

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE
SECOND SESSION OF THE 36TH SYNOD OF
THE DIOCESE OF GRAFTON
Saturday 16 June 2018



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Anglican Diocese of Grafton

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36TH SYNOD OF THE DIOCESE OF GRAFTON

Grafton, Saturday 16 June 2018

(Delivered in the context of the sermon at the Synod Eucharist)

Wisdom & Courage

1 Chronicles 28:20

Colossians 2:2-3

Gospel: Mark 16: 1-8

Welcome to the 2nd sitting of the 36th Synod. I am confident that this Synod will be far more daunting for me than it will be for you.

I can remember attending my first Synod here some 25 years ago, it was held over there in the Hunt Hall. It was there that I discovered that Synod had its own language. There were things like *Standing Orders* (something that you didn't have to stand in order to present), and there was *moving into committee*, without physically moving anywhere. There were legalities (that seemed to have multiple interpretations until the Chancellor spoke), Bills (that had no money attached to them) and motions (moved on the floor) all of which we were expected to understand and navigate our way through.

I am sure that I have learnt something since that first Synod, but the idea of chairing a synod has never really been on my radar, nor is it something that has filled me with a great deal of excitement, but it is nevertheless where I find myself at this point of time in my ministry.

Over the years of attending Synod, I have come to greatly appreciate that our Synod Eucharist is actually the first item of business that we attend to as members of Synod. During this Eucharist we come together as Church, to honour God, to be with God, to listen to God, to be fed and nurtured by God, and then we are sent out "*enriched*" by God so that we can do God's business.

Synod is really about us as Disciples of Jesus Christ coming together to engage in God's business in the life of this Diocese. It is where we are invited to exercise good stewardship of all that has been committed to us by God and by the Church. Our task is to address that which is before us with wisdom, and from that point of wisdom, determine the appropriate action, and then to live out that action with courage. With this in mind, it is obvious why there is such a focus on the Holy Spirit during every Synod Eucharist. It is my hope and prayer that throughout this gathering of Synod we will call upon the Spirit to guide us, to inspire us, and to *stir us into action* so that we may truly be God's people in this time and place.

Over the past few months I have found myself pondering and praying repeatedly for Wisdom and Courage. Wisdom to know what it is that God is calling me, and us as a diocese, to do. Courage to do what it is that I believe God is asking of me, and of us as a diocese. These two words, *Courage and Wisdom* have appeared in our Discernment Synod discussions, our Diocesan Strategic planning days and in our life of faith more generally.

Discernment Synod & Bishop Appointment Board.

It was at our Discernment Synod in early February, 2018 that we elected the members of the Bishop Appointment Board, to take responsibility for engaging in the work of discerning and electing the next Bishop of Grafton. The Bishop Appointment Board has been earnestly seeking the wisdom of God throughout the process to date. Please continue to pray for the Board as the process of discernment continues.

Diocesan Strategic Planning.

During the past year, a variety of people across the diocese have had the opportunity to engage with the process of reviewing our Diocesan Strategic Plan. Whilst there was some initial shock that we didn't use the traditional model of using butchers paper to record our findings, most people quickly embraced the Mentimeter app. It seems that we, as a diocese, had taken a step forward in embracing digital technology! We enjoyed being able to see instant results, and the common threads in our hopes and dreams for the future.

Perhaps our engagement with the Mentimeter app. has reminded us that, as a Church, we need to be more Tech Savvy and to engage (wisely of course) with the vast array of digital social media tools that are available to us. The reality is that social media is now our first line of engagement with the current generation, and its use will be crucial for us if we are genuinely trying to connect and communicate with those who are younger than most of us. It may well be a million miles away from what you and I grew up with, but it is the world here and now, and will be well into the foreseeable future. So do we have the **courage** to grasp this nettle and learn a new way of evangelism and pastoral care, a new way of connecting with thousands of people who are currently beyond our reach? Can we commit to using social media in a wise and Godly way, and are we prepared to put resources into making effective communications with the wider community? That's a question for all of us to answer.

So what did this review reveal? Well, it resulted in the diocese identifying five main areas of priorities for us as we move forward towards 2020. Those priorities are to:

- Strengthen our mission focus;
- Equip and resource people for Mission and Ministry;
- Support local initiatives/partnerships;
- Attend to our Governance and Culture;
- Restructure the Diocese.

Strengthen Our Mission Focus.

Wow, to strengthen our mission focus is both exciting and reassuring isn't it?

There is no doubt that over the past few years we have strengthened our relationship with our Schools recognising the significant part that they have in mission across the diocese. Much work has been done, and is still being done to ensure that our schools with their chaplains are recognised as faith communities in their own right. This is Good News!

We have strengthened, and are continuing to strengthen, regional opportunities for mission. That is, missional activities beyond our parish boundaries. This too is Good News!

However, in the review we have just undertaken we have said that we want to do more. We have named and owned the fact that we want to be disciples out there in the world, committing to and engaged in the transforming work of God. Whilst it is true that this has always been at the heart of our calling as people of God, it would seem that we have not always made it a priority. Now in 2018 we, as a diocese, are saying that we are ready to reclaim this as a priority.

We have identified the fact that we want to be a Church that serves the poor, welcomes the outcast, shares the Gospel and grows communities of faith. We are acknowledging that we want to be a Church that speaks God's word of hope, joy and justice into the concerns and challenges of our local communities. There was also desire expressed by many that *we stop talking about this and get on and do it!* So how will you act to strengthen your mission focus in your patch during the next three years? Will you engage in the *prophetic* role of the church, giving voice to such issues as: the plight of the homeless, the refugee, the poor, those who have a disability, and those who are living with violence? Will you commit to encouraging existing disciples, and building up new ones? Will you look for links with local schools both Anglican Schools and our Public Schools? Whatever you do may you seek God's wisdom first, and may that wisdom give you the courage to act.

Equipping and Resourcing people for Mission and Ministry

Not only have we said that as a Diocese we want to strengthen our mission focus, but we have also expressed a strong desire that every Christian should be encouraged and equipped to live a distinctive Christian life in the world and for the world. However, the review also revealed that many across the diocese feel that they are not equipped or resourced adequately for mission and ministry.

Firstly, can I just remind each of us here today that we have been called, chosen, equipped and blessed by God. Each of us here has been given the gift of the Spirit. Each of us has been assured by God that we have all that we need to be God's people in the world. So, perhaps all we need to do is to embrace the Spirit of God within us and use the gifts we **have** been given!

Secondly, over the past 10 years there have been a number of courses, speakers, workshops and formation days that have all had an emphasis on equipping and resourcing people for ministry. At the conclusion of these days participants are often asked: *What is it that you need to feel equipped and resourced for ministry?* So often there is little or no feedback. If we are to take this priority seriously, then can I please encourage you to contact the MDO so as to assure that the appropriate opportunities to equip the people of God are available throughout the Diocese?

Inclusively Supporting Local Initiatives/Partnerships

During the past three years there have been conversations and explorations that have strengthened our ecumenical bonds across parish ministries. These conversations and explorations have usually arisen out of need, more than out of a genuine desire to be in partnership with our brothers and sisters in Christ from other parishes or denominations. However, our recent review has revealed that there are a number of parishes that genuinely want to be in partnership with other Christians so as to increase our opportunities of making God's presence and love known in the world. We have also said that we want to initiate new partnerships with existing community groups, rather than reinventing the wheel. Will you commit to explore, with courage and wisdom, this priority in your patch?

Attend To Governance and Culture.

We have undertaken much work to ensure that our diocese is now a much safer, sustainable and compliant diocese, and I would want to honour and give thanks to everyone involved in this aspect of our diocesan life.

There is, however, still much to do. The Royal Commission released an extensive list of recommendations for the National Church in December 2017. These recommendations were put in place in an attempt to make our Churches safer places for children, safer places for the vulnerable; safer places for everyone.

As a diocese we have been consistently working at, and are committed to, doing all that we can to ensure that our diocese is embracing the recommendations from the Royal Commission and recommendations from our General Synod.

At the February Synod we unanimously adopted a group of General Synod Canons. Canons that revolved around Safe Ministry to Children, Child Protection, and Vulnerable persons. Our unanimous endorsement of these canons shows our commitment to child protection and the protection of vulnerable people. This legislation also adds to, and honours, the work that has been done over many years.

Ensuring that our ministry units are safe is not just the work of the Bishop, the Registrar or the Professional Standards Committee; it is the work of us all because it is a Gospel imperative and central to our calling as Christians. Keeping people safe, holding them in high esteem and treating them with dignity and respect are all hallmarks of Christian love. It demands of us all vigilance, wisdom, respect and the courage to change a culture that has previously existed.

Restructure the Diocese.

The last priority that was named in the MMO review was that of restructuring the Diocese. Did I just see you wriggle in your seat, or fold your arms, or even close your eyes? So what image came into your mind when you heard those words restructure? Do you see *restructure* as a negative priority? Do you panic? Do you think of selling centres? Do you think of ministry across a region, or centralised ministry? Do you see it as a must, a positive thing? Do you think about Pioneer Ministry, Church Plants, Fresh Expressions, or really exploring what it means to be a good steward of all that has been entrusted to our care, for the sake of growing the kingdom of God?

During her episcopacy, Bishop Sarah began the conversation around restructuring by challenging us to think about: *what is lead in the saddle bag* and *what is bread for the journey?* It was an invitation for us to think about those structures or ministries that weigh us down, or bind us up, as opposed to those structures or ministries that give us life and enable us to move into the future God has planned for us. This challenge was (is) only the first step of a journey. A journey which will require us to exercise *wisdom and courage* as we move into the Church of the 21st century.

As a Diocese, it would appear that we want to be a church that knows where it has come from (to honour and celebrate our past) but we also want to be a church of the future as well, sustainable, viable and relevant. With this in mind, it is imperative that we give time and effort into re-shaping our church structures so that they will enable us to bear witness to the compelling love of Christ. This will not just magically happen, we will need to be proactively exploring opportunities of new growth; and courageously committed to looking at the sort of structures that are needed for the type of ministry and mission that God is calling us to in the 21st century. We can no longer afford to resist this kind of exploration. So, are we really open to listening deeply to God and to one another so as to determine how we can be smarter and wiser stewards of the resources that have been entrusted to our care? And after the listening is done, will we have the courage to act on the collective wisdom and be ready to faithfully live out what God is saying to us now?

Diocesan Life To Aspire To.

There is a feeling of tension that exists in the life of the diocese, and I am sure it's not just because I am chairing Synod! Let me name just a few of the tensions that I see (and hear). Tensions between the world view and the churches view. Tension between honouring the traditional way of being and doing church, and exploring something new and creative. Tension between singing those *good old hymns*, and introducing new ones. Tension around using page 119 in the prayer book or using liturgies from across the Anglican Communion. Tensions between the ministry in our Schools and

the ministry in our Parishes. Tensions in our Theological differences. . Tensions around change.

Tension or *fear* is a normal part of life and as such should not paralyse us, or disempower us. Rather, can I encourage you to embrace that sense of tension as a positive feeling, as an energy that can move us forward, stretch us, and cause us to think and rethink about who we are and what we have been called to do and be as Church. As a church it would be wise for us, firstly, to name our tensions to God. Secondly, it would be wise for us to talk about our tensions with one another, listening carefully to one another and to the world. Thirdly, we need to have the courage to ask what the Spirit is saying to us about the tensions that we are experiencing and allow the Spirit to work in us. As a diocese, it could be extremely beneficial for us to create spaces, debates, discussions where we talk openly and honestly about the critical matters that we are facing. Spaces where we can name our tensions, our diversity and honour them as we seek ways forward together. Do we have the courage to be open to such conversations? Conversations where we are truly listening to God and the voice of God in the other?

The Gospel reading that I chose for today is the ending of Mark's account of the Gospel in which we hear these words: *"So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them: and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."*

I chose this reading because it reminds me that love overcomes the fear that those first disciples experienced. And that love propelled those early followers into a new future. Their fear turned into energy and excitement as they courageously became God's people in the world. They were transformed by their experience of the power of the risen Christ and became agents of transformation, followers became leaders, listeners became preachers, converts became missionaries. The disciples became apostles, and nothing was the same. Their focus became the mission that God had called them to, and in being true to that calling they found themselves equipped for the tasks that confronted them. Surely this is what we are aspiring to as God's people today?

Isn't this the kind of transformation we are seeking? Isn't this what we are looking for in our diocese as we seek to strengthen our mission focus and to live lives as Confident Christians in the world? We may not know all answers now but that should not paralyse and cause us to be afraid, for we know that God is with us, and it is God's love that will empower us to be God's people in the world, and to grow communities of faith.

As a diocese we engage in our Diocesan dreaming, our response to professional standard matters, and our daily lives as communities of faith, in the face of financial challenges, declining numbers and struggling parishes. We do this knowing that we are engaged in God's Mission, and as such we will never lose sight of the bigger picture of God's transforming grace, God's call to keep moving - with him – being faithful to God and to each other.

And In Giving Thanks.

There is much to give thanks for in the life of the Diocese. We have been blessed by the episcopacy of Bishop Sarah and for the ministry that Ian offered us all. There has been growth in our schools, and in their relationships with our ministry units. There are new expressions of church that are taking root and bubbling away. There are numerous ways in which our worship is undergirding all that we are and all that we do. We have indeed been steadily *growing our leadership capabilities*, and I personally give thanks to those who have stepped up and ministered alongside me during this interregnum. There has been no lull in the activity in the diocese since +Sarah laid up her pastoral staff. This is a sign of good episcopal ministry, recognizing that we have all been given both the guidance and the freedom to use the gifts that we have for ministry. For all this and much more we give thanks to God.

My sincere thanks go to the Registrar, a prayer partner, friend and a colleague whose heart (and mind) seeks only the best for the diocese. To the Registry staff who really are an amazing group of people. To Canon Zoe Everingham for her work on reviewing our Diocesan Priorities and to the countless people who pray for me regularly. I sincerely appreciate your prayers and your ministry.

Just one more person to thank and to do that I want to take you back to that first synod that I attended some 25 years or more ago. Mark and I decided to take our two children, Clare and Matthew, to a Synod Eucharist to give them an experience of a more formal gathering, and it was in those days. The procession started to process in, the Deacons, the Priests, the Registrar, the Advocate ... When suddenly Matthew yelled out! Dad, Dad, look that man has a fox on his head! It was the chancellor of the day wearing his distinctive robes! Richard Cogswell, our Chancellor, does not wear a fox on his head, and I can't imagine him wearing one either. He is not that kind of person. But it would be remiss of me if I did not draw attention to Richard and to thank him personally for his generosity of spirit, his wisdom, advice and friendship. You are indeed serving this diocese well and I thank you.

And so we continue our journey as a Diocese living into the future. We do so giving thanks to God for his faithfulness. We do so seeking God's wisdom in all that we do and we do so courageously put God's plan for us into action. May we all continue to be faithful to the mission before us, and in setting the scene for a new bishop to minister with us here in the Diocese of Grafton.

