



Anglican Church of Australia - Diocese of The Murray
The Bishop of The Murray
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THIS PASTORAL LETTER IS TO BE READ IN PLACE OF THE SERMON AT EVERY ACT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP IN THE DIOCESE ON 23RD OCTOBER 2016

To the holy people of God in the Diocese

Dear sisters and brothers,

KNOWING WHERE AND HOW TO STAND

In this morning's gospel we hear how the Pharisee went to the Temple to pray. On arrival, the gospel says, he "stood by himself", unlike the tax collector who, "stood afar off". The difference between the attitudes of these people is not immediately obvious, save for Luke's introduction to the parable where he tells us it is something to do with internal opinions concerning themselves.

The way that Luke describes the Pharisee and his standing is best equated to what happens when a batsman in cricket comes to the crease and, "takes his stance". He comes in, and asks the umpire to confirm he is taking his stand, very deliberately, in the right place for him to continue. He arrives and, as it were, claims attention for himself; he needs to, so that he can continue with the task assigned – to bat well. The Pharisee, like the batsman, takes centre stage as if it were his right; whereas the tax collector stands in another place far off from the centre if not literally certainly metaphorically.

Which of these two stood, not necessarily in the right geographical place, but in the correct way for the activity at hand? What is the internal attitude appropriate to prayer?

Actually, both **where we stand** and **how we do so** are important. Where we stand when we pray is always, in Christ and how we take our stance must be

likewise directed. What is true for prayer is, by definition, also true for other things that Christians are commissioned to undertake. We always stand in Christ, that is, in him united with his Father; and how we do this is, or should be, characterised by an attitude of humble and obedient service, of the Father and towards others.

I would love to continue this theme addressed towards our life of prayer but the purpose of me writing to you today is to report on where the Diocesan Council thinks it has got to following the two rounds of meetings about our **PROGRESS** and to introduce a document that you can collect from the back of church after this service. The Diocesan Synod at its meeting on 5th November will spend some time considering how the proposals I am about to outline will help us to stand in the right place and, in the best way, to share in God's mission to the world and thus be faithful in growing the Kingdom.

The first proposal the Council has is to invite all parishes and pastoral districts to act as if they are part of one of the eight areas illustrated in the document and spoken of at the second round of conversations that took place last month. We believe that if every part of each of the eight areas really commits to standing together and sharing resources and expertise, we will be more able to undertake the task at hand.

Taking our stance humbly and in the right place, acknowledging our need of each other and the fact that together with other congregations we have a more appropriate sized community to share in the task of mission and outreach, is obvious if we are going to grow not only the Church but also the Kingdom. It is very plain that small congregations need to be released from some of the unnecessary tasks that prevent them from taking their proper stance in the service of God and his people.

I hope that within each of the areas people will try to grow closer to God and each other by regular prayer, study and acts of service to others who know not of the love of God. It might be that once congregations start to take their stance in a new and deliberately mission orientated way, the question of shared worship becomes important. Some areas in the Diocese have already come to experience how different it is when several congregations join together and create a larger assembly in which worship

can have other dimensions and to which it is far easier for enquirers to begin to belong.

It will be important to think creatively about meetings so as not to increase them but still abide by our current regulations. The document that you are encouraged to take away with you this morning explains in more detail how the Diocesan Council proposes to come alongside each and every congregation to encourage them in their common life and witness. If needed and wanted, it will be possible for me to be with each of the eight areas on a regular basis to pray and witness with you and to offer any teaching and instruction that would be helpful in our deliberate plan to stand in the right place and in the best way for our task – perhaps not aiming to score a century but at the very least expecting to improve our average!

The second and important request from the Diocesan Council has already been made. So that each of these eight areas can be resourced with ordained ministry – in my opinion not adequately but in all the circumstances, sufficiently – it is necessary to inject a substantial sum into the Home Mission Fund so that we can pay 3.5 additional stipends. Parishes and Pastoral Districts will still need to fund the clergy currently deployed – 13.5 stipends in parochial contexts – and these extra stipends will be deployed in the service of the Council's own strategic plan (outlined in the document you will be given). The request that each Parish or Pastoral District contribute 12% of your special purpose funds for this task has already been made and members of the Council and the Finance Committee are arranging to come and explain why this is thought to be the best option. I pray that, as members of our Diocesan family, people will respond positively to this request. Without it we are not able to create a firm platform of ordained ministry across the whole Diocese. We need such a provision so that we can stand firmly and securely for our ongoing mission.

If we can all be positive in our responses to both of these requests

- that we act as if we are part of a larger unit, and are prepared to behave as such,
- and also that we can have a fund for extra stipends

then I believe we can stand in a firm place from which we can move forward in confidence. The document you will take away outlines how we should

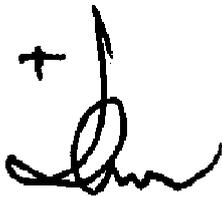
stand together in this new way humbly, optimistically, deliberately and with resolve to get on with the task at hand. Who knows, perhaps if adopted with enthusiasm, we can all score centuries?

The Synod will have plenty of time to think about how to start making this work in your area. All that I can say is that it is simply not acceptable for any Parish, Pastoral District or Congregation to take their place in such a way as to be deliberately alone no matter how and in what way they believe themselves to be different.

I really look forward to the conversation continuing at Synod and beyond and I pray that God will bless us with new life and a renewed commitment to be his holy people and that we might all be prepared to cooperate with him as we seek to be Jesus in the world.

The time has arrived, I believe, for us to move forward together on the pilgrim path of faith as we walk the Way together inviting all around us to join the procession.

With every blessing and many prayers,

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a small cross symbol above the main body of the signature.

Why start ministering as if we are already 8?



More resources locally to share as a larger group. Someone in a neighbouring town may know how to do something that locals don't or have equipment you don't, sharing of ideas – making posters, technology, teaching skills, children's ministry ideas...



Able to provide outside resources to a larger group that you would not be able to for a small pastoral district – workshops, guest speakers, training programs...



Able to see things afresh as larger faith communities. We get stuck in our ways and lose vision – new ideas, new ways of doing things, fresh approaches to what we are doing...



Providing ministry teams with people who have the right gifts, skills, experiences. At present as smaller faith communities with aging smaller ministry teams there are gaps in what we can offer, we are limited as to the ministries we can explore with fewer people with less time available.



The joy of worshipping and doing things as a larger group... real community... 5 people struggling with hymns and no organ every Sunday versus a choir, music ministry team and a full church like in Southern Suburbs.



Larger worship centres attract newcomers more than smaller ones – crowds attract crowds... ***There must be something happening there!*** Less threatening for those new to the faith to go into a large group of people than just a few scattered around the church where everyone knows everyone... Hillsong, The Edge...



Less administration, infrastructure and meetings relating to property, finance and management frees up both clergy and people to focus on mission and ministry. For example all the documentation and forms relating to Charity Commission each parish / pastoral district has to complete separately could be completed as one.



As larger 'units' people worship where the majority of people live. Buildings are often in the wrong places – population has moved... sale of unused rectories, halls and churches generate income to support ministry where the people are now...not where they used to be.



Ministering as 8 – Establishing ourselves for growth!



Prayer and Worship – Where will this happen? At what times on what days? What will be the style of worship? Who will lead it?



Pastoral Care – How will this happen and by who? Will you create teams? Who are the people with the required gifts / training / experience? What pastoral ministry are you doing now? What is being missed? What are the local pastoral needs – gaps?



Evangelism – Who are your people who may have this gift? How can you find this out? What training and resources are needed to evangelise – tell the Jesus story?



Education, Training, Formation – What is needed to equip people in liturgy, pastoral care, evangelism, ministry and education? What could clergy and laity in other parts of the Diocese offer? What do we need from outside of the Diocese?



Property – What buildings will be used week after week, which ones less and which ones never? Why? What needs to happen with these buildings that are seldom or not used? What do we need to do with the buildings we plan to use regularly to make them better equipped for the future – PowerPoint, heating / cooling, seating, wheelchair access, plenty of toilets...



Resources – what is required in terms of books, technology, programs, lectures or workshops to equip us better in liturgy, pastoral care, evangelism, ministry and education? Can some of this be found in other parts of the Diocese? What is available in the province and Australian Church?



A skills, experience, gifts and passions analysis – Do parishioners and clergy know what they are good at...their gifts and how to develop these gifts? Do they know how to utilise them in the Church? Are they encouraged to truly use their gifts, skills and talents?



Administration, property and money – How will this be managed and by who? How do we move from being money focused to being mission focussed? How do we work smarter rather than harder? What can be done to free people up from administration in order to concentrate on the mission of the Church?



Clergy ministering as 8 and growing in God



Prayer, spirituality, spiritual direction, confession... so very important. Growing in God, growing as priests...growing the Church.



Formation, education and training of new clergy and ongoing for all clergy – most necessary – Quarterly training days with Bishop, study leave, lectures...



As a Diocese we need more mentors, supervisors and trainers.



It is paramount that clergy know their passions, joys and loves...that they actually have some... what field of theology inspires you? What are you reading at present? What project would you love to take on? What outside hobbies, sports or interests do you have?



Time management and self-care in this new way of being Church is important. A part of time management is knowing what to give up, what to delegate out and what must be done at once.



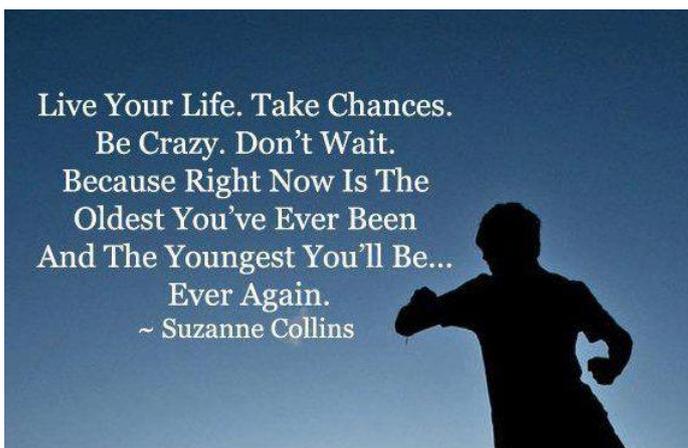
Good communication will be so very important in this new way of functioning.



How to work as a team, share ministry, giving up control, embrace the skills and advice of others, utilise laity and other clergy... It is no longer “my parish”, “my people” or “my ministry”.



Like laity clergy need to know what they are good at – their strengths, gifts, skills and abilities and really utilise them. At the same time clergy need to realise they are not good at everything. In some cases they will have to learn anew, change and perhaps re-train in order to grow.



Personal reviews, episcopal visits and personal reflection will be most beneficial.



Clergy need both answerability and responsibility.

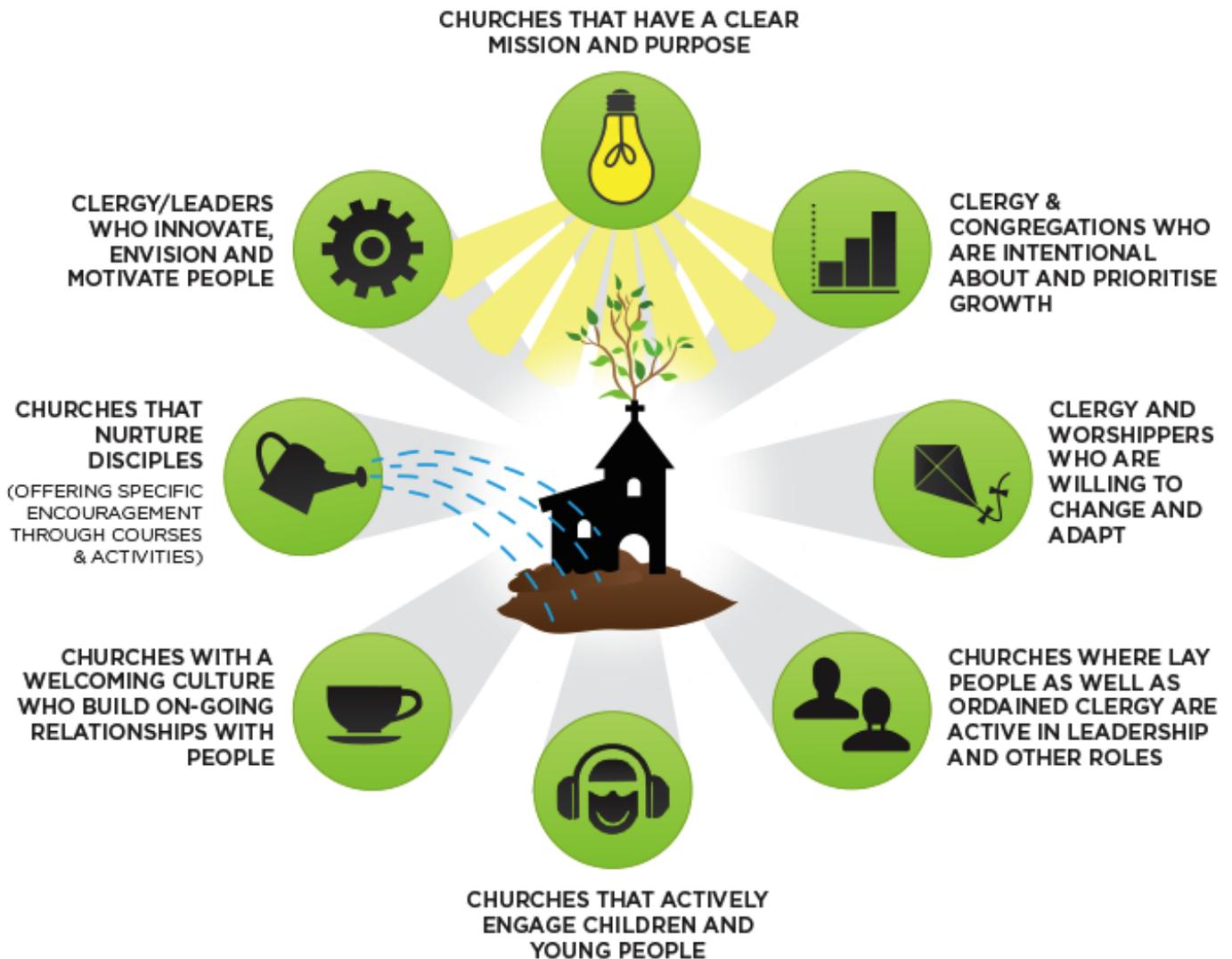


It is extremely necessary that we have clergy who take ownership of this new way of being God's Church – that they are passionate... on fire about it!



Like laity clergy must have hopes and dreams, vision and aspiration... they must be willing to see things in new ways, experiment, take risks and even be prepared to make a few mistakes along the way.

What each of the 8 will look like



What about Diocesan Council?



We need to create a '5 year plan' – a way of monitoring not just financial aspects but mission and ministry – a 'parish development plan'



We urgently need a stewardship program that takes seriously the need for God's faithful to commit their time, skills and gifts, resources and money. Good stewardship is to be seen as truly growing in the faith – growing in relationship with God.



How do we as members of Diocesan Council start to engage with the 8 units so as to encourage each of them to start ministering as the 8? How can we equip, support, inspire and journey with each of the 8?



How do we encourage the 8 to really utilise those who are passionate about this new journey – often who are behind the scenes and not the 'gate-keepers'?