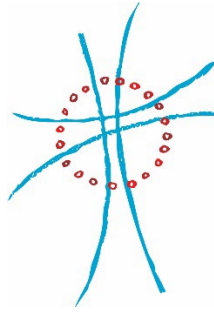




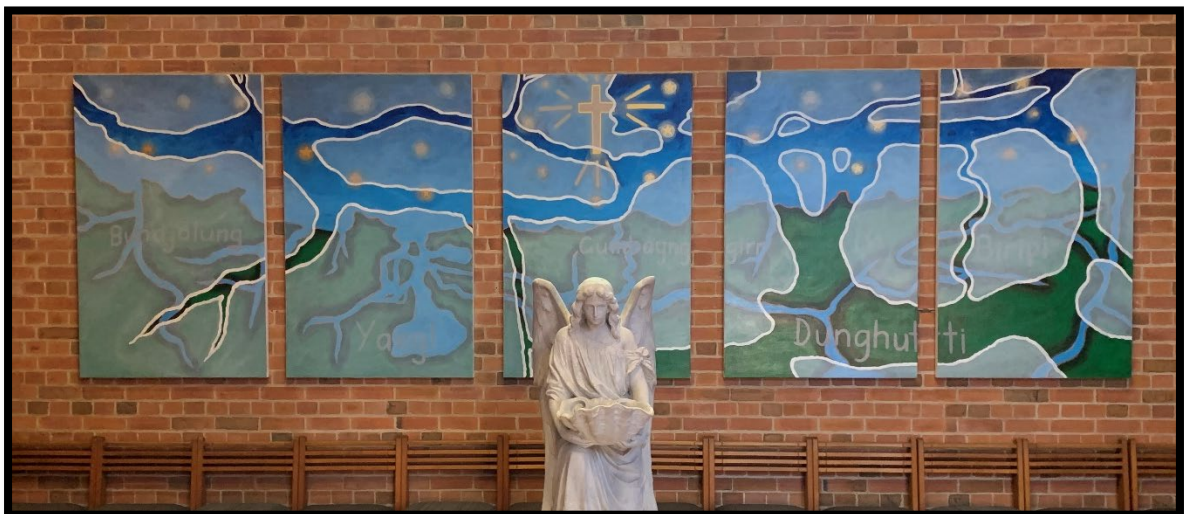
President's Address to the Synod of the Diocese of Grafton 17-19 June 2022

Dr Murray Harvey
Bishop of Grafton





I acknowledge the Bundjalung, Arakwal, Yaegl, Githabul, Gumbayngirr, Dunghutti and Birpai peoples, the traditional custodians of the lands on which the Diocese of Grafton is based. I pay tribute and respect to the elders of these nations and peoples, both past, present and emerging, acknowledge their continuing connection to the land and waters, and thank them for their protection of the mountains, hinterland, waters and coastline since time immemorial.



This impressive painting by Frances Belle Parker provides a stunning backdrop in the Baptistry of Grafton Cathedral. This work evokes the life-giving capacities of the Clarence River and reminds us that we stand on country that has long been sacred to the indigenous peoples of this ancient land.

We never planned to have an elephant.
Our house is not designed for so large a pet.
At best it would be chaotic,
at worst, destructive.
Don't get me wrong,
elephants are magnificent beasts in the right place:
The plains of Africa
The jungles of Sri Lanka.
Yet here we are with an Elephant in the room,
now occupying our living space.
At first we assumed that we could easily rehome the elephant,
unravel the misunderstanding that led to its arrival.
Yet it seems rehoming and re-ravelling are more complicated.
The elephant inevitably took up space
it trampled on the plants
and defecated in the borders.
It wanted to be near us
but once inside the room
its bulk made conversation difficult,
obscuring the view and blocking the light.
Though people tried to politely ignore it
our lives became shaped by its presence.
People began to forget that we had not
asked for an Elephant.
Despite having the paperwork showing
its origins, and our lack of ownership,
it was assumed to be our elephant.
After all, it lived in our house.
And so this is how we live,
negotiating its size,
tending to its needs,
and hoping daily for news of an Elephant sanctuary.

Poem: *The Elephant in the Room*ⁱ

In the Diocese of Grafton we seek to transform lives for Christ. We seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ, making disciples and growing faith communities. Through the work of our parishes,

schools, chaplaincies and Anglicare, we seek to embrace the Spirit of Christ in our time. These are some of the things that we say about ourselves in our vision and mission statements. More recently, our restructuring for mission and ministry has expressed our desire and commitment to dare to live into God's future for us. This is exciting stuff. It's great to be part of this passionate commitment to mission here on the North Coast and to be able to gather as the Synod of the Diocese for the first time since 2020.

But there is an elephant in the room. As in the poem, we've tried to politely ignore it, but our lives are being shaped by its presence. In fact, we have more than one elephant. I think it's a herd.

One particular elephant is COVID-19. Like a typical elephant in the room, we all know it's there but we feel uncomfortable about acknowledging it's deeper and long term impact. A global health crisis that has affected the whole world, including our region here on the North Coast, has directly impacted our mission and ministry in many ways. Thankfully our region got off fairly lightly compared to some, but the social and economic impacts will continue to affect us for years to come. One of the main impacts has been the effect of COVID-19 on our mental health. Relatively early in the pandemic the NCLS Leader Wellbeing Check highlighted one aspect of this – the impact of the pandemic on our clergy. The closure of churches to Public Worship, the ever-changing restrictions and resulting administrative burden of offering COVID Safe worship and pastoral care, the pressure of producing online services and other ministries, the cancelled or postponed services and events, the lockdowns, isolations, vaccination requirements and reduced church attendance have had a cumulative effect over a period of more than two years.

The pandemic can be seen as a real threat to the survival of congregations, worship centres and parishes. Yet such a huge

worldwide crisis offers opportunities as well. As studies of previous pandemics and other major crises have shown, these events are typically followed by a questioning of values and priorities and a challenging of prevailing social constructions of reality. They offer the chance to re-imagine and reorder society, reconstructing it in better ways.ⁱⁱ What part is the church going to play in this re-imagining? A question that Bishop Rob Gillion posed to his Synod a few years back is pertinent: *Do we have an openness for intentional deep change in the light of serious decline that will bring new life, or do we prefer tolerable minor adjustments that makes slow death more palatable?*

The pandemic came at a time when we were already under stress. You might recall that in my Presidential Address in 2019 I observed a real sense of disillusionment amongst Anglicans in our diocese:

Like many, I am disheartened that the church appears to have lost some of the respect and standing that it formerly had in the community. This loss of confidence can have implications for how we see ourselves and can negatively impact on our mission if we allow it to.

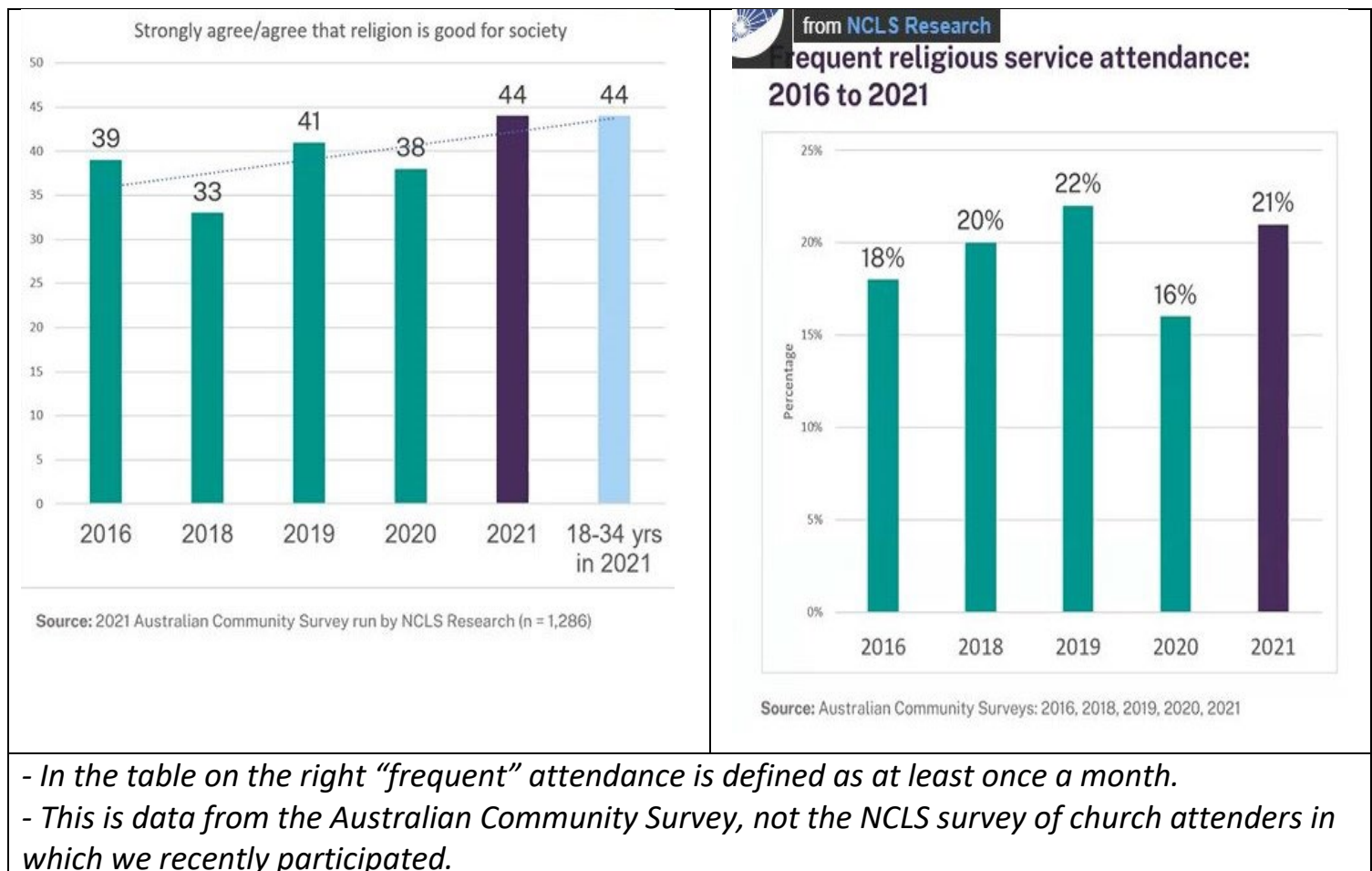
I was encouraged to attend a NCLS Webinar recently, entitled *What Australians really think about Jesus and the Church today.*ⁱⁱⁱ I

encourage you all to watch the recording of the webinar here:

<https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/webinar-what-australians-really-think-about-jesus-and-the-church-today/>

The results of the NCLS Australian Community Survey offer evidence that the church, and Christianity generally, has greater respect in Australian society than the media and other loud voices would have us believe. The narrative tells us that the Church has failed children, Indigenous people, the vulnerable, and is failing as an institution. The narrative of a failing and dying church is clearly inaccurate and is published by those with an agenda both outside and inside the church. The latest research (November 2021) reveals that 44% of Australians believe

that religion is good for Australian society (at the time of the Royal Commission in 2017/18 it had slumped to 33%). The decline in church attendance seems to have plateaued since about 2016 and despite a slump in 2020 due to COVID-19, by November last year it had returned to pre-pandemic levels.



Yet we still have significant challenges. Two in ten Australian adults had tried to get involved in church but decided not to continue. Did we overlook these newcomers/seekers in our *busyness* to maintain a “business as usual” church? Whatever the reasons, the research shows that too many have tried to get involved and failed. I’m drawn to Colossians 4:5-6 here. In our interaction with those outside our regular circle, we are called to be *wise and to make the most of every opportunity, letting our conversation be always full of grace.*

Consistent with earlier research, the 2021 survey revealed that those who do give us a try are looking for relationships, community and belonging. While the statistic that 34% of Australians would accept an invitation from a friend or family member to attend church is encouraging, it is tempered by the fact that only 44% actually know a churchgoer. So we not only need to promote an invitational culture, but also to make more friends with non-Christians! I look forward to receiving the results of the recent NCLS Survey in which we participated as a diocese. It will aid our understanding of how some of these trends relate to Anglicans on the North Coast. The crisis that the pandemic has created has been described as an opportunity to reinvent ourselves in mission. As we rebuild after the pandemic, let's do it with more confidence and a commitment to growing community.

We are indebted to clergy and lay leaders in ministry units for their diligence and perseverance through the pandemic, as well as to the Registrar and his team, the Corporate Trustees and the Bishop-in-Council for their wise financial management of the diocese during the darkest days of the pandemic. School Principals and School Councils were also under extreme pressure and they offered excellent leadership. Anglicare North Coast was able to reach out to those most affected and also help to resource parishes in their response.

Another elephant in the room is the financial challenge of meeting our redress commitments to survivors of abuse in church institutions. Just as we were planning to use valuable resources to establish new ministries through which we could further God's mission, in the second half of 2020 we found out about a much higher than expected redress target. Thankfully we have been able to raise the funds required, which is a credit to the decisive and strategic actions of the Bishop-in-Council, Corporate Trustees and

the Registrar, and of course to the financial sacrifices made by most parishes. The figure is a crippling sum and seriously limits our ability to resource new ways of being the church. Speaking personally, the news of such an enormous commitment was to say the least disappointing and deflating. Yet it's important to keep things in perspective. The hopes and dreams we have of living into God's future relate to getting on board with God's mission – with what God is already doing. It's not our mission. So this ongoing financial commitment to redress is a commitment to survivors. Let's see God at work here, see his mission being lived out, despite our weakness and past failures. As Professor Martyn Percy^{iv} writes, we're not called to be devoted members of the Church Preservation Society, absorbed by our own survival. We are called to be a church that does not cling to itself but empties itself. The church hasn't been good at this in the past. As the authors of *Letters to a Broken Church*^v write, our institution struggles with truth telling and doesn't know how to own its own struggle. I pray that we might be a humble, listening church, modelling in a post-pandemic world the Gospel values of truth, justice and compassion. Let's model the true humility that we see in Jesus (Philippians 2:3-8) which dares to hope. After all, as John Stott wrote, the Gospel is not a demand, but an offer.^{vi}

Sadly, there are still more elephants in the room. In undertaking the Anglican Church of Australia's Family Violence Project, the Church has deliberately taken the lead on this broader societal issue. However, the study's findings about family violence, especially Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), within families associated with the church is disturbing news.^{vii} The prevalence of IPV among Anglicans was the same or higher than in the wider community, with perpetrators misusing Scripture and Christian teachings in order to justify family violence. Our own Sister Helen CSC has written about this, quoting The Rev'd Professor Dorothy Lee, that to deny authority to women in home and church is a form of spiritual abuse.^{viii} On the

positive side, while most Anglican victims of IPV did not seek help from Anglican Churches, those that did reported that it positively changed the situation or helped them feel supported. This is a complex issue and is the topic of a presentation and a motion at this Synod. I'm glad that this particular elephant has been named and that it's clear that the church needs to take action on this. Domestic violence is an issue that should be discussed in church, and local churches should do more to raise awareness of domestic violence. In preparation for this part of the Presidential Address, I re-read 1 Peter 2:13-3:7 where the author gives instruction to those living under human institutions. How might this section of 1 Peter speak in our contemporary context? I wonder, why are we more confident in condemning slavery than patriarchy in our world?

Another elephant in the room is the issue of whether or not Anglican clergy may be permitted to bless Same Sex couples who have been legally married under Australian Civil Law. While this is a contentious issue, the Australian Bishops had made good progress in early 2020 in listening to one another and discerning possible ways forward. Frustratingly, COVID-19 and the resultant restrictions on interstate travel and gatherings, saw the cancellation of three Bishops' meetings (planned for Adelaide, Melbourne and then Canberra). The result was that progress was delayed until our meeting in Adelaide this year which thankfully was our most helpful meeting so far on this issue. Conscious that General Synod 2022 was unlikely to resolve the issue, earlier this year we agreed to meet in October for further discussion. While the GAFCON proposal has been carefully planned and publicly released, it is only one possible way forward and in my view a not very attractive one. It is worth noting that, in line with the other members of the House of Bishops, I gave an undertaking not to move forward on this issue until it was debated at General Synod 2022. Since then, in a Pastoral Letter after General Synod, I have counselled continued restraint until after the Bishops' meeting later

this year. This is necessary for the unity of the church at this time, as moving forward to Bless Same-Sex Civil Marriages now will impair our relationships with other dioceses within our Province of NSW and in the wider Anglican Church of Australia without a plan for how this can be managed. While I know that there is hurt and confusion over this issue for many LGBTQIA+ Anglicans, the Anglican Church has a long tradition of considering the answers to theological and ethical questions in process and over time as we seek to discern God's ongoing revelation for our generation and context. A key role of a bishop is unity, so I am endeavouring to seek God's wisdom and to act pastorally, justly and with integrity for the whole church while we continue to discern a way forward. Please pray for the Bishops as we consider this divisive issue.

Another elephant is climate change. In February this year 14.5 metres of water inundated the City of Lismore and had a catastrophic effect on the city and the surrounding region. Over 3000 homes were declared uninhabitable and thousands of families have been displaced and will be living in temporary accommodation for many months if not years. Affected communities were well served by the selfless work of parishes, schools, Disaster Recovery Chaplains and Anglicare North Coast. There are no simple solutions that this Bishop is going to offer in his Presidential Address, yet if we are committed to a love of God's creation and of his people, for us hope should mean believing that the future is worth our best efforts and our deepest resolve.^{ix} There is much that we can do on a practical level as individuals and through the work of our parishes, Anglicare North Coast and schools. Yet some have suggested that the question we should be asking is, how can our churches curate spaces of hope^x within a post-pandemic society in the midst of a climate emergency?

As in the poem, we did not ask for any of these elephants. While we might claim lack of ownership, they are, for all intents and purposes,

our elephants. In other words, they are the issues that confront us in our time. So it's important to name them and wrestle with the issues they present, otherwise our lives will continue to be shaped and defined by trying to ignore their presence. These are our issues and how well we deal with them, and with one another, will define who we are.

I'd now like to move onto some other matters. I won't deal with the implementation of *Restructuring for Mission and Ministry: Daring to Live into God's Future*, because I have reported on this in a document that is part of the Synod papers.^{xi} The plans for the restructure anticipated that leadership would be a key issue in living into the new models. Therefore, a key focus since last Synod has been the resourcing of ordained and lay leaders. Over a period of two years, Dr Tim Dwyer has led sessions with LLMs and clergy about working in teams, leading teams, resilience and conflict management. At Ministry School and the Lay Conference this year the focus will again be on leadership, but from a theological perspective with Bishop Stephen Pickard, focused on leading Christian communities in the context of our Australian society.

Sadly, as we have begun to live into the restructure, one of the main stumbling blocks has been conflict, power struggles and impaired relationships within parishes. I resisted the temptation to identify this particular elephant in my description of the small herd of elephants described earlier. Impaired relationships within parish communities is not only very destructive but holds churches back in mission, deters newcomers and absorbs the time and energy of Regional Archdeacons, the Diocesan Archdeacon and the Bishop. Leadership is key to flourishing Christian communities but for this to happen, lay and ordained leaders need the support of a cohesive team that is committed not to individual agendas but to the vision for mission and ministry which that community has discerned as

God's will for them. I welcome the revised version *Being Together*, the Code of Conduct for Anglican Church communities (see below). My prayer is that our churches will be a blessing to their wider communities, offering the Gospel to their neighbourhoods through humble service and promoting human flourishing. This can only be genuinely offered by church communities that themselves model respectful and affirming relationships (e.g., John 13:34-35).

Finally, I would like to thank the incredible team that is Grafton Diocese. I often get asked, what do I like the most about being the Bishop of Grafton? My response is that it is the *team* that makes the difference. Despite floods, COVID-19 and more, I've seen faithfulness, resilience, tenacity, determination, creativity, professionalism and a true commitment to God's mission and ministry amongst people from parishes, schools, chaplaincies, Anglicare North Coast and the Bishop's Registry. I thank you all for your ongoing partnership in the Gospel.

*Lord of all,
we thank you that in Jesus Christ you came alongside us
to teach us love and strengthen us in faith.
Be with us all, we pray, as we seek to follow you,
that through our discussions and our encouragement of one
another we may learn more of your truth
and have the energy and the courage
to serve this world in new and imaginative ways,
that through your gift of creativity,
your holy gospel would be preached afresh in our generation,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

[The Canterbury Book of New Parish Prayers, Max Kramer, 2020]

ⁱ E. Percy, *The Elephant in the Room*, 2020

ⁱⁱ F.M. Snowden, 2019, *Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present*. Yale University Press

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- iii Ruth Powell and Karl Faase, National Church Life Survey Webinar, *What Australians really think about Jesus and the Church today*, 9 June 2022
- iv M. Percy, 2021, *The Humble Church*, Canterbury Press
- v J.Fife and Gilo, 2019, *Letters to a Broken Church*, Ekklesia Publishing
- vi J. Stott, 1967, *Our Guilty Silence*, Hodder and Stoughton
- vii *National Anglican Family Violence Project: Research Report Top Line Results*, 2021, National Church Life Survey
- viii Sr Helen CSC, *Spiritual Appreciation and Respect*, August 2021
- ix Ian Cowley, *The Contemplative Struggle*
- x The William Temple Foundation. *Curating Spaces of Hope: Intra-Communities Dialogue and Post-Pandemic Society*. williamtemplefoundation.org.uk/curating-spaces-of-hope-2/
- xi *Restructuring for Mission and Ministry: Progress Report to Grafton Diocesan Synod 2022* (see Report Book Volume 1, pages 39-47)





Being Together

Expectations of behaviour in our church community

Jesus told us to love one another as he loves us. As Christians we know our life together is strengthened when our behaviour is consistent with our faith.

However, our experience of being together can be difficult, particularly when there are differences. So, it is important to be clear about how we will behave towards each other.



Being a community

- ✓ We will value the wellbeing and safety of others, especially children and other vulnerable people.
- ✓ We will encourage each other to participate in the life of the church.
- ✓ We will consider the impact of our behaviour on others.



Relating to each other

- ✓ We will protect the safety of all, especially children and other vulnerable people.
- ✓ We will treat each other with respect and dignity, irrespective of ability, gender, sexuality, race, age or contribution to the church.
- ✓ We will act with integrity and honesty in our interactions with each other.



Communicating with each other

- ✓ We will communicate respectfully with others, and not in a way that threatens, belittles or humiliates.
- ✓ We will speak with integrity and honesty, and refrain from speculation and gossip.



Acknowledging difference

- ✓ We will respect those who are different from us and not isolate or ridicule them.
- ✓ We will listen to and seek to understand the beliefs, opinions and practices of others, even when we do not share their views.



Responding to conflict

- ✓ We will accept responsibility for our part in a conflict.
- ✓ We will be willing to play our part in resolving a conflict.



ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA







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