



The Synod of the Diocese of The Murray
of the Anglican Church of Australia Inc.

Administrator's address to Synod 2025

As we gather here in Seaford, we begin by acknowledging that we meet on the land of the Kaurna people. We honour their continuing spiritual connection to this country and express our respect for their Elders, past and present. We name and do not hide the wounds left by European settlement, some wounds still open and we renew our prayerful commitment to reconciliation as a sacred work of justice and grace.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our risen Lord. As we commence this second annual session of the 19th Triennial Synod, I want to begin by expressing gratitude for each of you. Your commitment to the life of the Church in this Diocese is a sacrament of hope, especially in times that often feel marked more by diminishment than by flourishing.

This evening, we opened Synod in worship, gathered at St Nicholas within the Seaford Christian Churches campus. My thanks go to the parish of the Western Fleurieu for their hospitality and to the Reverend Wayne Landford for his preaching. The gathering of the Church in worship is itself a prophetic act. It is an embodied declaration that Christ is risen, and we are not alone.

Synod is not merely a meeting. It is, at its best, a sacred assembly where we seek to listen not only to one another but, more importantly, to the whisper of the Spirit. Our purpose here is not only administrative, but spiritual. We are gathered not to curate an institution, but to steward the gospel. As many of you are aware my spiritual frame of reference is one that is informed by my profession as a third order Franciscan so forgive me if I reference another of the worldwide Franciscan order at this time. In Richard Rohr's words, we are not managers of empire, but midwives of grace. We are custodians of a message that liberates, not burdens, a faith that must be proclaimed afresh not just in every generation, but in every cultural moment.

Over the past year, I've had the privilege of spending time with many of you in your communities. I've joined in your worship, listened to your stories, and walked with you through both celebration and struggle. What I've seen is a people marked by a quiet faithfulness and sacrifice, but also wearied by the burden of trying to hold together structures and rhythms that no longer serve our mission.



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There is beauty in this faithfulness. Yet as the Church on the margins, we cannot simply do more of what we have always done. As Francis taught, we must walk light-footed into the future not encumbered by the trappings of power or prestige, but with the humility and courage of pilgrims. We are not what we once were, and that need not be a threat. It may well be a gift.

The structures that once undergirded our life as a Diocese are faltering. Vocations to ordained ministry are few. Most of our clergy serve part-time, often in complex bi-vocational arrangements. Our financial resources are strained. Heritage buildings, beautiful as they are, weigh heavily upon our parishes not just in cost, but in energy and time. We are not alone in this. Across the Western Church, these same patterns unfold, and like St Francis before the dilapidated chapel of San Damiano, we hear the call anew: "Rebuild my Church." St Francis later recalled that his mistake was that rebuilding the chapel building itself was not what was being asked of him.

Like St Francis let us be clear that what God asks of us is not nostalgia but renewal. Rohr reminds us that all great spiritual awakenings begin with descent through the necessary dying of old forms so that something deeper, more authentic, might be born. In that spirit, we are invited not to resist change, but to embrace it as the Spirit's gentle pressure upon the clay of our lives.

The pathway forward may include restructuring but is not about an ending of what came before. It is an invitation to continue to refashion our diocesan life around mission, not repair or maintenance. It is the opportunity to ask whether our buildings, boundaries, and financial models are freeing us or entangling us. In the spirit of poverty and most importantly simplicity that Francis so loved, we are being called to strip back, to discern what is essential, and to let go of what no longer serves the mission of God.

This is not easy work. Change brings grief, and grief must be honoured. We lament the decline in Sunday attendance, the closing of churches, the loss of familiar patterns and identities. But we must not confuse the Church with its furniture. The Body of Christ remains. And so, we seek new models of shared leadership and ministry, where lay and ordained collaborate more deeply, where parish boundaries may be changed not to diminish but to unify, where congregations over fifty can act as anchor communities, sharing resources and spiritual leadership with those around them.

We are being asked to steward our finances wisely and perhaps pooling our resources for more strategic impact. We need to be ensuring that we have professional investment oversight and seeking out external streams of income so that our witness may be sustained across generations. But these are not merely technical matters; they are spiritual disciplines. The early Church held all things in common not because they were efficient, but because they were freely journeying together with God.

Our goal is not survival. It is transformation. The Church that will thrive after Christendom is one that has shed the illusion of cultural dominance and embraced the vulnerability of love. It is a Church that chooses the margins, listens more than it speaks, and offers welcome

rather than judgment. This is the Church I believe the Diocese of The Murray is called to become. This is the holy calling before us.

And so, I invite you not into a project of efficiency, but a journey of faith. Let us trust, as Rohr encourages, that everything belongs. Even our weaknesses and failures are taken up into the grace of God. Even decline can be holy ground, if it leads us to greater dependence on the Spirit. We do not need to be big to be faithful. We need only be honest, open-hearted, and willing to be led.

In this Synod, I ask us all to engage not with defensiveness, but with holy imagination. Speak the truth, and listen for God in the voice of our neighbour. Let our hearts be broken if they must be, but never hardened. We are not here for a last hurrah. We are here to continue, in the name of Christ who is always making all things new.

And so I thank you for your courage, your perseverance, and your love of the church. I thank the Registrar, Assistant Registrar, and FAI Committee for their diligent work, and the Diocesan Council for their commitment to wise stewardship. I thank our small group facilitators and presenters, and again the Parish of the Western Fleurieu and Seaford Christian Churches for their warm hospitality.

Let us leave here Sunday afternoon not with answers but with better questions. Let us seek not comfort but clarity. Let us remember that Christ is risen, and because he lives, we are free to risk everything for love. The Spirit is with us, and will not abandon us. May we go from this place with hope in our hearts, humility in our hands, and the gospel ever on our lips.

Amen.

The Venerable Simon Waters
Administrator