

**The President's Address to the 50th Synod
of the
Diocese of Melbourne
Wednesday 19 October 2011**

*The Most Reverend Dr Philip Freier
Archbishop of Melbourne*

Opening

I welcome you to the Second Session of the 50th Synod of the Diocese of Melbourne. I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations, the traditional custodians of this land, and I pay tribute to those who have gone before us, from our beginning as a diocese in 1847 to the present day.

As we reflect on the first year of implementing the Vision and Strategic Directions, and on other matters which properly concern us as the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, let us reflect on what God would have us do, in godly responses to all that is before us.

September 11

On the tenth anniversary of 9/11 I was in the United States as part of a period of study leave. I preached on that Sunday at the morning service of the Episcopal Church of St Peter's in the Woods, at Fairfax Station in Virginia. We were not far from Washington DC where on the eleventh of September 2001 one of four hijacked planes was intentionally crashed into the Pentagon.

The parish held an all-day prayer vigil, each person having been personally affected by the terrorist attacks of ten years before. Whether close to the site as I was, or here in our own 9/11 cathedral service, the commemoration was profound.

The lectionary readings, as you may remember, were compelling in the theme of the godly response of forgiveness and reconciliation. It was not the message that might have been expected at a time when feelings remain high, still feelings of outrage, of horror and of grief.

Many of you will recall the Memorial Service held in London after the Falklands War when the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, displeased the Prime Minister of the day by praying also for the Argentinian victims of the war. As followers of Jesus we are charged with a godly response in all that we say and do even if it is counter to the expectations of the day.

Synod

We are here at the annual Synod of our Diocese for the presenting of reports, the consideration of aspects of our organisation and mission and so ensuring overall accountability.

It is important for us to gather together as one in the body of Christ, upholding the vision of *Making the Word of God fully known*. As well, we meet as colleagues and friends and even as people who may have met for the first time last year. In such a large group getting to know each other has its obvious challenges, but I encourage you to engage with as many other Synod members as possible. We are the richer for our Christian fellowship.

Journey of a Year

I want to single out the highlights of the last twelve months and some critical issues. My first is surely the implementation of the Vision, so enthusiastically adopted by Synod last year. I will report to you the details of all that has taken place and we will have a special time later in the Synod, to focus on the Vision. There is much to report on and much that has been implemented.

Diocesan Ministry Conference

Next, this year's Diocesan Ministry Conference was a highlight and has been summed up as a friendly and happy conference with good Bible Studies, good music and good input. The sessions on being an inviting church were particularly well received. Most of all there was a strong sense of unity and purpose. I was pleased with the success of the conference, which had the theme of "*Servants of the Church According to God's Commission*". This verse of Colossians 1:25 gave us the Conference theme and the context, of St Paul charging the faithful of Colossae with being servants of the church and making the Word of God fully known. Two thousand years on, we are still charged to be servants of the church and 'to make the Word of God fully known' - which we adopted last year as our Vision.

Let me encourage those of you who are wardens and vestry members of parishes, or connected with chaplaincies, to give full support to the attendance of clergy at diocesan and regional conferences.

Professional development is an expectation of all professions, industries and workplaces. Clergy need to be updated in knowledge and skills and in better ways of undertaking ministry. We also need to be built up spiritually and relationally. In 2012 there will be Regional Conferences which are part of the learning program for clergy and we hope that as many as possible will gain the benefits of these gatherings. For those in non-parochial ministries I recognise the competing demands on your time and, whether or not you are free to come to the clergy conferences, I encourage and support you in the aim of continuous learning. The Church is a dynamic learning organisation, as well as the bearer of ancient traditions and truth.

Asylum Seekers

In the broader community this year I want to highlight three critical issues starting with the treatment of asylum seekers.

As Australians we can be rightly proud of the land of the 'fair go'. We have rallied round to support those affected by flooding and by Cyclone Yasi. Our hearts and our donations went out those affected, both in Queensland and New South Wales and then closer to home in Victoria. But there was more tangible help: strangers came with buckets, spades and mops to dig out, to clean up and to restore homes and lives to some normality. Our compassion reached to the people in Christchurch and Japan. The natural disasters of 2011 brought out the best in the Australian character.

Our demonstrated national values are not always so simple. Even though neither legal nor political agreement was found in the question of so called 'off shore' processing of asylum seekers, both Government and Opposition appear to concur that border security, not compassion, will be the lens through which asylum seekers are seen. For most of us here, the experience of being a refugee seeking asylum in this land has to be imagined. Those of you who did come as refugees know that struggle for survival. Compassion must come first.

Climate Change and Carbon Pricing

This leads to the second issue, the impact of human life on our planet and climate change, because many become refugees through intolerable situations such as famine. The associated issue is the carbon pricing debate. Ideology is always tested in the personal and the personal has been caught up this year in reactions to the political agendas surrounding the proposed carbon tax. Little has been heard of reasoned argument, much about additional costs and how to manage them. If the scientists are even partly right, our children's children will have to endure this harmful legacy, global warming and its effects on sustainable living. Is this a risk that we want to take?

So I was pleased to see the carbon pricing legislation pass in the House of Representatives. What a shame, though, that so much of our attention over the last year has been engaged on the kind of debate we have seen, rather than in debating the relative merits of a carbon trading scheme where the market sets the price of carbon, compared with a carbon tax with the carbon price set by government. Long term effectiveness, instead of the short term impact on our finances, should have made up the debate.

Population growth means that humans are living in greater numbers or more permanently in both arid environments and flood prone environments. Predictions of climate change mean greater extremes of climate - longer droughts, heavier flood rains, higher frequency of cyclones. Natural disasters of the kind we have recently experienced in Australia will mean more people throughout the world pushed to desperation more often. Our national leaders will need great wisdom and great compassion to guide us through these circumstances.

Pacific Neighbours

Thirdly, our Pacific neighbours. As Christians we have a responsibility to our neighbours. A godly response in this region of the world is to consider how we might assist Pacific neighbours, beyond the existing partnerships. This month the Pacific island archipelagos of Tuvalu and Tokelau declared states of emergency, having almost exhausted their drinking water supplies.

Later this year I will travel to Honiara in the Solomon Islands to lead a retreat for the General Synod of the Church of Melanesia and to preach at the opening of their General Synod.

As with the other Pacific islands the Solomon islanders have suffered coastal erosion, threats to water supplies and food production and the costs incurred with flooding. The Solomon Islands is also struggling to cohere as a state in which its citizens can expect the same quality of law, policing and public administration that we take for granted. The annual survey of citizen satisfaction completed as part of the accountability of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) reported this year that nearly half of the population believed that law and order would break down if RAMSI left.

The Anglican Church in the Solomons can and must make a difference. With Anglicans at 45% of the Solomon Islander population, our church is a very significant part of civil society with parish and institutional infrastructure reaching to the most remote parts of this nation of islands. The Archbishop of Melanesia has launched a vision of founding an Anglican University with faculties of theology and teaching. The existing provincial theological college, Bishop Patteson Theological College, operates the only degree conferring program in the country and it will become the Theology Faculty. This is a great vision and it could change the course of that nation for the next generation.

Just think of the impact that skilled and ethical leadership has on any nation's prospects. I am not sure how we might help that vision come to fruition but I feel sure that God will make a claim upon us at the right time for such an important work to prosper.

Moving from a wider perspective of the church in the world I want to come closer to home and make four other observations.

Vicar General of Ballarat

Firstly to appreciate the magnificent contribution Bishop Philip Huggins has made to the Diocese of Ballarat in the seventeen months he has been the Vicar General. Bishop Philip had provided assistance to Ballarat prior to that time but his official period as Vicar General commenced on 28 May 2010 and will come to an end on 5 November this year, when Bishop Garry Weatherill takes up his responsibilities as the tenth Bishop of Ballarat. You may remember that Bishop Philip accepted this role at the invitation of Bishop Michael Hough to enable Bishop Michael to take a period of sick leave, and after that long service leave, prior to his resignation. The role has continued through this year as the bishop election process took its course.

Throughout this long period Bishop Philip continued in his responsibilities as the Bishop of the Northern and Western Region of this diocese, a responsibility in size and complexity several times larger than the majority of Australian dioceses.

It was of course right that we should have made this commitment and it has been generous of Bishop Philip to carry both roles with such grace and good humour.

These are the things we do because we are part of Christ's Church and recognise the need of a neighbour and the opportunity to lend a helping hand.

CRE in State Schools

Secondly the teaching of religion in state schools. I must say that I was surprised that this became such a public debate for the church. The withdrawal of government support to denominational schools in the 1870s set a pattern of closure of most Anglican parish schools and the eventual agreement that instruction in Christian faith from the Christian scriptures would be ensured in all State Schools.

I would be sorry to see that right removed.

The teaching of the Christian faith in state primary schools may be the only opportunity children have to know about Jesus Christ. Children and young people in our Anglican schools are fortunate to receive religious education in the Christian faith as part of their curriculum, as well as to participate in forms of worship. Children in state schools, though not involved in worship, can learn about Christianity through Christian Religious Education, CRE.

CRE is not intended to be an academic or intellectual exercise but it has, I understand, a well-designed curriculum and a focus on Bible stories. Is this not part of our Vision, 'making the Word of God fully known'?

It has been suggested that the teaching of world religions replace CRE. In my view this should not be seen as an alternative or replacement but I would welcome the addition to the curriculum of this different discipline of the study of world religions.

Theological Education, Formation and Training

I highlight as my third observation theological education, formation and training. Renewal of ministry lies at the heart of our church.

All ministry - clergy and lay - is valued by the diocese. Parish ministry is the more common expression but distinctive ministries in ethnic congregations, in chaplaincies or pioneer ministries or fresh expressions are open to be discerned. Our program of theological education, formation and training seeks to maintain intellectual and theological rigour. I am heartened by the quality of this and of all involved and by our commitment to continue to improve.

Anglican Church of Australia

Finally I want to speak about the Anglican Church of Australia which on 1 January next year celebrates the 50th anniversary of the operation of our Constitution. Long in the making, this constitution provided us with the framework to be a national church and to take our place as an autonomous province of the worldwide Anglican Communion. I believe that there is much that we can continue to do together as a national church even though we are bound to regard the individual dioceses as the fundamental locus of mission and resource.

The constitution commits us to: the apostolic faith; the diocese as the fundamental unit of church organisation; and the three-fold order of deacon, priest and bishop in the ordained ministry of the church.

One of the early achievements of the national church was the foundation of the National Home Mission Fund in 1969 in order to fund the unendowed outback dioceses and respond to national disasters.

Through the constitution we cooperate and collaborate. We did so to achieve the ordination of women which the Diocese of Melbourne will celebrate next year, as the 20th anniversary of the first ordination of women priests. For Melbourne this was a principled journey, following first where Scripture called us to obedience of the biblical principle that we are all one in Christ: *"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus," Galatians 3:28*

While the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia constrained this diocese from proceeding at its own pace, the unity of the Anglican Church in this country was worth preserving. Sound biblical scholarship assured our Synod that it was right for all orders of ordained ministry to be open to women. We worked with the Constitution to bring us to where our church is today.

It is my hope that when other issues arise, as has diaconal presidency, the same commitment that we make to biblical principles and the Anglican Church of Australia Constitution will maintain the unity of our national church.

Early next year Melbourne will host the National Bishops' Conference. When Bishops - and when General Synod members - come together, we quickly discover that what we have in common significantly outweighs any points of difference. Difference has its cost, however, and we must continue to find our unity under the Lordship of Christ.

Implementation of the Vision

I come back to the Vision and Strategic Directions 2011-2013, adopted in this place one year ago. Let me briefly look backward and then forward!

There are six strategic directions. I remind you what they are:

1. We will strive to 'make the Word of God fully known' in word and action in all parts of the Diocese - urban, developing and rural
2. We will form an institute to foster the development of effective churches, congregations and ministries throughout the Diocese
3. We will establish a pilot program to encourage growth in mission within 25 selected parishes over the next three years realising that congregations are key to the effective ministry and mission of the church throughout the diocese.
4. We will steward our inherited parish property assets in the service of mission in all the parishes of the Diocese
5. We will steward our monetary wealth so as to enable future mission
6. We will monitor and report our progress in the implementation of the Vision and Strategic Directions.

One of the first steps was the appointment of a Coordinator for the implementation of the Vision. Mr Ken Morgan commenced in the role at the end of February. You will meet Ken and learn more of his work during the Synod.

Throughout the last twelve months there has been regular monitoring, reporting and discussing progress with Archbishop in Council, with the Senior Staff team of archdeacons and with the Vision Leadership Team I set up for this purpose.

The report of the first five strategic directions will follow tonight and in other presentations during Synod.

The great commission of Jesus is:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."
Matthew 28: 19-20a

It is the mission with which we are charged as followers of Jesus, for clergy and lay. We clergy in our ministries are particularly mindful of this commission, instilled in us in our ordination and permeating all that we do, for how can we keep to ourselves the Good News of Jesus Christ?

The first of the strategic directions played out in the theme for the year, of *"Seeing the Parish with Fresh Eyes"*. Some parishes have not had the capacity or felt the need to take up the annual theme. Many have taken up the challenge of seeing their parish with fresh eyes. Regardless, all parishes can look back through the year and list the highlights and achievements, in making the Word of God more fully known.

A year ago I stated that:

"I ... see the establishment of the parish as the central missional strategy of Australian Anglicanism. ...Understanding parish in this way gives a basis for the vision that the heart of our vision of ministry renewal, at least for the next three years, is the parish."

Parishes are a grid overlaying God's world, dividing up the mission field. For us the 210 parishes of the diocese provide a latticed network for organising mission across the more than 4 million people of Greater Melbourne and Geelong, a mission that is as challenging for us today as it was for Charles Perry, our first Bishop."

Let me pause: in so affirming the geographic parish I am not excluding any hospital, school or sector ministry. Instead, the geographic parish embraces all ministries.

As I said last year:

“ the Parish is not the parish church, nor a congregation, but a defined area of the diocese, with streets and lanes, paddocks and public places, schools and homes, medical centres and Anglican agencies. ...

...Grasping a vision of Parish in this way demands that we never just stop at our church door, no matter how comfortable, busy or thriving our congregations may seem. We need to be aware of the entirety of our parish: the diversity of its people; the industry and commerce which takes place within it; and the collaborators who might work with us in evangelism and compassionate service, and then frame our planning on these realities. We will undoubtedly find that Anglican community service agencies and schools have activity in the parishes of which we might previously have been unaware. Other Christian efforts in the geographic parish may commend themselves for greater collaboration.”

I am personally delighted with the progress of the vision. Strategy 3 has been the most intensive experience, setting up a pilot program to encourage growth in mission over an initial three years. Fifteen parishes are currently part of the program. On Saturday we will give you more of the story, of what’s happening for these first fifteen. In 2012 five more parishes will join, who seek to grow the parish beyond the 150 attenders size.

Strategy 2 is the forming of an Institute. This has begun! The name, The Bishop Perry Institute, was chosen for obvious reasons, to honour the first Bishop of Melbourne, Charles Perry, and to seek to carry forward this pioneering spirit of ground breaking work and church planting.

Five core training modules have been developed and already delivered through the Institute and will be accessible to all parishes. This is only a start and there is more to tell, later in the Synod.

Accountability is an essential part of effectiveness. Each parish in the Pilot Program has agreed to be accountable in key areas, including maintaining a prayer group, providing regular updates, the formation and operation of the parish Mission Action Team and monthly coaching.

Stewardship

That brings us to Strategies 4 and 5, the stewardship of our inherited parish property assets and the stewardship of our monetary wealth.

Last year I said:

“Our vision leads us to respond to the challenge of being a church with a presence throughout all of the Diocese of Melbourne, Lorne to Pakenham, Warburton to Torquay, and Sorrento to Lancefield. To do this we face the reality of the rapid growth of Melbourne which on some projections becomes Australia’s most populous city ahead of Sydney by 2039.”

In my year of consulting with parishes there was great support for renewal and growth of existing parishes and for pioneer ministry and fresh expressions of church, especially ministries opening up in places without an Anglican presence.

What shall we do? What are we compelled by Christ’s commission to do?

I want to challenge all of us to a godly response, to generously support the needs of Anglican ministry in greenfield areas, to share our resources to ‘make the Word of God fully known’ throughout the Diocese of Melbourne and beyond.

As with many organisations or even families, we tend to have resources that are illiquid, by which I mean not easy to be moved around or applied quickly in other areas. Our strategic vision requires us to use resources for the purchase of land and construction of buildings as well as to apply to our endowment, so that regular income can be available to fund the human side of our initiative. This means that from property sales a percentage of the proceeds will go to build up the Diocesan endowment and capital budget, to landbank for the future and to be spent on ministries that are part of that imagined future. Let us look at the stewardship of our monetary wealth and inherited property assets as an area that calls from all of us a godly response.

We must build up the diocesan endowment for the good of mission in Melbourne and Geelong well into the future. We must be able to plan strategically now for parishes yet to be created. I thank all parishes which in the past have generously shared what they have for Anglican outreach and mission in areas where there is no Anglican presence. We need to go further.

We need a Synod commitment to *making the Word of God fully known* across the diocese, in geographic parishes, into the community both urban and rural and to putting that into practice in policies which will steward our inherited parish property assets and steward our monetary wealth so as to enable future mission.

Thank you for the first year of the implementation of the Vision! On Saturday we will outline more plans for the Vision in 2012.

Conclusion

I conclude firstly in praise and thanks to God for all that has been enabled in the Diocese of Melbourne since its inception in 1847 and for all that God has empowered us to do in 2011, the first year of the implementation of our Vision.

I want to thank all of you for your part in this, through prayer or participation or simply warm encouragement of the efforts of others.

I make special mention of my episcopal team of Bishops, Barbara, Paul and Philip; of my Executive Officer Noelene Horton; of Ken Spackman and the Registry team; our Insurance team which serves all but one of the 23 Australian dioceses; Anglican Media which is a stand out in religious publishing in Australia, frequently winning awards; the Dean and the Cathedral; Archbishop in Council including the Chancellor, Deputy Chancellor and the Advocate; the Anglican agencies, Anglican schools and chaplaincies; the archdeacons and area deans; the list goes on. And finally, the parishes in which we are all involved, the heart of our mission.

We can be pleased with our achievements, but there is more. There is always more for the Kingdom of God. Using words of Colossians Chapter 1, as we are blessed as servants of God, according to his commission, *to make the Word of God fully known*, so may we continue with all the energy Christ powerfully inspires within us, to proclaim Christ through the second year of our Vision.

May everything in this meeting of Synod be to Christ's glory and may we honour Him in all that we say and do.