

The Link

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF ARMIDALE

2017 OCTOBER/NOVEMBER



Standing firm at Synod

THE SECOND SESSION OF THE 49TH Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Armidale met at Calrossy School in Tamworth on the weekend of 22-24th September.

In other Dioceses, Synods can be dreary affairs, with long drawn out discussions of arcane church law and business, but in our diocese, Synod is a very different thing. Clergy from the small towns on the edges of the Diocese have an opportunity to meet with friends and colleagues to be encouraged and pushed on to persevere. New diocesan initiatives come up for discussion and planning. Jokes are told, and very occasionally, tears are shed. This year's Synod provided all these things and so much more.

Traditionally, Synod begins with the Bishop's Presidential Address. This year, Bishop Rick Lewers launched his address with the clear and unambiguous words, "I will vote 'NO'."

He went on to quote Romans 1:20, "God's invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen since the creation of the world being understood through what is made"; and 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is God breathed..." and

expanded on his first statement by saying "To anything inconsistent with God's Word, I will vote 'NO'".

Just days before our Diocesan Synod, Bishop Lewers had returned from the General Synod, which is a meeting of all Australian Anglican Churches which was held this year on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland.

He began by outlining discussions which had been held there. "The Spirit of our age has Antichrist written all across it," he said. "The 2017 General Synod covered a number of obvious aspects of Antichrist: refugees, domestic violence, euthanasia, child abuse and same-sex marriage." He then addressed each of these issues, one by one, and urged everyone there, "...in obedience to Christ we need to declare His praises and show forth His love with missionary zeal." He bemoaned the decision of the Scottish Episcopal Church (Scotland's Anglican Church) to amend its definition of marriage to allow same-sex marriage. Before he turned his attention to local issues, the Bishop spoke movingly to everyone present. "By way of a postscript to this issue," he said, "I wonder if God might grieve the energy and effort that is put into

protecting our definition of marriage when such energy and effort we have been slow to apply to the salvation of souls."

The Bishop then spent some time unpacking the opening line of the Diocesan Vision; 'Building Christian community in every town.' He said, "...most people are aware that changing rural realities have taken their toll on community churches...Many ideas have been suggested as to the way forward and tonight you will be given an opportunity to share your thoughts on how we manage the mission of our Diocese." This will be an ongoing discussion over the months to come, and one which *The Link* will be covering.

Finally, the Bishop ended his talk with a moment of remembrance and sympathy for those who had lost loved ones throughout the year, and he had a long list of thanks for those whose work behind the scenes often goes unnoticed by the wider world. His final exhortation to those at Synod (and to readers of *The Link*) was to "Stand firm brothers and sisters. Let nothing move you. Always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain."

Synod highlights



Morning devotions at Synod.

EVERY YEAR AT SYNOD, SO MUCH happens that it is impossible to document it all! Have a chat to your Vicar or lay Synod representative and ask, “What was the

highlight of Synod for you?”

Here are just a few of the things which came up for report, discussion or celebration this year.

Key points of the National Church Life Survey



Bishop's Assistant, the Venerable Geoff Hearne (left) presented some of the findings from the most recent National Church Life Survey. This survey provides churches with some interesting and useful statistics about the wider church in general, and individual parishes in particular. As Mark Twain said, “There are lies, damned lies and statistics”, so these few numbers need to be read and discussed widely to make real sense of them. To find out more about the NCLS, speak to your Vicar.

Average age of church attenders across the diocese is 57 years. 30 percent of those weren't there 5 years ago, so the gospel still is at work!

To the question ‘What keeps people at church’ 57 percent value Gods Word through prayer, discussions and Bible study. This means that areas of faith and worship are real strengths in our Diocese.

- Male/female ratio of church attendance is an area we can work on.
- At present, church attendance is 62 percent female and 38 percent male. In our area of New South Wales, 49.2 percent of the population are women, so how do we engage more men?

- 10 percent of people in our area are aboriginal or islander but only 2 percent of our church attendees are aboriginal or islander.



- Only 52 percent were confident they could explain the gospel to a non-attender. (see page 11)
- 92 percent of our children who live at home attend church but once they reach the age of 15, only 60 percent are attending, hence the vital importance of youth ministry. (see page 6)

Anglicare powers on

Anglicare Northern Inland (ANI) CEO Veronica Rodenburg updated Synod on the past year.

“Since our very humble beginnings with a volunteer staff 30 years ago we have grown to be the leading provider of psychotherapeutic counselling and support services in the region – relied upon by people who often can't be helped by other organisations. Over the past 12 months we have provided counselling and practical support to over 1,200 individuals and families from across the Diocese.

Anger Management is ANI's most requested workshop. Participants come from all walks of life – they include people who have difficulty communicating without becoming angry, men and women whose anger gets in the way of having healthy relationships or holding down a job. Our educators provide the skills and strategies needed to deal with and manage anger. They also learn communication and conflict resolution skills, relaxation techniques and how to change the belief systems that contribute to their anger.

My priority over the past year has been the financial viability and growth of ANI. This coming year we will be operating within a balanced budget, but with a reduced workforce. This is a measure not taken lightly, but our funds are shrinking and we need to exist within our means.

Anglicare Northern Inland is your mission in this region. We continue to rely on your help and support – through your prayer, financial giving and volunteering.”

Grace, grit and gumption

After dinner on Saturday night at Synod, there were presentations from organisations which partner with our Diocese in the proclamation of the gospel.

The first of these encouraging reports was from David Rogers-Smith, Regional Officer of the Queensland and Northern NSW Bush Church Aid Society (BCA), who delighted and informed the gathering with news about the way the gospel is carried to the most remote areas of Australia. BCA was born out of a vision to provide pastoral and spiritual care for the original inhabitants and new settlers in remote areas of Australia. The far distant beginnings of BCA were in 1836 in the Swan River Colony in Western Australia. Almost a century later, on 26 May 1919, 26 people gathered in the Chapter Hall of St Andrew's Cathedral Sydney for the official founding of The Bush Church Aid Society for Australia and Tasmania.

It is on these foundations that BCA continues to stand for the gospel. David Rogers-Smith told the Synod that the key words in the early days of BCA were "grace, grit and gumption". He recounted a recent trip to Rome and his new understanding of what the early Roman Christians went through. "Your stand for the gospel will likely make you an enemy of the state, like the ancient Christians in Rome", he said. "BCA's mission field in remote and rural Australia is a formidable place. It is mostly in the grip of a devastating spiritual drought.... but we don't give up."

BCA has recently partnered with Generate Ministries with the aim of seeing Special Religious Education (SRE or Scripture) taught in every remote and rural school by 2020. This is great news for some of the remote parishes in our Diocese, and *The Link* will be following that story over the coming months as we start to see the benefits of this partnership in our region.

With CMS to Perth and Rome.



Often at Synod, a bit of emotion rises when it is time to say goodbye to someone with whom we have ministered for a long time. So it was this year, when Synod said goodbye to David Greeff who has been the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Mission Liaison Officer for the Diocese. David is moving on to Perth, to become General Secretary of CMS in Western Australia. Bishop Rick Lewers thanked him on behalf of everyone in the Diocese and pointed out that a General Secretary was a bit like a Bishop!

David said, "I look out at my friends and I continue to be grateful to God for your partnership. I wish every blessing on you in God's name."

Of course, the loss of David to the west doesn't mean an end to our partnership with CMS!

Gillian Law, a member of St Mark's Chapel who is currently serving with CMS in Rome, told the Synod about her life and the ministry she does there among university students. You can read some of that presentation on page 12 of this edition of *The Link*.

Then we really got sad.....

It's not much that can move the Dean of St Peter's Cathedral in Armidale Chris Brennan to tears, but this year the Synod got to see how it is done. After nearly five years as the Registrar of the Diocese, Ron Perry is moving on. There were a number of stories about Ron's astonishing knowledge of the Diocese. "He knows EVERYTHING!" was a fairly standard theme. But emotions overflowed when Chris Brennan broke down as he told the Synod just how important Ron and his wife Robyn are to the congregation at the Cathedral, which has become their Armidale family. There are many ways to measure the worth of a man or a woman, but surely being known as a wise, humble and loved member of a congregation is one of the best. Ron and Robyn Perry are just such people. You can read Ron's thoughts about leaving on page 5 of this issue.

Editor's note: The reason The Link has come back to life is only because of Ron's persistence and desire to see the news of the Diocese disseminated to the people of the Diocese. I want to join with everyone in saying "The man knows EVERYTHING!" His kindness, wisdom and guidance have been overwhelming to this grateful editor. When I grow up, I want to be just like him.



Plain plane conversation



Bishop Rick Lewers

IT PROBABLY ISN'T TOO SURPRISING that people ask the Bishop his views on same-sex marriage. Recent air travel on Qantas didn't prevent two customers asking my views. Alan Joyce may not have been pleased with my response but at least I still had the freedom on Qantas to do so. The first person told me he was undecided on the issue while another young woman happily shared she would vote yes. Both conversations were friendly, no angst, just a sharing of ideas and our reasons for them.

As a listener, a number of alarm bells were raised with me. Firstly, the abuse of language. Words like 'equality' in slogans like, 'Marriage Equality' are emotive, affecting the psychology of people. An unthinking acceptance of such a slogan is just dangerous without boundaries. The slogan could apply to polygamy, polyamory and other more unedifying relationships. Logically, if you exclude some of these then marriage is not equal for everyone. That being the case, on what basis are people equally entitled to marry? 'Marriage Equality' is a catchy slogan but manipulatively unhelpful and desperate for a thinking minds critique.

'Love' is another word that requires some serious attention. 'Love the one you're with' might have sold records for Crosby Stills and Nash but the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

makes it obvious that love has its boundaries. But who or how are the boundaries determined? Even the atheist, Richard Dawkins, admits that without God there is no ultimate way to define good and evil.

The second thing that bothered me (though it is understandable) is the way decisions are determined by particulars. The common struggle for all of us when it comes to same-sex marriage has to do with friends and relatives who are gay...not all of whom, it needs to be said, wish to get married or appreciate the LGBTIQ movement. In fact, some same-sex attracted people make a volitional decision to live celibate lives reflecting principles or absolutes greater than self. When a loved one seeks for same-sex marriage it is difficult for us to extricate ourselves from emotional attachment in making decisions to understanding the larger universal principles. While the principle ordinarily would apply, the emotionally charged particular requires a high degree of commitment to your absolutes. Otherwise the absolute gives way to permission-giving.

The third thing I noticed is the emphasis on numbers. A plebiscite or postal vote as a determiner of a nation's decision making is not, and never will be, a moral determination. At best it is a decision by popularity, at worst the outcome by peer group pressure. Each side argues their polled perspective but numbers

are not the determiner of right and wrong.

Fourthly, the slippery slope argument is always a dangerous one. Slippery slope arguments often confuse the issues surrounding the particular. However, when the particular challenges the universals or absolutes of a culture or history, there is inevitably a slope. To advocate for same sex marriage is itself a slope away from traditionally understood marriage. The LGBTIQ and liberal progressives have been intentional in their attempts to re-educate society. The unsafe 'Safe Schools' program and gender theory are not part of a slippery slope at all. Slippery slope arguments suggest accidental outcomes but there is nothing accidental in the social re-engineering that will come with same-sex marriage.

So how does one consider the boundaries of equality and love? From where do we draw the principles or absolutes that inform our thoughts about the particulars of life? And if numbers don't determine what is moral or true then how can such determinations be made? What is the slope beyond a decision to change the definition of marriage? I believe God is the answer to all these questions and the most dangerous slope is the one that slopes away from Him.

This is a part of the Bishop's President's Address at this year's Synod. To read the whole address go to armidaleanglicandiocese.com

Farewell Ron and Robyn...

AS DIOCESAN REGISTRAR RON PERRY PREPARES TO LEAVE the Armidale Diocese for retirement in his hometown of Canberra, he reflected on the time he and his wife Robyn have spent as an integral part of Diocesan work.

"I have been Registrar now for a little under five years. It has been a great time for Robbie and me as we have been able to minister alongside one another and she has been able to enter into my professional world in a way that was not possible when I worked for government.

We shall, as we leave, miss being able to contribute every day in major and minor ways to introducing people to Jesus and helping them home to heaven. For Robyn, in particular, she will also miss being built up and encouraged in her walk with the Lord by the richness and warmth of fellowship with many in the Diocese, lay and clergy alike.

The Rev. Dr David Seccombe once told me that the Armidale Diocese is unique and distinctive in the Anglican Communion given its unity of mind and purpose. There are any number of things to marvel at about the Diocese but its focus on the gospel and its undivided commitment to God's Word are the things we shall most take with us when we leave.

We would like to continue to contribute to the Diocese in those areas where our gifts and abilities can be best employed for God's glory. We have some ideas but they are at the embryonic stage. We are both passionate about Christian communities being raised mature in Christ in every part of the Diocese and we shall definitely be praying to this end when we leave."



Rick and Janene Lewers with Robyn and Ron Perry at the recent General Synod.

...Welcome Christopher and Karen



Christopher and Karen Pears

CHRISTOPHER AND KAREN PEARS ARE MAKING THE MOVE north from Hornsby Heights in Sydney where Christopher has ministered as rector for the past eight years. It is really a return home for them as Christopher was ordained in Armidale in 1997, and served at St. Peter's Cathedral Armidale, and then in the Parishes of Ashford-Delungra and Uralla.

He is looking forward to taking up the Registrar's position early in 2018.

"It was suggested to me that I would be a good fit for this role", he said. "After much prayer and consideration, I decided to throw my hat

in the ring. I am very much a believer in team ministry, and people working together as the body of Christ. I see myself as part of the team, working behind the scenes to help those at the coalface do what they do. I will be providing administrative support for the ministry in the parishes, so will be a different role for me. I hope I can bring an understanding of what it's like out in the parishes to the interactions I have with the various parish clergy. And of course, Karen and I would hope to be involved as active volunteers at our local parish as well."

The other great change for the Pears family is that Christopher and Karen will settle in as empty-nesters for the first time!

"Karen and I have three children: Grace, Timothy and Benjamin. (Tim was born at Armidale hospital, and Ben at Inverell). Grace will be finishing her physiotherapy degree at the end of this year, Timothy is studying Industrial Technology at the University of Newcastle, and Benjamin will be sitting his HSC in 2018. We've decided to leave Ben at his current school for next year, and so he'll be boarding with some family friends during school term."

As with any new job, there will be quite a learning curve to travel, as well as the job of getting used to a new home and family circumstances. We asked Christopher about the best things we could pray for.

"Please pray that we can get on top of all the various aspects of the job as soon as possible, and that we can settle into a new church family. Karen would like prayer for getting a job. She is a midwife, and is hoping that she can find work at Armidale Hospital. We would also ask that you would pray for our adjustment to having no children with us for much of the time, and for Ben, that the boarding arrangements work out well, and that he can concentrate on his studies in what will be an important year for him."

Ready to Surge?

YOUTH SURGE IS A FREE ANNUAL YOUTH EVENT THAT RUNS simultaneously in Armidale and Gunnedah. Armidale organiser Kurt Langmead said, "One of the best things about Youth Surge is that it gets a big crew of young people together under the one roof. It's a top reminder for Christian kids - especially those from small towns - that they are not alone in following Jesus. Youth Surges are great events for teenagers to invite along their unsaved friends. Youth Surges are open to ALL young people across the region, including youth groups from other towns and denominations. The 2017 speaker at Armidale will be Hugh McCowen. When he is not rounding up sheep, he is rounding up high schoolers as an SRE teacher in his home town of Tenterfield. Hugh will be speaking on the topic of "Identity" from the book of Colossians in the Bible. This is a super-relevant topic for young people, not to be missed!"

Meanwhile, in Gunnedah, assistant minister Aiden Sibrava is heading up the organising team and can't contain his excitement.

"Barabbas. He's the guilty sod who got to walk free while Jesus died the rebel's death that Barabbas had so richly earned. Plot twist - - you're Barabbas!", he said. "This year Steve Price (Secondary Boys Chaplain at Calrossy School in Tamworth) will be speaking to us about how Jesus takes our place on the cross, and how that act of mercy can secure our forgiveness, no matter how badly we've earned the opposite."

Gunnedah Youth Surge will be at the Gunnedah High School hall on the 3rd of November. Come for a free sausage sizzle snack from 5:30pm, and our official kick-off time is from 6-8pm in the hall. For more information, speak to Aiden at aidensibrava@gunnedahanglican.org.au or call him on 6742 7970.

The Armidale edition will be on the same night, from 7-9pm in the Dorothy Knox Centre at PLC Armidale. For more details, get in touch with your youth leaders, or contact Kurt Langmead by email (kurt@stpetersarmidale.org.au).

From Lightning Ridge to New Life

NEW LIFE CONFERENCE 2017 WAS HELD in late August this year, at Carinya Christian School in Tamworth. Speakers Carmelina Read and Christine Jensen spoke to 400 women from 2 Thessalonians and on the subject of prayer.

This year the entire contingent from Lightning Ridge numbered just two women and one cute little boy! Joanne Piper (with her baby son Matthew) and Joy Webb made the long trek in from opal country to spend some time with Christian sisters from all over the Diocese.

For Joanne, this conference is always an unmissable event. "It's all about seeing that there is more to Christianity than just our small group of believers", she said. "We drove home having learned some new things, which is always wonderful. We really appreciated being taught by women. I found Carmelina's application of the Thessalonians passages really had a very female spin on it, and that was helpful to me. Joy particularly appreciates the bookstall which is at the conference each year. It's great to have the books reviewed by someone you trust, so you know you can buy them with confidence."

As they were the only women from Lightning Ridge, you might think that Joanne and Joy would have been a bit lonely on the weekend, but far from it! "The ladies from Moree were particularly welcoming to us. Our church has done a few things with the church in Moree over the years, and we felt like they were our extended church family on the weekend! Also, over the course of the weekend, we had three separate offers of accommodation for next



Joy Webb and Joanne Piper with Matthew.

year. It's so lovely that people recognize that it is a bit of a journey for us to get here, and that so many people wanted to make it a good experience for us."

Carmelina Read and Christine Jensen are both experienced conference speakers, and



Carmelina Read

both are used to speaking to huge crowds at city conferences. We asked Joanne what she would say to them (and other speakers) to encourage them to keep accepting invitations to country conferences. "It can be really difficult for us to access city conferences. For some women, it is just too far out of their comfort zone, let alone the cost and time it takes to attend. If there were no country conferences, there would be no conferences at all for many country people. We so appreciated the effort the organisers put into making this conference a special time for everyone. The beautiful setting at Carinya only enhanced our enjoyment of the whole weekend. Joy came home ecstatic! It was such a great reminder that the New Life Conference is there to refresh and energise us to continue living for God and His glory and to keep serving Him, no matter where we are."

The Link

This old hall

THE PARISH OF BARRABA HAS A PROBLEM. THE CHURCH hall is well past its use-by date, but a place is needed to house the Vicar's office. A place is needed for pastoral meetings...funeral arranging (with its attendant grief counselling), support groups for those in need, and mothers' and children's groups. More importantly, the building as it stands is doing nothing to help people in the community come to know Jesus. The parish certainly can't afford the necessary renovations, so the Parish Council has applied for a Community Building Partnership Grant. If successful, it will cover most – if not all – of the necessary renovation costs.

"We need to give this old hall new life because it is falling apart. It is a sentimental building to many people, but most of all it has the potential to provide a physical location for our church vision to be realised, which is that our church would be shaped by the real Jesus, and that the community would come to know the real Jesus", Barraba Vicar Phil Coghlan said.

"As well as the grant, we have some ideas for fundraising events. We hope to have a banquet night in the hall as well as a silent auction for things like historical and contemporary photos of Barraba life which we hope to frame with timber taken from the Parish Hall. I am going to auction a year's supply of home roasted coffee beans...though I hope whoever wins it drinks less coffee than I do!"

Parish members have already made a good start on demolition, but more help would be very welcome. "Before the end of the year, we are hoping to fix some of the drainage issues so that we don't have stormwater running under the buildings and ruining any work we do. We want to replace the floor in the kitchen and fix damage to the internal wall render. If these things can be done, we can start using the space", Phil told us.

Can readers of *The Link* help in any way? "We would love to hear from any tradies – builders, plumbers, electricians – who are able to donate their expertise or advice", said Phil "Please give me a call if you could help in that way!" Of course, we need to pray that the grant will come through and that this old hall might witness many people being brought to new life.



Dean Blomfield up to his knees in renovation

Connected kids....connected parents

WE LIVE IN A WORLD SO CONNECTED to electronic messages, it can seem overwhelming to even begin to think about how we help our children navigate these murky waters. Fortunately, James and Simone Boswell have done the research and the legwork and, thanks to the Mothers' Union, are coming to share their expertise and insights with people from across the Diocese.

"We want all parents to know they can make a difference and the decisions they make can be beneficial to their families... even though that can be a very hard thing to do", Simone said. "Most parents want to think the best of their own kids. They say 'my kids are good kids. I know it is out there but not in my family'. One of our chief aims is to help

parents think about the impact of technology through a biblical lens. God provides all the foundations to think through these things and apply them to our lives." James and Simone would love to see parents of any stage at their seminars. "To those parents for whom it is all new, we want you to know that you can do this job. We want to empower and equip parents not to be daunted, but to be inspired to parent well. But we also want to affirm parents who are already doing a good job", Simone told us. "I particularly love talking to parents of young kids because we want them to start well. It is so important to begin to make plans early because the world is changing so rapidly and it is hard to keep up. Technology is accessible, normal and considered healthy...did you know

that 20 percent of one year olds have their own ipads! Waiting until your children are teens is too late."

You can catch up with James and Simone at their three seminars in the Diocese. They will be at Gunnedah Anglican Church on Friday 27th October, 9.30am-12.30pm. There will be a crèche and the cost is \$15. That evening, at 7.30, they will be at Oxley Vale Primary School in Tamworth. Cost is just \$10 per person or \$15 per couple. The following day, Saturday 28th October, they will be at Sandon Public School in Armidale, for a slightly longer seminar. It begins at 9.30am, and ends at 3.30pm but includes lunch. There will be a crèche there as well, and the cost is \$25 per single person or \$40 for a couple.

Plunging into ministry at uni



Students being baptised in Dumaesq Dam

WE LIVE IN A DIOCESE WHERE WE know that people, not places, are the most important things in ministry. But sometimes, a ministry cannot even begin without a place to start. So it is with the growing and vibrant ministry of St Mark's Chapel at the University of New England.



Gary Eastment

The ministry as we know it today, would not exist if Florence Mary Wilson had not given a parcel of land to the Diocese in 1954, to be used expressly as a site for a University chapel. Over the years, buildings have come and gone, staff members have moved in, and then on. Students have come to study, have met their wives and husbands, and have moved back out into the wide world. But always, at the heart of the ministry at the chapel, is the gospel of the

Lord Jesus Christ, who has changed the lives of students in ways they did not expect when they signed up to study teaching or nursing or sciences.

The Reverend Gary Eastment is the Senior Minister at St Mark's and he is convinced of the importance of university ministry. "This ministry is vital for two main reasons. First of all, university is a regional and national gathering point. Students come from all over for a substantial period of time (three or four years, sometimes longer) before spreading all over the country and world again. Disciple-making at universities can have gospel impact nationally and world-wide. Secondly, people generally go to university at a crucial stage of life. At uni age there is usually a new level of independence from family and other connections, along with a moment of forming ideas on the big questions of identity and belief. There is an openness to discussion about these things that tends not to be so pronounced at other stages of life. In our rapidly transitioning culture these questions are as pressing as ever", he said.

In recent years, the university ministry has expanded beyond those of the usual student age. There are now many families attending the Chapel, and ministries which go along with families, such as children's and youth work have become integral. Gary told us "Sometimes students get married, have kids, and stay in town! St Mark's is their community, and so it was natural that it grew to a more

rounded 'parish-like' ministry. This is beneficial for those involved, but also creates a base for financial and relational underpinning of the student work: the other congregations largely underwrite the student work."

Because of the demographic, students at the university and St Mark's are ideal candidates for the Ministry Training Strategy (MTS). MTS is an organisation which seeks to multiply gospel workers through ministry apprenticeships. They help local churches and ministries identify and train gifted individuals before helping them to decide on the next step in their ministry. For many people who train with MTS, the next step is to theological college and paid ministry. For others, it will mean a return to their careers but with considerable experience in ministry under their belts. MTS and University ministry are made for each other. Gary said, "MTS now has quite a history at St Marks, with close to 20 years of sending out trainees into various settings. It works so well here because the ministry is so uniquely placed: it gathers potential trainees from far and wide and works hand in hand with the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (AFES), which has a strong training and sending emphasis. We have a breadth of potential experience available, and the staff of the church are trained and structured to sow into the trainees well. This is all strategic for the gospel, both for the Diocese and further afield. A number of our vicars have been

MTS trainees at UNE: Bernard Gabbott at Wee Waa, Dave Fisher at Manilla and Chris Brennan at the Cathedral in Armidale are just three of them. There is a much larger diaspora of full-time workers further afield, and more again who are serving in lay capacities all over the country having been sharpened by their time in MTS at our university.”

Future ministry at the university is something which exercises Gary and the rest of the staff at St Mark’s

“I think it’s pretty obvious that there are great challenges to free speech on this campus – and other campuses – throughout Australia. These are challenges which face the whole western world. For us, most of the time, it seems not so bad. But it has been sharp at times. The UNE Christians United Graduate Fund has recently been created. This is administered by an independent board, with the express goals of growing the campus work by funding more staff and supporting the MTS scheme. Part of the logic in creating the fund is that we’re not to be focussed on maintaining what’s been happening, but to take advantage of the many opportunities we have. A big part of this is the opportunity we have among the international students, but even more can be done working alongside Polly Wong, the international worker who is attached to the cathedral in Armidale.”

So what can we do to help this ministry along? Of course we can pray for Gary, the staff and students at St Mark’s and the university, but Gary has another interesting thought. “I want to add a note of encouragement about the transition to university life. Students’ families should be concerned for the health of the churches where their kids are going to uni, and be very proactive in getting them connected on arrival. And, come to UNE!”

Aaron’s story

Aaron Alexander came to UNE, little expecting his life to change!

My story is probably not a typical journey to Christian faith. I’d been a professional gambler since my teens, using my knowledge of probability theory to profit at the poker table, in sports betting, and in financial markets. I made easy money and enjoyed spending it. To me, life was nothing but a game to be played, beaten, and enjoyed while it lasted. In that period of my life I’d have thought nothing less probable than that I would someday become a Christian. Why that prospect would have seemed so improbable was that I had, since my teens, considered myself to be an agnostic or atheist. Although I had nothing in particular against people who had faith, I simply saw no rational basis for a theistic worldview.



Aaron being baptised in a paddle pool.

All of this changed when I commenced my studies at the University of New England in Armidale. Living in one of the colleges on campus, one of my flatmates happened to be a Christian. In speaking with her, I was struck by the eloquence with which she was able to articulate and defend her faith. When she invited me to attend the campus church, I was intrigued and decided to tag along. I was profoundly moved by the sermon that evening; what I heard described the human condition more precisely than I had ever heard it expressed. When the invitation was extended to the congregation to participate in a prayer of confession, I joined in, praying sincerely for the first time in my life. I acknowledged that I had lived a life of sin; in spite of the fact that I knew that some sort of higher moral order existed, I had never been able to live in a way consistent with it, regardless of how hard I tried.

What occurred as I prayed that night is difficult for me to describe. It was as if I simultaneously felt and knew that all these things I’d previously dismissed as fanciful were not just true, but the highest possible truth. I knew that the promise of salvation extended to us through Christ was genuine, that it could be relied upon. In that moment, I wanted nothing more than to simply accept that promise. I knew that my life’s trajectory had changed. Some months later, I was baptised. It was the most joyous moment of my life. As time passes, I continue to grow as a Christian, day by day. I try to become as acquainted with the word of God as I can, I pray, I enjoy fellowship with other Christians. Life as a new Christian at university is not without its challenges but not a day goes by that I am not overwhelmed with gratitude that there is a living God who knows me, who hears me, who through Christ saw fit to save me. If there is a recurring theme in my prayers, it is that others would come to know him too, regardless of how improbable it may seem.

From student to Bishop

The Right Reverend Dr Richard Condie is the current Bishop of Tasmania, and plays a leading role in the world-wide GAFCON movement. But back in 1983 he was just one of many new students who arrived at the University of New England to begin a degree. “I spent my first three years in Armidale completing a Bachelor of Social Science degree and being involved at St Mark’s, and then I spent a year on the staff as a ministry trainee. It was probably the key formative time in my ministry life. When I arrived in Armidale I knew I needed to be taught well while I was at uni. This really came back to me when I dropped in to Armidale on my way north a few years ago. I decided to drive around the town for old times’ sake, and as I came around certain corners, passages of scripture would pop into my mind. It was amazing! Because I had done so much foundational learning, I realized ‘Oh...that’s when I understood Romans 8!’ The other great thing was being given the opportunity to do ministry...doing country missions, learning to evangelise and to preach. I am constantly spruiking ministry apprenticeship as a pathway to ordination because it was so formative for me. Because UNE is a residential uni, I found being plunged into that community made me grow up fast, and gave me practical opportunities to learn to minister. I look back on my time there with great thankfulness.”



The Big Plod



Problem: The young people of Wee Waa need a youth worker. Diocesan funding has been provided to do the work for the past three years, but that money has run out. What can possibly be done?

Answer: Send the Vicar of Wee Waa (and ultra-marathon runner), the Rev Dr. Bernard Gabbott, on a sponsored run around the parish!

THE RUN WAS 150 KILOMETRES OVER THREE DAYS– WEE WAA to Pilliga (60km), Pilliga to Burren Junction (38km) and Burren Junction to Wee Waa (51km). With sponsorship of \$1 a kilometre from more than 100 people, sixteen thousand dollars was raised. “This money will enable us to continue to run youth Bible studies plus two youth groups each Friday night, catering for around 40 students in years three to 12”, Bernard said. “Now we can continue the work of supporting Wee Waa youth by introducing them to Jesus, and all because of the generous support of people from Ulladulla to Picton, Dapto to Cronulla, England to Tanzania.”

The money raised will go to support Chris “Chippy” Petersen run the Bible studies and youth groups. He has been in Wee Waa only a few months, after time teaching high school Scripture classes in Cowra and Blayney. For him the run means much more than just continuing employment. “It was Bernard’s idea and I was glad he was doing it and not me!” he said. “The great surprise for me was seeing not just the churches but the whole community getting behind it. I know how much Bernard loves Wee Waa, and this showed me just how much Wee Waa loves him!”

In a world where Christians are being increasingly marginalized, and where Christian teaching is ignored or derided, it is astonishing to see such a level of community support for a church youth work. Chris said, “What this run means for the kids of Wee Waa is that they have someone here who can focus solely on them. I hope to be able to give them what they need, to preach the gospel to them....to be someone who survived teenage years and who can speak to them without judgment, and give them hope.”

For Bernard, this run gave him much more than just sore muscles. “One thing this has reminded me of is the benefit of staying in ministry long term in a small town,” he said. “We have been here nearly eight years and the response from town has been warm, generous and supportive. I think that this is testament to God using his mob in Wee Waa widely to show His grace and mercy.” And what happens when this money runs out? Plans are already being made for another run in a couple of years, from Wee Waa to the top of Mount Kaputar, and even Chippy is planning to break out his running shoes for part of it! For now, it’s not too late to donate, if you can. Have a look at the Wee Waa Anglican Facebook page to find out how to do it.



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Shooting for Men



Some of the shooters with Andrew Newman on the extreme right.

THE CLAY PIGEON POPULATION AROUND LOOMBERAH IS OUT of hand! So Dub Gannon, assistant at St Paul's, West Tamworth decided to do something about it. The church hosted a men's clay pigeon shoot in the middle of September at Tamworth Gun Club.

About 30 men turned up to do a bit of culling. Christian men were encouraged to invite their friends, and a number of men who are not yet believers came along. "The vicar from Manilla Dave Fisher gave a very compelling talk encouraging the men present to be ready to meet God face to face when that time comes, by putting their trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour," Dub said. All good men's events should include large quantities of meat, so a barbeque as well as a presentation of prizes for the shooters concluded the day. Andrew Newman was

one of the church members who brought a friend and had a great day. "These days, we sometimes need to excuse ourselves for being men", he said. "Men are often uncomfortable talking at an emotional level so I think we need to be able to step back and tap into the things we are more hard wired for...to do something that's hands on and doesn't need high levels of relational expertise (like shooting a gun!). I think that this event was a great entry point for men into the idea of coming to church. We need to keep showing men that Christianity is not just a women's domain."

The day was a great success and many of the visitors are keen to attend a similar event. Those pesky clay pigeons will probably need another cull, same time, next year.

Launching 'The Tacklebox'



At Synod this year Scott Dunlop, Vicar of Gunnedah, introduced a new training resource called *The Tacklebox* which was written by the people of the Armidale Diocese, for the people of the Armidale Diocese.

"*The Tacklebox* is something to help people with evangelism. The old proverb says it is better to teach a man to fish than to catch a fish for him. So it is in our service to Jesus. It's important for us to evangelise, but also to teach others to do the same. Many people have so much potential, but just need mobilising and training. It can be really hard to know how to begin to do that, so we have produced a local resource that will help that process. It is a collection of 25 articles, written by local people who are good practitioners in their fields. We have asked each of them to write a short article on different topics as a stimulus for evangelism in many areas. We hope the book will have a wide range of uses...for training new curates and lay leaders, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders and Bible study leaders. We want to encourage people to photocopy the articles to use. The whole book is available on the Diocesan website, www.armidaleanglicandiocese.com and hard copies are being given to all clergy, Year 13 and MTS workers. Each parish has been sent two copies each, but don't wait for them! Get onto the website and start reading the articles that are pertinent to you."



“...there’s no
discouragement
shall make
him once
relent
his first
avowed intent
to be
a pilgrim...”

John Bunyan

Gillian's Rome

Gillian Law, from St Mark's Chapel Armidale, is serving with the Church Missionary Society in Rome.

WHEN YOU THINK OF ROME, YOU MIGHT think of the fascinating ancient history and monuments like the Colosseum. Or you might think of the myriad of churches, and the precious artworks they house.

But my Rome is not there.

I live with the hustle and bustle of everyday life, the busyness of chaotic traffic, the filth of streets where rubbish is not collected, and in particular the excitement of the university campuses.

I am there in partnership with CMS (Church Missionary Society) and GBU (Gruppi Biblici Universitari), the Christian student group. I've been there for three years, initially in Siena to learn language and culture and now in Rome working alongside students.

But the question still remains, why does a mission organization send someone from this part of the world to Italy? There are church buildings on nearly every corner. Rome is the home of the Vatican. Almost every primary school child attends catechism classes after school, although this number is declining. This religious instruction is now just a cultural rite of passage.

Religion and the institutional church in Italy are very much tied up with politics.

Often churches were built with no expense spared to impress a prince in a neighboring rival city. The institutional church has also been associated with art. So much of Italy's wealth still lies here and Italians are proud of their rich art history.

Most Italians get their understanding of the afterlife from Dante Alighieri, a poet in the Middle Ages who wrote a classic piece of literature that students study in school, *The Divine Comedy*, which describes a journey to hell, purgatory and paradise.

But in all this there is little, if any, of the Bible and the Biblical message of salvation through Jesus alone. Only about 1 percent of Italy's 60 million population has a personal relationship with God through Jesus.

When I ask uni students about their current beliefs, I hear the same story over and over: *I was baptized, I attended catechism classes, I was confirmed when I was at school. But now*



I'm at university and I can choose for myself, and I choose not to believe.

When we ask them who they think Jesus is, their response is: *I don't know, it's a complex question.*

In this context, we aim to present Jesus as Lord and Saviour through Bible studies and outreach events. We have an enormous task in reaching the 230,000 students in Rome. Together with another Christian group working in different ways but with a similar goal to evangelise, we number only about 75 Christian students trying to reach those 230,000.

I help to run Bible studies which are student led, interactive, and inductive. That means we start by reading a passage of the Bible and looking to see what the passage says, what it means and what difference it makes to our lives. This is often a radical way of approaching Scripture. It is not a church authority figure telling you what to believe without asking questions. Instead, it is people reading the Bible for themselves and learning from it. The authority is the Word of God.

I'm also involved in organising evening events where we seek to have fun. We have open mic nights, games nights and dinners. Food is crucial to Italian culture! We want these events to be easy to invite friends to, but at the centre is always an evangelistic message such as a testimony, an explanation of a Bible passage or an apologetic response.

This is what has occupied my time during the last year, and is what I will be doing (God willing) after I return to Rome in January. I think it is important to remember that at the end of the day when Jesus returns, He is not going to be interested in how beautiful our local church building was, or what religious instruction classes we attended. Salvation is at stake.

As Peter preached that day in Jerusalem (Acts 4:12): there is no other name under heaven given to us... salvation is in no-one else, but in Jesus. This is the message that we take to people in this part of regional Australia, and it is the same message we take to the university student in Rome.

About

The Link, Number 61
October/November 2017
ISSN 1834-0741

The Link is published six times a year by the Anglican Diocese of Armidale as part of the Diocesan vision to "Introduce people to Jesus and help them home to Heaven".

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Art direction and assistance from
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Our thanks to all photographers, especially
James Levingston for his Synod photos.