many quality conferences on offer each year in our Diocese is testimony to the commitment and hard work of many people. These gathering opportunities throughout our Diocese have been developed over the years to encourage God's people right across the spectrum, and to equip them to use their gifts well to honour God and further his kingdom. Can I encourage you all, both clergy and laity to support and promote these gatherings at every opportunity, that together we might grow in Christ-like maturity and build the body of Christ throughout our Diocese.

### **Conclusion: Thank You**

In conclusion, I want to say thank you to both laity and clergy as we partner together in gospel ministry. Thank you for your commitment and faithfulness in persevering through the COVID recovery period. My prayer is that the signs of new growth following that season of pruning will continue, that together we might see abundant fruit for God's kingdom in the months and years ahead. I'd also like to thank the outgoing editor of "The Link", Robyn Powell, for her wonderful service in producing such a high-quality Armidale Diocesan magazine for the past seven years. The latest edition arrived on my desk as I was preparing this report, and I was reminded again of how thankful to God I am for Robyn. There's a great article towards the back of the August/ September edition of the Link entitled "Trading Places", where you can read about the handover of the editor's job to a well-known Tamworth local, Rachel Doran. I have no doubt that Rachel will also serve us well, and am very thankful that she has accepted my invitation to take on the job. Please pray for her and support her whenever you can, by sharing the encouraging things that are happening in your patch.

Finally, I'd like to thank the excellent team at the Diocesan Registry: Bishop's Assistant Ian Millican, Registrar Christopher Pears, Bishop's Secretary Emily Speed, and our finance team Sam Brennan and Caleb Dobos. I'm very thankful to God for each of them, its' a great team and I find it a joy to serve alongside them. Thanks team, especially for all your hard work in pulling this Synod weekend together.

Thank you all again for making yourself available for Synod this weekend here in Armidale.

May the Lord grant us wisdom, love, and strength to serve Him well over the next couple of days. Amen.