

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Synod 6 September, 2024

Introduction

All the clichés about the era we live in seem to apply today. May you live in interesting times. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. The clock seems closer to midnight than ever before.

Whether we live in the most difficult time in human history is always difficult to judge in the present time, but this is a very difficult time to be alive. The climate is heating up, our weather systems are awry. Storms, floods, and fires too frequently threaten many parts of our planet, and these islands. War in Europe, in the Middle East and the threat of war in the Indo-Pacific region has a 1930s unsettling feel. Economic downturn in a post-Covid environment (though Covid remains) underlies political lurches to the left and to the right in many democracies. Can the centre hold?

Here in Aotearoa New Zealand, the majority voted in 2023 for a change of economic policy, but the resulting coalition government seems curiously out of tune if not out of touch with the 21st century nation we have become – a nation alive to the injustices of past neglect of the Treaty of Waitangi, and alert to the importance of regulation, whether of guns or polluting gases or waterways that we aspire to become clean. Seeking tighter government management of its spending when we went to the polls last year was a good aspiration for a common, beneficial goal of reducing inflation. But did we vote for such drastic lowering of funding support for the most vulnerable people in our society?

From the perspective of the kingdom of God, of the rule of God in Christ through the Spirit working in the world for justice, peace, reconciliation, healing and feeding the hungry, there is much to work for in our world. Properly we give thanks to God for many advancements in the world which ensure more people than ever before live above poverty, with hope for medicine, education and employment. But there is no place for complacency in the Christian heart. There is work to be done as agents of God in the world God created and redeemed.

The good news of Jesus Christ asks of us as God's agents in the world to share with people how the bread of heaven is available to feed our souls and the grace of God is available to pour the forgiving, reconciling love of God into each of our hearts. All this because on the cross, Jesus Christ bore our sins and shed his blood that we might be made right with God and reconciled with each other.

As I attend to some selected topics this morning, I want to attend to them on the basis that in our life as God's family in the Diocese of Christchurch, we are simultaneously a gospel people, disciples of Jesus, and citizen agents of the kingdom of God, standing on

the revealed Word of God and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit to proclaim that Word with proclamation and practical deeds of mercy and grace.

The topics that follow are selected as priority topics for this Presidential Address in this time and situation of our Diocese. The many undiscussed topics you may observe I am not talking about are important topics: we are a busy diocese doing many things, all of which are important outworkings of the life of God within us. But time is a hard taskmaster and so only a few matters are discussed here.

Regeneration

There are many uplifting and inspiring aspects to the Regeneration of the Diocese through this decade. The Diocesan Mission Action Plan [DMAP] – now in existence for three years - and individual ministry unit mission action plans [MAPs] enable us to work on what our priorities are in our mission and ministry. Training in mission and evangelism, Leading Your Church into Growth, coaching in missional leadership, review of the mechanism of our administration, new initiatives in Building a Discipling Culture, Mission Impact Reviews, continuing work on Biblical Literacy, and the forthcoming Diocesan Conference on 26 October all contribute to being a diocese with a will to live and to flourish.

This is a challenging way to be church in this decade. It has been and is a busy time and I am aware that we need to take care over the expectations we have of ourselves and each other. Despite much progress in human life, there are still only 168 hours each week. There is always a simple human need for our lay and clerical ministers and leaders to have rest and recreation and to feel encouraged by our life in Christ and not weighed down by unreasonable expectations.

The great challenge we face, beyond managing time and expectations, is that our world continues to pose sharp questions of our claims about God, about Christ and about the Spirit. While we seek to grow the Diocese, the society around us continues to grow apart from its Christian foundations. A recent report focused on theological education and ministry formation, called Te Pae Tawhiti, commissioned by Te Kotahitanga and authored and researched by Steve Taylor and Animoa Goold, includes some of the only detailed research, in the past decade or so, into attendance and participation statistics of our church. It is bleak reading. It predicts the actual death of some of our dioceses in the next 10 to 15 to 20 years.

From a different, anecdotal perspective, within our own diocese, we can celebrate wonderful examples of congregational growth, enquirers into the faith turning up to services and staying, and general resilience of congregations and groups while also acknowledging that things are not as good as we know they once were.

It is pleasing also to update the attendance table I have been sharing with you through my time as bishop:

Our attendance statistics – one measure, but a significant measure of how we are doing

	Total Attendance for worship in Dio Chch
2014	356,080
2015	351,448
2016	316,098 [a blip re counting?]
2017	336,155
2018	277,526 [including disaffiliations]
2019	258,623 [fuller effect of disaffiliations]
2020	173,568 (from 41/58 ministry units, in the Year of Covid affecting 7 or more Sundays)
2021	236,414 (from 52/58 ministry units)
2022	205,084 (from 54/58 ministry units)
2023	230,740 [finally past Covid?] [from 50/55 ministry units]

Regeneration of our Diocese is foremost a work of God. We are asked to cooperate with God in what God is doing in our regions. Last year we agreed as a Synod that this year would be a year of prayer. We have been praying, notably in a pilgrimage in early March and in the formation and encouragement of a Diocesan prayer community. We must keep praying. Jesus himself taught us to pray “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Our prayer for Regeneration of the Diocese includes these words,

“grant us courage to grow disciples of Jesus, give us vision to reach young people and their families, and strengthen us to create vibrant communities of faith.”

Shortly we are going to hear more about regeneration in our Diocese. May this part of the morning give us courage, enlarge our vision and strengthen us in our commitment to this work of God.

Royal Commission on Abuse in Care

This section of my address is accompanied by a summary, Whanaketia, of the Royal Commission on Abuse in Care’s massive report,

<https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/assets/Whanaketia/PDF-downloads/Whanaketia-brochure.pdf>

We have known that there has been abuse in our Diocese from before the establishment of the Royal Commission on Abuse in Care. In the past there have been

various ways in which abuse has been acknowledged, for example, through the establishment of the role of the Diocesan Monitor in the 1990s.

Nevertheless, the presence of the Commission in the life of the nation and in our church has prompted us to act in various ways to hopefully better and more deeply acknowledge and respond to abuse than we have ever done before and to have that acknowledgement and our responses informed by perspectives of survivors of abuse. Such perspectives have not previously been a strong aspect of past response to abuse.

Last night we held an important service, our Liturgy of Lament, as part of our response to the history of abuse in our Diocese. It was a significant service because one way in which we signal that we are serious about something in our life as church is that we organise ourselves to meet liturgically to acknowledge the importance of an occasion: a baptism, an ordination, a commissioning of licensed ministers, an opening of a new building.

It is rare, however, that we gather in order to lament. Last night we did that.

We have not held a diocesan service of this kind – probably never held one and certainly never held one in the thirty-four to thirty-five years in which we have acknowledged, in increasing degrees of honest appraisal, that we have had abusers among us. There have been church leaders, ministers, teachers, musicians, children and youth workers who have abused vulnerable people. And I and other leaders and officers of the Anglican church have often responded unsatisfactorily to survivors of abuse and fallen short of the best efforts they hoped for from us to redress their trauma and pain.

Last evening's service was a formal, liturgical lament for abuse experienced by people in the context of church. It was also a service in which we signified that we wish to move forward into a future in which we will be a safe church. The service was a long time in coming for our Diocese. In terms of conception and planning, it has been a couple of years of diligent work. I thank everyone who has had input into this preparation period and note in particular the guiding hand of Archdeacon Megan Herles-Mooar over the group that has done this work.

No one present last night, no one present today in this Synod wants anything other than for our church to be a safe church. One incident of abuse is one incident too many. This is a simple proposition to state but the pathway to being a safe church turns out to be surprisingly challenging. Ponder for a moment these questions – just a few of all possible questions:

- How do we train to an appropriate degree, every regular worshipper in all of our ministry units to participate safely in church life including respecting other people's boundaries, conducting edifying conversations (rather than destructive

criticisms) and contributing to genuine loving relationships across the members of the congregation?

- What level of training is appropriate for licensed ministers in our ministry units, given that responsibilities vary between, say, a minister responsible for a service in a rest home, a children's ministry leader and the Vicar of a parish?
- How is that training to be delivered across the whole of our large geographical diocese so that all licensed ministers can equitably access training?
- What level of costs are we willing to invest in as a diocese in order to become a safe diocese, given that our budget for 1.0 FTE in 2025 is almost certainly inadequate?

At a national level a strong commitment to be a safe Anglican church in these islands is proving to be a slow process. The slowness is not due to lack of resolve but is a sign of the complexity of developing a comprehensive response to all lessons from and recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Abuse in Care. (There are 138 recommendations in total, though not all are applicable to churches and faith-based institutions.)

Such response includes how we train people, how we receive and respond to complaints, how we engage in redress when complaints are upheld. And, all such work on our part should be consistent across our whole church, while ensuring appropriate ways in which independence is achieved in respect of those who investigate and assess complaints as well as work on applications for redress. As well, what we do must align with what the state determines will be the state-led implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations.

This is a lot of work and there will be a cost to us as a Diocese – at this stage an unknown cost, but we have put an amount into our budget for 2025. By the end of next year, I hope we will have a better estimation of what our budget should be year on year.

At a whole of church level, the urgent and current engagement with the Royal Commission's report and recommendations is on our response to the request of the Royal Commission that we provide a response to the recommendations within two months of the report's publication [i.e. by 24 September 2024] and a response signalling the implementations we are making within four months [i.e. by 24 November 2024].

In seeking to be a Diocese in Regeneration we also need to be a Diocese in Repentance. Our present and future work for Regeneration must not forget our past and the work we are doing and will continue to do on it.

Reinstatement of our Cathedral

The Cathedral Reinstatement Project, as recently announced, is making a pause in construction.

In June 2024 we met as a Synod to agree to a new funding contribution to the reinstatement of the Cathedral. I am grateful for that resolve. It was and remains a vital part of our ability to say to the wider community that we are committed to the reinstatement of the Cathedral.

However, we are in a difficult place of disappointment following the announcement a few weeks ago that the NZ government will not be making funds available to meet the significant shortfall in funds the Project needs.

We need time to consider viable options for progress towards completion.

My goal is that we might resume worship and witness from our Cathedral in the Square. It is our privilege in the city of Christchurch to own a central site, in the heart of this city, from which we glorify God and proclaim the Good News.

Our commitment since 2017 has been that we will honour the heritage of our 1881 Cathedral and join with the wider community in reinstating our heritage Cathedral so that:

- the Diocese of Christchurch has a Cathedral and
- the community of Christchurch city and beyond has its heritage building.

This has never been a Project that we could go it alone on. The only viable pathway for us to have a Cathedral in the Square within our own resources was that we built a brand new cathedral within funds then available to us.

That was then and now is now. Our commitment to return to the Square in a reinstated heritage building needs assistance external to the Diocese.

On good days I remain confident that we can secure that assistance – on not so good days I remain merely hopeful: but it is going to take time, including time which sees change in the economic and political circumstances of our nation.

Our appeal is to the citizens of our country and overseas who wish to see reinstatement of this heritage cathedral take place: now is the time to commit funds through pledges and, even better, actual donations.

Naturally many suggestions are being made about the next step or steps. Suggestions about pathways to completion of the building at least to a limited but viable extent. Suggestions about different approaches to fundraising. Not all suggestions can be entertained simultaneously, and some suggestions, if explored further, could entail considerable costs for a feasibility study to be undertaken.

The motion before us in this Synod acknowledges the reality that this Synod needs to return to the question of the future of the Project while also giving the Project team – both CCRL and CPT - time to consider carefully what options exist for genuine progress

in a timely manner. I hope we agree to the motion, and I look forward to a full report to the Synod no later than our session in September next year.

We will need through this next year to think clearly about what any further rescoping of the Project may involve. To be slightly facetious but to make a point, I cannot see that we would have a viable Cathedral if we had no heating in it. Good heating is heating embedded in the floor and a new floor for the Cathedral should be at the top of a renewed foundation. Ideas for rescoping the Project will need to engage with the question of a renewed foundation – its significant costs and the time to complete its construction.

The way forward will involve a joint workshop between CCRL and CPT in October 2024. That workshop will give a steer as to what new directions the Project will take in respect of investigating and implementing next steps towards completion. In due course we will report to the Synod on progress as we make our way through the next twelve months.

In the meantime, we have a cathedral, the Transitional Cathedral. We will also be working in the year ahead on what improvements we may need to make to our facilities there if we are to be there for longer than we have previously estimated we would be. Last year our Synod set up a working group to look into the future of the Transitional Cathedral site and buildings, including a possible sale of the property in order to contribute funds to reinstating the Cathedral in the Square. To an extent the work of this group has been overtaken by events, first that the site really needs to be sold to raise funds for Reinstatement, then, secondly, that with Reinstatement on pause, we are likely to stay on the Hereford Street site for some time to come. Nevertheless, the working group has successfully organised a concise history of our church presence on the corner of Hereford and Madras Streets and that history has been made available to members of Synod. I thank this working group for their work on our behalf.

Since 2017 a significant group of people have worked tirelessly, and enthusiastically on the reinstatement of the Cathedral. Paid staff and consultants, volunteer directors or trustees and advisors, employees and contractors, workers within central and local government, in association with CCRL, CPT and Chapter: I want to pay tribute to them all and thank them for their efforts.

Finally

I express my thanks to the following people who have served our Diocese on our key governance boards and committees and who have concluded their work on these bodies in the past year:

Anglican Care Trust Board: Steffi Brightwell, Chas Muir, the Reverend Ben Randall, the Reverend Sampson Knight

ADMSC Board: Tim Stevenson, the Reverend Michael Brantley

Standing Committee: the Reverend Michael Brantley

CPT: Robert Bijl

I want to thank the vast array of people who work in the life of the Diocese to enable to growth and development of the Christian faith in the Anglican tradition. Some of those I thank in this way I work closely with, others I know nothing about. But all of us, what we do, say and pray, are known to God.

May our God: Father Son and Holy Spirit continue to work among us and through us for the glory of God in the church.

Bishop Peter Carrell.