

Welcome to the first Session of this 18th Triennium of our Synod.

After all the stops and starts it seems remarkable that we are finally all here, gathered together for this important meeting of our Diocese.

We acknowledge the Triune God (Father Son and Holy Spirit), the creator of heaven and earth and His ownership of all things. (Psalm 24:1)

We recognize the He gave stewardship of these lands upon which we meet to the First Nations Peoples of this country (Acts 17:26)

In His sovereignty, He has allowed other people groups to migrate to these shores.

We acknowledge the cultures of our First Nations Peoples and are thankful for the community that we share together now.

We pay our respects to the Ngarrindjeri nation and their elders / leaders, both past and present, and those who are rising up to become leaders.

I also want to begin by acknowledging my predecessors, Bishop Robert and Bishop Graham who led The Murray for 19 and 12 years respectively last century and Bishop Ross and Bishop John more recently. Each of my predecessors have brought a different perspective and contribution shaping the Diocese during the times in which they served.

It is two years since I became your bishop. It was such an amazing coming together of the Diocese in August 2019 for my installation. Alice and I are delighted to be back in South Australia and you welcomed us home.

It was followed by a “Grand Tour”. What a joy that was, and then, listening to people in the context of the Healthy Churches Check.

It started out so well, and then COVID hit. A pandemic. As a result there was no synod last year. Thank you for the way everyone has responded to the challenges thrown up by the pandemic. It has taught us that there can be new ways of doing church.

What can you expect from this Bishop?

A bishop is a spiritual leader and my job is to embrace the prophetic and pastoral ministry of the office.

As many of you know, I have been a keen observer of the Diocese for about 30 years. This is because my parents have been parishioners in Balhannah and Mount Barker. I have heard about the ups and downs and the church politics over the years.

What I heard when I travelled around the Diocese reminded me of the Early Church. There has been conflict which has not been resolved. Tempers have frayed. Parishes have been largely left to defend themselves, trying to stay open and struggling to survive. I am sorry. I cannot change the past, but I can commit to making sure that we chart a new course together as God's people.

We can do better.

I am going to challenge your assumptions and ask very difficult questions of you all, so be prepared. I am determined to put an end to in-fighting.

Let's go back to basics: **WHY, HOW AND WHAT?**

Everyone knows **WHAT** we do. Some people know **HOW** we do it, and we can do it in different ways. But, I think we have lost sight of **WHY** we do what we do.

When I was travelling amongst you all on the road trip, I would ask one simple question, **WHY should anyone come to your church?** Why should anyone come to your church when they can go to any number of other churches in your area, who are all doing roughly the same as you? Why should people get out of bed on a Sunday and become involved in your church community?

We need to rediscover our **WHY**, for in having our **WHY** we have our purpose. We are founded on the person of Jesus Christ, and in him alone, none other. He is our **WHY!**

We are the people of God, the body of Christ and his spirit is with us. We are not here to exist for ourselves, but for God, and the Lord Jesus. To look at Jesus is to look at God, for you cannot separate the two, they are one with the Spirit.

God has a WHY, and Jesus expressed that WHY for us clearly and unambiguously in the Gospels:

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

⁴ Later, He appeared to the Eleven themselves as they were reclining at the table. He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who saw Him after He had been resurrected.¹⁵ Then He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.¹⁶ Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.¹⁷ And these signs will accompany those who believe: In My name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new languages;¹⁸ they will pick up snakes; if they should drink anything deadly, it will never harm them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will get well.” Mark 16:14-18

Now many of you have heard me teach on these two passages. The only verb in the grammar of the sentence in Greek is “make disciples.” That is Jesus’ WHY. Making disciples. He did it before his death and resurrection, to show us what we are to do as his followers, as his disciples. If we are to be Jesus’ disciples, Jesus’ followers, we are to adhere to his WHY, and that is to make disciples.

That is our only purpose, nothing else. Everything that we do must assist in this endeavour, everything else must be shaped to allow disciple making to happen.

What I am interested in is: are we making disciple of the Lord Jesus? Are we loving as Jesus loves? That is our mandate. That is what is important for me. I want a church, clergy, lay ministers, congregations and structures that assist us in doing what God wants us to do, make disciples, and love as Jesus loves.

As your Bishop it is my mission to assisting us all to rediscover the WHY of Jesus so that we can truly be the people of God. The great thing about WHY is that when we make that clear, we still have all our WHAT we are doing, but now HOW we will do them will be different and have an authenticity that may or may not have been there in the past.

The Two Greatest Commandments are familiar to us: we are to love God and we are to love our neighbour. Our neighbour is our fellow Murray Anglicans, more particularly our church family. It is not easy but we must love each other and put rancour aside.

So thinking about the HOW, **what needs to change?**

That brings me to Brian McMillan's questions. I really want to thank Brian, for being so clear in his questions, they have really helped me frame this address. The questions are framed within the context of the Parochial Administration Ordinance which is before us this Synod. Brian's questions are:

- a) what do we as a Diocese want to achieve by such amendments,
- (b) what kind of church do we want to be?
- (c) what kind of priests do we want? and
- (d) what sort of structure do we want?

The new Parochial Administration Ordinance PAO is reforming legislation. Reform involves change. The original PAO was a document for its time, verbose and written in legalese and has served its purpose. Today the church faces new challenges.

If our WHY is to make disciples and to Love as Jesus loves, then we need to have a PAO and Clergy Services Ordinance (CSO) that will enable us to do those things more effectively.

Vision

As a Diocese we exist to make Disciples of the Lord Jesus so that they may have new life, new hope and together we might bring about the kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven.

As a Eucharistic community and therefore the forgiveness of sins people, I imagine our Diocese is a place where we love as the Lord Jesus loves so in that people's lives might be transformed and others might in turn be likewise transformed in that love. I want us to assist people to become fully alive by giving their lives to Jesus thereby living transformed lives, with new hope and

joy, transforming the lives of those around them and realising the Kingdom of God here as it is in heaven.

What kind of a church do we want to be?

First, we need educated Godly leadership. In terms of structure, I envisage the leadership team as comprising of the Bishop, the Vicar-General (heading the Cathedral Parish) We will probably have to return to having Archdeacons, not sure how many to oversee prescribed areas, and then of course, a senior priest in charge responsible for each of the major town and its surrounding towns. We will have, therefore, approximately 13-14 geographic centres, based on current structures, with Archdeaconries.

We need to have this new PAO to bring us into alignment with best ministry practice. This is why the PAO has in it a structure for parishes that has a Pastoral Care Leader, Catechetical Leader Stewardship and Evangelism Leader. We need these amendments to assist us in our mission of being disciples of the Lord Jesus who makes disciples of the Lord Jesus, and who strives to love as Jesus loves.

Going forward, Priests in Charge to be licensed will require in addition to Theological Training, one or more of the following:

1. Recognized Leadership Capability. This may need to be demonstrated by undertaking a leadership course within 12 months of commencing as Priest in Charge.
2. Mentor/Coach. The reality is, leadership is difficult, and it is a team sport. All of us need help in this space. A mentor or a coach will assist the clergy person to think through leadership issues. Assist in thinking strategically.
3. Pastoral Supervisor. From 2023 all clergy will have to have Pastoral Supervisor, but between now and then, any one wishing to be newly licensed as a PIC will need to have one. This is different to the coach. The Supervisor assists the clergy person to reflect on the ministry they exercise and the impact they have on those around them.

I have a number of coaches / mentors who assist me in thinking through strategic issues, governance, WHS, Leadership, change management, conflict resolution etc. I am not an expert in these fields, no one is an expert in all these, and yet as leaders in this new world we find ourselves in we need to be

across all this to be effective. I am willing to make myself vulnerable and admit I don't have all the answers and seek help and assistance. I have a Pastoral Supervisor as well as mentors and coaches.

If I can do this clergy can as well. I am not asking anything of the clergy I am not willing to do myself. I am a student of St. Barnabas at the moment doing the Leadership Course.

Depending on the size of the congregations, the churches will be led by ordained clergy or lay ministers who will be trained and supported in their ministries. The new PAO allows for this, and anticipates it.

In the past, the traditional parish role had the local church being led by the minister. It was primarily a pastoral care model, for the church usually had many people, and they needed pastoral care. Under resourced, they were effectively lone rangers. The world is too complicated and the task of making disciples too great for that to work today. We must work as a team. We still need pastoral care, please hear that, but we now need a leadership model. Let me use a Navy metaphor. We do not sail out alone. We are a flotilla. Ministers will still get to sail their own boat but they have a bigger identity. They are part of the fleet of The Murray. We must share our resources and our experiences. In the future, lines of authority and reporting will be respected.

Second, we are a church family. We are to love each other. We are to support and encourage one another. We know that division, enmity and gossip are contrary to the ethos of the Gospel, contrary to the mission of Jesus and therefore this Diocese and is the work of the evil one.

We need to have trust. We don't have that yet, but it is my goal to get our diocese to trust one another. You won't always agree with me, and I won't always agree with you, but in good faith, we have to trust one another. I have to trust you all to get on with what you need to be getting on with as the people of God, and you need to trust me that I am getting on with what I need to be doing as your Bishop.

The infighting must stop. Matthew 18 defines a dispute process for the church. I invite everyone of us to prayerfully reflect on the reality that we all are fallen, to turn the other cheek and walk away from disputes. If you can't say something kind, be silent. Forget gossip. For the bigger issues, I am appointing a conflicts officer and a grievance policy has been approved by Diocesan Council.

We cannot change the past. As Christians we are called to emulate Christ's example. We are to turn the other cheek. If someone demands your cloak give them your shirt as well, if they ask you to walk one mile, walk the second also. We are called to love each other, even those with whom we disagree. Jesus did not berate the Pharisees or the Romans.

As he was being nailed to the cross he did not call down the legions of angels to protect him that he could have. After the resurrection he did not turn up at the front door of Pilate or of the religious leaders to point out they were wrong, and he was right. He simply got on with the mission God had sent him to do, and we need to do likewise.

Third, we believe in education. We believe in bible study which brings us together in groups to learn and discuss our faith.

In the next year, the Diocese will be introducing various teaching programs offered in conjunction with major theological colleges at both secondary and tertiary education levels. It will provide clergy, lay ministers and parishioners the opportunity to pursue their passions for theology and liturgy.

Perhaps more importantly, courses will be offered to fill the skills that we need in leadership, risk management and governance. Education will be offered in person in group settings and online.

Fourth, we believe in good governance, obeying the law and risk management. One of the obligations of *Faithfulness in Service* is that we must obey the law. This is why we need a safe workplace regime, training about harassment and bullying as well, of course, as Child Protection protocol.

In the 21st-century, there is a need for good governance. Good governance is common sense. It also flows from the commandment to love. This is something new for the church. Clergy are not taught about the parameters of good administrative decision making, risk management, or statutory compliance at theological college. For this reason, during the last year the Diocese has been working on a new governance system which you have already heard about during Synod, and you will continue to hear about from now on.

Finally, we believe in Worship. I am willing to do things differently. We have to change whatever is not working. I am not wedded to an ecclesiology or a churchmanship. I don't care if you are high church, low church, left church, right church. But it must be church done well. I will not bring in clergy just because they are of a certain churchmanship; I am not looking to maintain a certain tradition.

The Eucharist is the meal of identity for us as Christians. It is the meal that identifies us as the Forgiveness of Sins people. As I wrote to the clergy earlier this year, I am content for experimentation in parishes as long as there is proper consultation as identified in my letter. As your bishop I don't mind whether you have a service which is traditional BCP, Modern rite Eucharist, Family Service, Prayer Praise and Proclamation, and any other sort of contemporary service you see fit, but please consult with me as well so I can assist you in heading off any issues that may arise, and help you identify others in the diocese who think as you do.

We should also offer evening and morning prayer recognising that they feed us spiritually and centre our life daily around God. Services and the daily offices should be offered in person and online.

We have just passed our 50th anniversary, the first Synod of The Murray being held on 16th April 1970. This is a challenging time for all Christian denominations in Australia and the Anglican Church of Australia. When we look at the 50+1 issue of The Murray Anglican, an excellent read, we see that every place had a priest in it, not any more.

The times have changed. Many of us will remember Gough Whitlam's election campaign in 1972: "It's Time". "It's Time for Freedom/ It's Time for Moving/It's time to begin/ Yes It's Time". The mood was that it was time for change.

Since the 1970s, Australian society stopped being automatically Christian. It was no longer the expectation that mainstream Australia would attend Church on a Sunday. Children stopped going to Sunday School. This has meant both a decline both in parishioners and knowledge of Christian doctrine generally, and much more perhaps, what is distinctively Anglican. The Diocese of the Murray has been impacted by this societal shift.

The culture we live in no longer supports the church. The average percentage of NRA in our diocese is between 45% and 48%. I suspect, that with the census this year we will see that number tip over the 50% mark. This means roughly 50% of the population is either suspicious of us, don't know we exist, or don't care we exist. This has meant that we can no longer simply assume that we can do church the way we have always done it. People will not naturally come for baptisms, weddings or funerals as they did in the past. Recently COVID shattered that understanding, and we can not go back to normal.

The new PAO gives us flexibility to embrace and explore different ways of being church both in the flesh and in cyberspace with online models and other innovations. The new PAO is not just for now, it is for the future, and it will need to be flexible and we need to be flexible also.

In conclusion

This Synod marks a new beginning and a new beginning for Diocese.

I ask you to think about the simple question I asked, WHY should anyone come to your church?

I recognise that there is pain and there are voices in the Diocese that need to be heard going back many years. Anyone with spiritual needs is welcome to approach my office. Anyone with specific concerns should write to me. Everyone will be listened to and treated with respect.

Do you remember the game that children used to learn at Sunday School? "Here is the church and here is the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people". That is what I want to see again. All the people. I know all of you love your parish church and this Diocese and want to see more people in your faith communities, more loving congregations. I am trying to do my part, you need to do likewise, and together we need to continue to minister the Good News of Jesus to a world that desperately needs to hear it, but it will only be good news for others if it is good news for us as well. So now, let us go and do all this together.