

The Anglican Diocese of Willochra



**Presidential Address
Second Session
of the
Thirty-Fifth Synod
7th May 2016**

Introduction

In the address to the Synod, which gathered in Roxby Downs in 2014, in response to the times that people gathered with me in prayer in the months prior to Synod and our celebration of the centenary, I wrote:

*Each time of worship with each congregation at each location has brought with it **a sense of how God has blessed us**, and I pray that those who have been able to gather in prayer have also **felt blessed by giving to God our worship and prayer ‘as a sacrifice of praise’**.*

These times of prayer have focused [upon some] broad areas [such as]:

- *Responding to God in the community within which the congregation exists*
- *For [the] future, **that God will continue to bless the Diocese** as it pursues God’s call; and, **for revival** that the ‘wind of the Spirit’ may bring new people to faith.*

...My sense was that we needed to be drawn together in prayer as a precursor and a constant companion as we move intentionally into mission in the Diocese of Willochra.

*When I speak of **mission** in this context I am talking about **God’s call upon the church**, within its own local setting, to respond to the community within which it exists. Mission that **reflects the actions, the mission and ministry of Jesus**, and takes seriously the ‘commission’ that Jesus gave his disciples after his resurrection.*

As Jan and I drove North to visit the congregations at Roxby Downs and Andamooka on Sunday 9th March [2014] it became clear to me that focusing prayer on four areas: congregation, synod, centenary and future need to be expanded to include praying for revival.

Why quote myself in this address to Synod?

It is my hope that there is a discernible theme that will run through all of my addresses to the various Synod sessions and that, at

some time in the future, when people reflect on my time as your bishop, that theme will be able to be detected.

In the written text of this address weight has been given to a number of phrases in the section that is quoted:

- a sense of how God has blessed us
- [that we have] felt blessed by giving God our worship and prayer as a 'sacrifice of praise'
- that God will continue to bless the Diocese
- for revival
- mission ...God's call upon the church
- [mission] reflects the actions, the mission and ministry of Jesus
- the 'commission'

I will be mentioning a number of books in this address the easiest way to get hold of a copy is through a website such as Book Depository <https://www.bookdepository.com/> . The title of the book will take you to a page where you can order the book.

Blessed

A catch phrase which could be associated with me is 'see the glass not as half empty but as half full'; indeed as was later shared with me the glass is always full even when half of its volume is water the other half is full of air – it is full!

If we start with what we lack we become paralysed and believe that we can do nothing; glass half full. If we start with what we have, and see it as that which God has supplied we can start believing that we can do something; glass half full or even full.

Our greatest blessings are our relationships – relationship with God, through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit; relationship with a faith community, the body of Christ which is the Church of God; relationship with the community within which we find ourselves, whether it's in Port Lincoln or Andamooka, Ceduna or Burra; our personal relationships with family, friends and our fellow parishioners; our relationship as a Diocese and a growing

commitment to look beyond the local; our relationship with the Diocese of Mandalay, of which we will hear more about later.

Our knowledge of how abundantly we are blessed is often expressed most easily in our response to disaster, in recent times in our response as a Diocese and as congregations to the fires experienced on the Eyre Peninsula, the Bangor Fires and Pinery Fires – the generous support which is given to our disaster response fund enables us to give cash grants immediately in such situations. Maybe more importantly it can be seen in the volunteer hours that are given in support of community rebuilding – for instances helping to cater for meals for Blaze Aid volunteers, pastoral visiting and prayer.

We are abundantly blessed and we act to bless.

We are blessed for purpose, God's purpose – to be active partners in God's mission in the world. Part of God's mission is to bless and therefore part of our mission work is to be a blessing to those in the community within which we have our existence.

In the later part of this year we have sponsored a visit to Australia by Roy Godwin. Roy is the author of *The Grace Outpouring*, the story of his experience in leading a community and retreat house at Ffald-y-Brenin, in Pembrokeshire, Wales. Ffald-y-Brenin has become the focus of blessing – blessing of the surrounding community, blessing of the individuals who come to make retreat and/or to receive healing there, a source of inspiration for *Houses of Prayer* around the world which become themselves sources of blessing of community of people, sources of the 'water of life'. Roy is in the final stages of publication of a new book, *The Way of Blessing: stepping into the mission and presence of God*; I count myself fortunate to have been asked to read a pre-publication version of the text and write an endorsement of this new book.

There will be opportunity in the second and third weeks of August for us to learn from Roy in regional gatherings as well as at a more extended event with Roy over a weekend at Camp Willochra. I believe that we will be blessed by the experience of hearing from and being ministered to by Roy and his wife Daphne.

Will we be a Diocese which lives into the reality of being blessed and from that abundance be a blessing? Are we committed to enabling and equipping ourselves to knowing we are blessed and to exploring how to be a blessing? I would encourage you to participate in these opportunities to grow in your faith – to know we are blessed (personally and as community) and to be released as a blessing to the people and communities where we live.

Following on from Roy's visit we have invited the Rev'd Canon (Emeritus) Robin Greenwood to be the key note presenter at the Diocesan Clergy Conference in September as well as facilitating regional and local gatherings during September on the topic *Sharing God's Blessing: how to renew the local church*, the title of Robin's most recent book (published earlier in 2016). This publication is the fruit of his work as the William Leech Research Fellow, St John's College, Durham University; ground in the reality of ministry that suggests a way of interacting with the wider community where blessing is given and received.

Robin comes with a wealth of experience in the implementation of the ministry of all the baptised, most often referred to as Ministering Communities in Australia. This latest work expands on his previous work and offers us a way of approaching a conversation with both the church community and the wider community served by the church founded on an appreciation of what we have and then a commitment to serve the wider community from the basis of our appreciation of what we have. It is not a program but rather a way of drawing together our interaction with God and with the wider community and responding to what God and community are saying to the church in the light of what the church has.

The second half of the year offers us opportunities to embrace and grow in our blessed-ness and then to be the ones who bless just as Jesus the Christ blessed the individuals and communities with which he had contact – work that continued through the activity of the disciples of Christ.

Will we be a Diocese that knows it is blessed and from that knowledge of being blessed be a blessing? Will we be individuals

and faith communities which see the glass as half full rather than half empty?

Prayer

In the 21st Century we can feel both advantaged and at times disadvantaged by the various communication tools at our disposal – telephone, email, social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) video conferencing. In Australia just about everyone has access to at least one of these tools of communication – they can be beneficial as well as being a great irritation; sometimes they seem to replace face to face communication. They are, like so much of the technological advances we have now, both a curse and a blessing.

We can know God by knowing Jesus. God communicates with us through a variety of mediums. We know Jesus and his presence with us in the Bible and in our worship, both places where we can practice the presence of God. We can encounter God in sacred place whether in a church in nature and even in the wonders of human creativity in buildings, art and performance and in our daily encounters with one another.

The most powerful way we can practice the presence of and communicate with God is prayer.

Prayer is the channel of communication with God; as with all communication it needs to be a two way street – us speaking to God and God speaking to us. Too often we focus our prayer upon telling God about our lives, our needs and often our wants. We should be focussed more on what God has to tell us, how God wants us to act, what God sees as our needs, how God wants our lives to become full of vigour – how God wants to bless us and through us bless others and the creation.

Our prayer can be directed outward, as we live into being a blessed community of Christ followers we can pray blessing upon the wider community in general and specific ways. I have on occasions spoken to people about how they could pray for the people who they are acquainted with, the people who live in their street, in their village, town or city. Maybe they could pray blessing upon particular places – places where there is often trouble, places where lives have been shattered places where people are

struggling. Possibly prayer could be incorporated into a daily walk where the exercise is not only directed at one's physical wellbeing but also at the spiritual wellbeing of those who live in the houses we pass.

I was told recently of a situation where there were some people who volunteered in the Parish Op Shop; they were not church attendees. The person who spoke to me prayed a blessing upon those individuals and in this particular circumstance, after some time, they began to attend church.

The churches of the Diocese are houses of worship and prayer but they can be even more powerful places of prayer if we choose to take some time during the week to make a point of praying in them either as individuals or collectively. Prayers that are simple: Lord, bless my neighbour may he/she/they know they are loved. Amen.

As houses of prayer many of the church buildings of the Diocese are open during the day for others to come and know the presence of God and to pray, some to light a prayer candle or to write a prayer request. The stories that have emerged from those churches that have opened their doors each day have been very moving as people express gratitude that there was somewhere where the presence of God can be experienced.

Will we be a Diocese of prayer a Diocese that is constant and consistent in being at prayer for the individuals that make up the wider community, and the places of the community? Will we be a Diocese which has its church building open so that the people of the community may know there is a place available where they can encounter God in a special way?

Mission

The God of the Church has a mission in the world; the Church of God exists so that the mission of God may happen.

Let me remind you of the consistent message to the Diocese – we, the Diocese and each and every member of the Diocese, exist as God's Church because of God's mission. We do not exist for our own sake but for the sake of God who loved the world so much

that he sent his only begotten Son. We exist because God calls us into existence.

Our Diocesan Mission Statement makes it clear that MISSION is not only about making disciples; even though that is of great importance. The Goals of our Mission statement are:

1. Proclaim the Good News and make disciples of Jesus
2. Grow a mature and confident faith in Jesus
3. Be transformed by the Holy Spirit to reach our God given potential
4. Encounter God through meaningful, uplifting and engaging worship
5. Show God's love for the whole creation
6. Pursue God's justice in the world through word and action

God's mission encompasses all that is part of God's creation; for God's purpose in Jesus the Christ was the restoration of relationship between the creation and God's self. Humanity sits at the pinnacle of creation which brings with it not rights over the rest of creation but rather responsibilities to the rest of creation. By creation we mean all of humanity as well as land, sea, air and living creatures.

Mission, at least in one way, is about stewardship:

- stewardship of creation,
- stewardship of relationships,
- stewardship of resources,
- stewardship of the image of God which is especially our responsibility as followers of the Christ – Christ's disciples.

We are called to reflect the image of Christ, a calling that is only possible through the saving activity of Christ and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit indwelling us. When we give ourselves to God rather than resisting God we lose nothing but rather gain

everything – life in abundance, being fully human, knowing that we are in relationship with God – God abides in us and we abide in God.

Equally we are called to help others to reflect the image of Christ. This may require us to work to create a more just society where people have all that they need to thrive – we should actively work for justice.

God's saving action in Jesus Christ is not just about being made right it is about living right – not because we determine to live right but because God's abiding in us and our abiding in God transforms us – living right becomes our nature more and more as we allow the two way traffic of abiding.

As we grow in our faith, and it is a growth that takes our whole lifetime and indeed only reaches its perfection in the true and full kingdom of God, we animate God's mission in and to the creation. In our active engagement in the mission of God we receive blessing, not for our own sake but so we can share the blessing with others.

The blessing of relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the blessing of the Holy Spirit indwelling us, the blessing of active engagement in ministry, the blessing of more easily reflecting the image of Christ as we grow in maturity in the faith.

God's mission blesses us, our active involvement in God's mission blesses others, and because it's the way that God's economy works, we are blessed by blessing. Life has its meaning.

Will we be a Diocese involved with the Mission of God?

I would urge you all to consider attending the Mission Conference from the 10th to the 12th of June at the Cathedral. This conference is intended to be one of the ways that we are enabled for mission.

Pilgrimage/Journey

I am indebted to Bishop Kate Wilmott, an Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Perth, who gave me a book by an Episcopal Priest Ian Morgan Cron, *Chasing Francis: a pilgrims tale*. Mark Batterson, a bestselling author writing in the new York Times said of this book,

“reading this book may cause a total overhaul of the way you think about what it means to be a follower of Christ.” It is one of those books which has challenged my own ongoing pilgrimage, my following of the way of the Christ.

Chasing Francis is a novel. The main character is a pastor who, following a crisis in his ministry, is invited to come to Italy and undertake a pilgrimage of Franciscan sites; he is to say the least dubious about the usefulness of such a strange discipline as pilgrimage. The story, at one point, picks up on Francis' experience of being called by God to 'rebuild the church' while he was at prayer in the derelict church of San Damiano. Francis did not realise, at first, that God's call was to rebuild the Church of medieval Europe, not just a single church building.

The Church of today exists in difficult times. Undeniably we, in the Diocese, face difficult times and we could very easily shift our focus to what we do not have instead we, as Francis before us, are being called to rebuild the Church – by Church I mean God's Church rather than our local church; of course the two go hand in hand.

We can explore what this might mean by gleaning resources from past experiences that the Church has faced; this is where the example of Francis fits in and where a pilgrimage or journey where we follow Francis may help us to identify what we might do – it will show us where there are strengths but also where there are weaknesses.

Pilgrimage is about journey – how to; pilgrimage is about destination – where to. Pilgrimage can be physical – walking a pilgrim way; it can be in the mind – a process of guided reading for instance. In both cases it is a spiritual endeavour that is enabled by physical exertion – walking or intellectual exertion – reading to name two ways of pilgrimage. Pilgrimage requires that we follow – follow a physical path that has been well worn or follow a mind path that may have been mapped by others. Christian pilgrimage of course is ultimately focussed on Christ, and Christ's way.

Thomas Merton wrote: *“The geographical pilgrimage is the symbolic acting out of an inner journey.”* The inner spiritual journey

is the core of pilgrimage. We should be indebted to Archdeacon Michael Hillier who is working on resources which can enable pilgrimage; we as a Diocese have the potential to create geographic pilgrim ways through the dry yet inspiring geography of the Flinders, along the coast of the Eyre and Yorke Peninsula's and along such existing routes as the Riesling Trail in the Clare Valley which pass many of our historic churches with their own tales of God's presence and activity.

Will we be a Diocese that engages in the journey of faith, pursuing a pilgrimage which will enable us to see more clearly where Jesus is leading the way; to simply renew our follower-ship of the way of the Christ?

Pilgrimage in the way of Francis takes us to the heart of following where God would lead the way, for Francis' purpose was to give his life fully to God. Part of Francis' way was a reclaiming of the place of creation, that God's concern was not just with humanity but with the whole of the created order. Creation offers us what is often know as a general revelation of God, or to put it into the more poetic words of Gerard Manley Hopkins, "*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.*" This is balanced by specific revelation – the revelation of scripture, of the life of the Christ. Both of them are relevant, both of them are real for they both speak of the presence of God, the love of God, the grace of God.

Christians should be at the forefront of defending the creation from exploitation for the creation reveals God, it speaks of God. The creation draws many of us into an encounter with God – its amazing diversity, the contrasts between a clear sky and the forces unleashed by thunderclouds and the flash of lightning.

Will we be a Diocese that works not only for the salvation of humanity but for the renewal of the whole creation? To restore relationship with *brother Sun* and with *Sister moon and stars* as Francis called them.

Karl Rahner, a renowned theologian has written, "*The Christian of tomorrow will be a mystic, one who has experienced something, or he will be nothing.*" Many people are yearning for an encounter with God not just an intellectual encounter where we engage the

mind but an encounter which is visceral, moves us at a 'gut level' like the rolling of thunder in the sky can actually resonate in our bodies at a physical level. There are some authors who are writing about the younger generation being more spiritual than other recent generations but this does not equate with them being more interested in Christianity, in religion.

Christians actually have the resources to speak of spirituality of what Rahner calls the *mystical*. Some of what we need comes from the lives of the saints and their writings, some of it comes from the various traditions of the faith from the Orthodox in particular who have always emphasised the mystical encounter with the Christ. It requires an appreciation that we are people who experience life with all of the senses as well as with our intellect. It requires an openness to what other traditions may have to teach us.

Will we be a Diocese that embraces experience and intellect to offer encounter which touches mind and spirit, to embrace the mystical and spiritual, to balance the word made flesh in scripture proclaimed and preached and the word made flesh in the sacraments – in the bread and wine of communion, in the water of baptism and our mystical incorporation into God's family. To offer the gift of the mystical in hospitality, in healing with anointing, in prayers of commissioning, in welcome, in being places of belonging, in being places of blessing.

Will we be a Diocese that appreciates that while we may have an approach to our faith that suits us, a particular tradition which we prefer, that the traditions and the approaches that differ from our preference are not invalid but will have something to teach us about the faith we hold? Our approach to difference should not be to think or say, I have something to teach you, but rather what is it that you might have that will illuminate my faith?

Our stewardship of ourselves and of the things that God has provided for us is vital. Francis said, "*Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.*" This is a glass full approach! Do something no matter how small with what you have – it is clear from the Bible that the stewardship of resources by just preserving what God has

given us is not acceptable to God – to bury the one talent is unacceptable (see Matthew 25:24-30). We are called to steward our resources not by preserving them but by using them as God would have us use them, for God’s mission purpose.

This includes the stewardship of our finances. We start by understanding that the whole of the creation is God’s – all that is, all that will be is God’s. God provides us with abundance – when I was visiting the Diocese of Mandalay I was reminded of this once more – what they can do with \$1,000 is more than we can do with a \$1,000. They have little, but they appreciate what they do have – they are not downcast or despondent focusing on what they don’t have instead they get on and do remarkable things with what they have. Our partnership with Mandalay has as much to teach us as we might have to resources Mandalay. Two Priests from our partner Diocese of Mandalay will be with us in June, there will be opportunities to meet with them on a regional basis and at the Diocesan Mission Conference.

St Josemaria Escriva wrote, *“So you have failed? You cannot fail. You have not failed; you have gained experience. Forward!”* Again, this is a glass full attitude which sees failure as opportunity, opportunity to learn from mistakes and then to get up and move forward! I recall an adage which has informed my ministry at times, it doesn’t matter how many times you fall down, it matters that you get up and get going!

Pilgrimage can be hard going, challenging physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. Jesus never said to his disciples, and to us that the way of following where he lead was going to be easy, indeed he said the opposite that it would be hard going at times and yet even in those times God sustains us – we are actually called to rejoice in the midst of hardship not because we are religious masochists, enjoying the pain, but because we know that God is working to bring a blessing out of what may appear to be a disaster.

Will we be a Diocese that embraces stewardship of its human resource and financial resources where each individual and each

community of faith lives as the body of Christ in pursuit of God's mission?

Will we be a Diocese that takes a radical view of the roadblocks and failures that may face us by giving ascent to God's claim that God is in charge and that all will be well under the sovereignty of God? That out of apparent disaster God can and will bring blessing.

The roadblocks include, at least in some places, declining attendance, aging congregations, growing disinterest in the faith by people in our communities. Failure come as we take the risk of doing something new as does "success".

David Fitch has written that "...*what the culture needs is a church that believes the truth so absolutely it actually lives it out.*" In the daily office, morning and evening prayer in our Prayer Book, we conclude the reading of scripture with these words, " May your word live in us and bear much fruit to your glory." As I say those words on a daily basis I pray them for myself and for each of you and for each person who is coming to know the faith.

We, you and I, need to allow God's words and the words of the liturgy, which more often than not are grounded in scripture, take root in our lives, to grow and bear fruit. To become the church that "*lives it out.*"

We need to grow in our knowledge and love of scripture, we need to grow in our knowledge and love of God expressed in our worship, we need to grow in our knowledge and willingness to serve the communities within which we exists as the Christ would have served them. We need to grow in our willingness to be the servant of others holding our roles lightly and seeing them as opportunities to serve God's Church and not to serve our own interests. We need to be the Church we say we are, a reflection of God's kingdom.

Are we going to be a Diocese that lives what it says about itself and what it knows the Word of God calls it to be. Will we just talk the talk or will we walk the walk?

