
Wednesday, 24 August 2022

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Pastoral Letter regarding the Launch of the Diocese of the Southern Cross

As your Bishop I write to express my sadness over the recent media reports of a "split" in the Anglican Church of Australia. These reports have caused anxiety and concern for many, including myself, and so I want to challenge them and to offer some clarification.

Firstly, the Anglican Church of Australia has not "split" – no diocese of the Anglican Church of Australia has "broken away" and as far as I know, none are intending to - we are still 23 Dioceses. Archbishop Raffel of Sydney, for example, recently wrote in a Media Statement that: "The Diocese of Sydney is an integral part of the Anglican Church of Australia and we have no intention of leaving". Put simply, what has happened is that some people from one congregation in the Diocese of Brisbane, together with their priest, have chosen to leave the Anglican Church of Australia and therefore the Anglican Communion to become part of a new theologically conservative and Biblically fundamentalist denomination – the Diocese of the Southern Cross. This is effectively a new church and is not part of the Anglican Church of Australia or the Anglican Communion.

About 40 people have joined this new denomination (more will likely join in the future) and a retired Anglican Bishop has chosen to support them. They have left because of the debate about the possibility of the blessing of same-sex relationships and the inclusion of LGBTI+ people in the life of the church. For these reasons they feel they can no longer remain in the Anglican Church in their diocese and under the leadership of their bishop. While some Anglicans may support this development it should be noted that this new group is not a diocese in the Anglican Church of Australia. It was established by GAFCON (the Global Anglican Futures Conference) and can be viewed as another step on their journey towards a more Puritan, and less comprehensive Anglican, future. It is also worth noting that they are meeting in rented premises as they can no longer use their parish site because this is Church Trust property of the Anglican Church, and they are not an Anglican entity.

While I sympathise with those who act according to their conscience, I feel that leaving the Anglican Church on this issue at this time is foolish. This is because in the Anglican Church of Australia, including in the Diocese of Grafton, there has been no doctrinal change – our Doctrine of Marriage is unchanged and we remain committed to the Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles of the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia.

I am encouraged that the evangelical bishops to whom I have spoken are committed to remaining in the Anglican Church of Australia. Despite our deep divisions, they are willing to participate in ongoing debate within our church regarding gender and other issues. At the recent Lambeth Conference, with a broad range of Australian Anglican bishops - evangelical, anglo-catholic and liberal - there was a genuine sense of being able to celebrate our diversity, of deep listening and genuine fellowship. While it is true that a comparatively small number of bishops did not attend Lambeth again this year, they do not represent Anglican evangelicals worldwide.

Earlier this year, following General Synod 2022, I wrote a Pastoral Letter to the Diocese which included the following:

It is clear that we will need to continue to live in respectful disagreement with continued dialogue on this issue.... the Anglican Church has a long tradition of discerning the answers to ethical questions in process and over time. 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.

In the same spirit I urge ongoing respectful debate about this issue within the Anglican Church, including within Grafton Diocese, as we listen and walk together despite disagreement. If you have ongoing concerns about these issues I encourage you to pray about them but also to discuss them with your ministry leaders.

At the Lambeth Conference my wife Leanne and I were nourished by our study of the First Letter of Peter. I strongly believe that the call to unity in 1 Peter 3:8 is a call to us today:

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

I hope that we can hear afresh this call, and make our own commitment now to strive for the unity of the Church.

Yours in Christ

+ Murray

Dr Murray Harvey
Bishop of Grafton

