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AT THE THIRD ORDINARY SESSION OF THE 54TH SYNOD OF THE
ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF TASMANIA

HOBART | 21-22 MAY 2021

Unless the LORD builds the house,
the builders labour in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the guards stand watch in vain.

Psalm 127:1

We meet today in the presence of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and acknowledge our complete dependence on him in all things. He is building his house and watching over our work. We long to honour him in all things. We know that “from one man, he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.” (Acts 17:26) And so today we acknowledge that the palawa people of lutruwita/Tasmania were appointed as the traditional custodians of the land where we meet. We acknowledge them, their unceded sovereignty of these lands and waters, and honour their elders.

It is truly wonderful to meet together face to face as representatives of the Diocesan family. While we managed Synod on-line last year, it is so much better to meet in person. As we meet, we are mindful of those who are continuing to face significant challenges from Coronavirus, and of how fortunate we are to gather in safety. We lift the nations of the world to the Lord for his mercy, protection and healing.

Recently I was in a meeting of Anglican leaders from around the world and in hearing their challenges, was struck by how the Lord has been so merciful to us over the last 18 months. We have seen our ministries and work continue through the pandemic, and in a few places, seen growth and development – new congregations, expanded ministries and a number of new ministry appointments. Thanks to government assistance, and the generosity of our people, it looks like all of our parishes and ministries will be able to continue their work. For this we give thanks to God.

1. CHALLENGES INSIDE AND OUT

I want to begin today by reflecting on some of the challenges in the context of doing our ministry, and why it is so important that we remain focussed on our vision to be a Church for Tasmania, Making disciples of Jesus.

Social Change

We are in the midst of a period of great social change, especially the way Christianity is viewed in the West. A generation or two ago, it was common that Christians were still regarded as respected members of society. Christian values and morality were generally upheld, and Christians were affirmed by society at large.

Things started to shift in the mid to late 20th century. Rather than being at the centre of society, Christians began to move to the edges. We were seen as one option among many. Our views were considered, but alongside other views that had equal weight. Our “go to” text

was Acts 17, and Paul's speech in Athens where people "loved talking about and listening to the latest ideas". The Christian faith was one of these ideas.

But in the last 20 years or so, it seems that that the tide has turned. Now rather than being seen as one option among many, biblical Christians are increasingly being viewed with suspicion and hostility. Our views of morality are increasingly seen as outdated and not just irrelevant, but bad for our society. Many today think that the Christian faith and its teachings have no place in public life.

An illustration of this hostility was the way in which some in our community tried to silence the Christian voice in the Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide debates in our community and Parliament over the last year. We were told many times that our view was not welcome in the debate. When we tried to argue for the sanctity and dignity of all lives, we were painted as being heartless and uncaring.

Some churches have tried to address this shift by accommodating the world's perspective. It is not hard to find Christians speaking in favour of euthanasia, abortion, or same-sex marriage. It is not hard to find those who call themselves Christian denying the miracles of Jesus, his bodily resurrection, and the authority of the Bible in the marketplace of ideas.

But others have sought to stand firm with biblical truth in the face of a changing society. That is not a comfortable place to be. But trusting in God's truth as revealed in the Bible is a sure and certain place to stand. Truth is not something that we get to choose but is given to us in the word of God. I am proud that the Diocese of Tasmania has this commitment as we stand in our society.

Anglican Church of Australia

One place where these tensions are being played out is in the Anglican Church of Australia. In 2019 the Diocese of Wangaratta passed a Regulation for the Canon Concerning Services, to allow a service of blessing for people married under the Marriage Act. This effectively paved the way for the blessing of same-sex marriages in our church. The regulation is in tension with the Anglican Church of Australia's consistent teaching that the biblical understanding of marriage is an exclusive life-long union between a man and a woman. The Primate referred this Regulation to the Appellate Tribunal seeking its advice on whether it was consistent with the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia.

When we met online for Synod last year, we were still awaiting the Appellate Tribunal's opinion. In December 2020 it published a majority Opinion that the Regulation from the Diocese of Wangaratta was "not inconsistent" with the constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia. They based this view on their interpretation of the word "doctrine" in the Constitution. They determined that it referred only to those matters of faith "necessary for salvation", and that the blessing of same-sex marriage did not contravene that doctrine. A minority opinion was also published by one member of the Tribunal, that argued the opposite view. The majority opinion means that it would now be possible for a service of blessing of a same-sex marriage to take place in our church.

The Primate has urged bishops and dioceses to exercise restraint in allowing these blessings to take place until the meeting of the General Synod, where the matters will be discussed further. So far, apart from one service in the Diocese of Wangaratta, the bishops and clergy have exercised restraint.

In my view the Majority Opinion of the Appellate Tribunal is problematic, in that it allows clergy to bless a sexual practice that the Bible clearly calls sin. The matter is serious and of first order because the New Testament teaches that unrepentant sin jeopardises salvation. By allowing this we put people in spiritual danger.

We want our churches to be welcoming of all people, including those in the LGBTIQ+ community. We want all people to be called into a life of obedient discipleship to the Lord Jesus. To love people well, we must lead them to the truth that is expressed in the Bible.

As we have seen in other parts of the Anglican world, the innovations contemplated by the Wangaratta Regulation, and allowed under the Appellate Tribunal's Majority Opinion, run the risk of tearing the Anglican church apart. Faithful biblical Anglicans will find it difficult to receive the ministry and authority of their bishops if these services are allowed to take place, and some will be forced by their consciences to leave the Anglican Church of Australia.

Many of you know that I am involved in the Gafcon movement, which has made a commitment to support those Anglicans who would be marginalised by these moves. If need be, Gafcon has committed to establish a new Anglican entity in Australia to support those who cannot remain.

Until the matter can be settled more clearly in the General Synod meeting (now scheduled for May 2022), I am pleased that we have a proposed Regulation for the Canon Concerning Services coming to this Synod, and a motion about doctrine, to reiterate our long-held position.

Redress

We continue to face the challenge of redress. As we reported last year at Synod, the estimates for funding redress, including a number of civil claims against the Diocese, has increased our estimated liability from \$8 million to \$21 million. This is a very significant challenge for us. You will have read in the Synod papers how we propose to meet this, through redirecting some of our invested funds to the project. A team of our best thinkers worked on this solution, and we consulted widely among Parishes for other ideas. While I believe it is the best solution, sadly it will have an impact on our ability to do ministry moving forward.

Some have asked why we didn't do this in 2018, when we elected to sell property to fund redress. The answer is that we have a dual responsibility, to not only fund redress but also to ensure the ongoing ministry of the Diocese of Tasmania. Our decisions need to be generous to survivors of abuse, but we must also be wise stewards of our future resources.

Committing to sell under-utilised property in 2018 had a smaller impact on our ability to do ministry than other options.

While we would prefer not to have to take these steps, we welcome the opportunity to provide a measure of justice, and support for survivors of sexual abuse in our Diocese. We have already collectively borne some pain for the sins of those who have gone before us. Now that pain will be extended again, as we curtail some of our ministry to make sure we can respond in a godly way. I am still of the conviction, that providing redress and settling civil claims in a just and equitable response to historic sexual abuse and is the right thing for us to do. I also believe that God is honoured when we do the right thing.

Family Violence

We continue to be disturbed by the rate of family violence across Australia. This national tragedy affects people of all ages and from all backgrounds, including those in our churches. Those most affected are women and children. It is estimated that 2.2 million Australian adults have been victims of physical or sexual violence from a current or former intimate partner. We know that members of our churches are victims and survivors of domestic abuse, probably at similar rates to the general population.

I am personally grateful for the increased discussion of these issues, as greater awareness will hopefully lead to safer outcomes. Some wonderful resources are now available to the church specifically to help us. I am thankful that the Diocese of Tasmania has been thinking about these issues for some time and am especially grateful for the formation of a small working group who are helping raise our awareness and equipping our churches to address the problem. I know a number of our churches are working specifically in this area. I commend to you the motion on the business paper regarding this issue.

Fractured society

Domestic and family violence is one of a number of issues in our fractured society. Tasmania's housing crisis, with increasing rates of homelessness especially in these winter months; concerns about our health system and care of the aging population; the real threats to vulnerable people due to our new euthanasia and assisted suicide laws and their potential effects on our already alarming suicide rates; the continuing damage from poker machines and problem gambling ripping our communities apart. These are just some of the issues that concern us.

We often look to our political processes to find leadership on these important matters, and find ourselves frustrated by inaction, partisanship and a lack of will to tackle the big issues. We are so fortunate to have the frontline services of Anglicare working in many of these spaces, providing care and support, research and advocacy. We also recognise the importance for each one of us taking our place and fulfilling our responsibility to do whatever we can with whatever resources we have, to stand up for the vulnerable and marginalised and bless those around us.

All of these challenges, make it all the more important that we have a clear sense of our call to let the Lord build his house; to continue to walk in obedience to the Lord Jesus; and to be his disciples as we make disciples of others.

2. VISION 2022 - UPDATE

As I hope you know by now, our Vision in the Diocese of Tasmania is *to be a church for Tasmania, making disciples of Jesus*. As we are FOR every aspect of Tasmanian life: for Business, Government, Healthcare, Education, Media, the Arts, Families and Individuals, we want to do what only the church can do among them, that is make disciples of Jesus; to help people in each of these spheres become his followers.

As we pursue that vision, we continue to rest in our convictions that:

- Jesus Christ is the head of the Church ...
- And He has sent us to make Disciples ...
- By Word, Prayer and Service ...
- Supported by fruitful godly Leaders ...
- God being our provider, and us stewards of his gifts

To achieve our Vision, we have set ourselves 4 main goals:

1. Build a network of confident flourishing parish centres
2. Develop partnerships with Anglican agencies and schools
3. Grow missional chaplaincy in hospitals, aged-care facilities, and prisons
4. Be a people of blessing to our communities

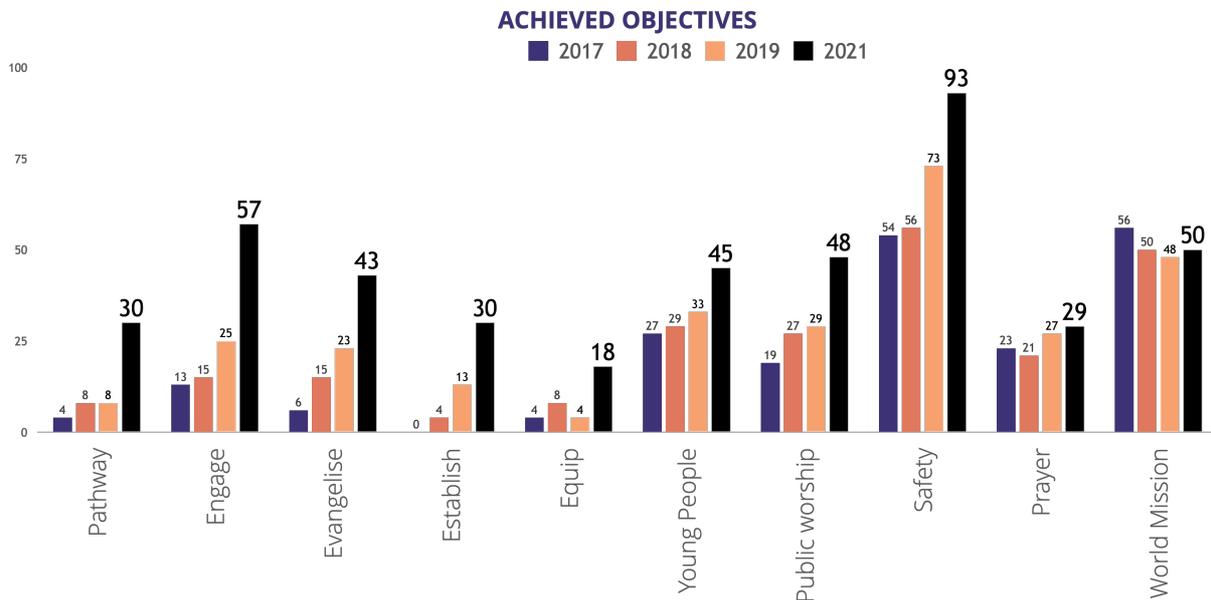
I want to report on our progress.

Build a network of confident flourishing parish centres

We set out to concentrate on developing parishes in our main centres to be strong, healthy, and growing. We wanted to build resilient rural ministries, and plant new churches as we are able. And we have been able to do some of those things. We have consolidated our parishes to main centres, and are seeing strong, healthy and growing ministries emerging and established. We have had some success in rural areas, but there is more work to be done. We are delighted that we have managed to plant two brand new churches in the Southern Beaches and in the Jordan Valley, and also new congregations in existing parishes in Kingston, the Huon and Sorell.

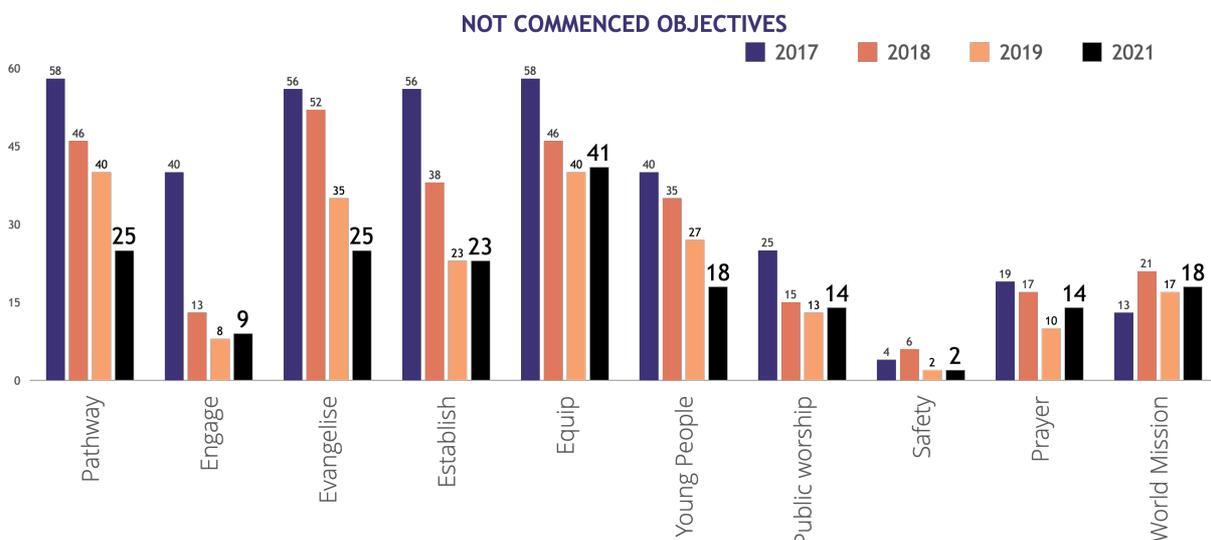
You may remember that last time we met in person, I spoke about how we are tracking our measures of parish ministry effectiveness. Each Parish has been encouraged to work on a range of activities. and we give each of the measures a red, yellow or green light. Red signifies the activity is “not started”, yellow signifies “in progress”, and green signifies an “established practice”. It is not perfect, but it gives us a picture of how we are doing.

I want to share with you, the encouraging results we have in “achieved objectives”, the green lights in our system, that is where we have established practices in place. In every domain we have seen an increase since we last met.



In 2017, 4% of our Parishes had an establish disciple-making pathway of some description. That had risen to 8% in 2019 and has jumped to 30% by 2021. Activities to engage outsiders, present in 13% of Parishes in 2017, now in 57% of Parishes. Established evangelism ministries like Alpha, Christianity Explored or some other activity is now established in 43% of Parishes up from 6% in 2017. And so on it goes: 30% of Parishes with programs to establish believers in the faith, 18% intentionally equipping leaders, and 45% of Parishes engaging with young people and families.

One of the concerns here is that less than 1/3 (only 29%) of our Parishes have a focussed prayer meeting outside of Sunday services. We should be able to achieve this in more of our Parishes and we will work hard with you to help you do that in the next year.



In line with this we have also seen a decrease in the percentage of Parishes that have not begun work in each of these different measures. A quarter of Parishes have not commenced a disciple-making pathway and don't have active evangelism taking place, but those measures are down from 58% and 56% in 2017. This is a good trend that needs to continue.

There is obviously still much to do, and we will continue to resource and encourage growth in each of these different ministry areas. But I want to take this opportunity to thank Rectors and ministry leaders, ministry teams and parish councils for their hard work in making all this happen. It is so encouraging to see this growth, and I am convinced it will flow through to more spiritual vitality in our parishes and more disciples being made.

Develop partnerships with Anglican agencies and schools

Our second mission objective was to develop partnerships with Anglican Agencies and schools.

It has been very encouraging to see the continued growth in alignment between the Diocesan Vision and Anglicare. I commend their report to the Synod and encourage you to read it if you haven't already. They have been working on a series of statements explaining the Christian basis of their care in the areas of children, the elderly, homelessness and disability services. It is great to meet a growing number of active Anglicans who work for Anglicare. We are so well served by this fantastic organisation, and I thank Bishop Chris for his fine leadership of it.

I have continued work with our Anglican Schools on a shared statement about what we are trying to achieve. It is hard work to get consensus across the three school boards, but the Principals, Board Chairs, and I have proposed the following guiding vision that is under discussion. Please pray that it will become second nature to us.

Anglican Schools in Tasmania provide excellent education within the framework of the Christian faith, in line with the vision of our founders. We invite all members of the school community to live a life in response to Jesus Christ. This takes place in all aspects of our school life. Our schools are nurturing and inclusive, welcoming people of all faiths and none.

We have grown our relationship with Bush Church Aid in the last year, with the appointment of the Revd Josh Skeat as the BCA Regional Officer. We continue to enjoy BCA's commitment to us in supporting the ministry on King Island, in the church plants at the Southern Beaches and in the Jordan Valley, and also the Digital Church project. We would like to see more of our parishes being financial supporters of BCA through their mission budgets, and I'm sure Josh would be happy to talk with you.

The Tasmanian Branch of the Church Missionary Society is in the best health it has been for some time with a record number of Tasmanian missionaries serving overseas. We are thrilled to be in partnership with them and I know the Revd Scott Doran-Sargent is delighted with the number of Anglican Parishes that support this important avenue of global mission.

Our involvement with ABM is challenged with no Tasmanian representative being appointed to the national board for some years. However, the local branch is keen to encourage support, and it has been good to use some resources produced by ABM in our work with Aboriginal reconciliation.

Grow missional chaplaincy in hospitals, aged-care facilities, and prisons

Our third objective was to grow our chaplaincy in hospitals, aged care facilities and prisons. This work has been steadily increasing over the last few years under the guidance of the Board of Anglican Health and Welfare, and their Executive Officer Mr Luke Campton. It is gratifying that AH&W continues to be the preferred provider for Chaplaincy in the public health and correctional services in Tasmania. Our chaplains have been on the forefront of care during the pandemic over the last year, and we thank them for the efforts they have made. It has been great to see an expansion of chaplaincy to provide a Chaplain to the Adolescent Ward at the RHH, and a Special Care Chaplain with the TPS.

Be a people of blessing to our communities

Our final mission strategy is to be a blessing in our local communities. Here I want to especially let you know about and acknowledge a couple of different things that have been going on in our wider community.

The Anglican-Aboriginal Relationship Working Group have been hard at work building relationships with the Aboriginal communities of Tasmania. We have strong links with Reconciliation Tasmania and the Reconciliation Collective, as well as growing relationships with Aboriginal Groups and people around the state. I had the privilege of making a short address at the January 26 rally on Parliament lawns this year and Dr Bonnie Bonneville from the Burnie Parish spoke at a local event there on the same day.

It is so important that we continue to sponsor these relationships and continue to be truth tellers about the Anglican/Aboriginal history of Tasmania and the unceded sovereignty of the palawa people. I want to encourage you to be a blessing as you reach out to the Aboriginal communities in your part of Tasmania, as we continue to speak about the dispossession, colonisation and de-culturing of the Aboriginal peoples here.

It has been wonderful to see the practical care that our churches provided to their communities during the Covid pandemic. I want to acknowledge before the Synod today the exceptional work of the Show Hope campaign. What started as a venture to feed 40 international students with a hot curry once a week, became a major undertaking providing groceries and health care items and a hot meal to around 800 international students per week in the middle of the pandemic. This was practical love in action, and I want to publicly thank The Revd Sam Gough and Mr Paul Shantapriyan for the amazing work that they did.

Anglicans have continued to be a blessing in the public square, as we have spoken out on many issues. I am always proud of Anglicare's willingness to speak on tough topics like

homelessness, rental affordability, mental health, gambling and other issues. The Diocese has also made public submissions on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Legislation, and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity conversion practices. All these contribute to the betterment and blessing of our social fabric.

3. FUTURE PLANS

Our strategic plan that we launched in 2017 comes to maturity at our Synod next year. We have made a lot of progress, but there is still much to do. I am convinced that our Vision is sound. We need to keep aiming to be a church for Tasmania, making disciples of Jesus. We will stick to that as our Vision.

As we move into the next 5 years we need to focus down on some important matters. Over the next 12 months I am going to be working with people around the Diocese to refine our plan. I am keen to hear ideas and gather all the voices in shaping our strategic priorities. Of course, I have already been thinking about some of those priorities that are growing out of what we are already doing, and in some ways, they will be a continuation and intensification of what we have done so far. Let me outline some of them for you.

Parish Transformation

We have seen a lot of change in Parish ministry over the last few years, but there is still much work to be done. If our main task as a Diocese is making disciples of Jesus, then we need to pull out all stops to make that happen. While it is great that we have 30% of our Parishes with an active disciple-making pathway in place, it should not be impossible for us to reach 100%. I know this is not easy work, but if we are not making disciples, then we are not really being the church.

Over the next 5 years we need to focus on how we can be effective in making disciples in the various different parishes across the Diocese. Ministry is especially challenging in rural areas, so we need to concentrate our best minds on developing strategies that work in this context. We need to be more disciplined in helping Parishes engage with different models of ministry like Pathways, the Vine Project, or Building a Discipling Culture. Every Parish in the Diocese should be able to tap into some models for evangelism and reaching out to unbelievers with the good news of Jesus.

I am so encouraged by how far we have come and what has been achieved. In the next iteration of our Vision, you can expect some solid plans to accelerate our Parish Transformation.

Leadership Pipeline

We know that under God, a lot depends on the quality of the leaders we have in the Diocese. Our clergy and lay ministry team is among the very best in the country. We are truly blessed by the people who serve in our Parishes, Schools and Chaplaincies. It is so encouraging to see how God has been building our leadership team in the last few years. At the recent

Ministry Leaders' Day, for all of our clergy and lay ministers, I introduced 17 new people who had joined us since we had last met in person in October 2019. In fact, last year, during the pandemic, we managed to make 11 new appointments.

In addition to this, in February we held the largest Ordination for some time, with 5 Deacons and 4 Priests being ordained. We currently have three ordinands in training (2 women and 1 man), and 7 new applications for Ordination just this year. It is exciting to see God raising up leaders to help us in this mission.

The demands are high, and as we grow, we are going to need more people to take up leadership roles, and to replace those who move or retire. The very best scenario we can strive for is producing our own leaders from our own parishes rather than on relying on recruiting from outside. This is a long-term project, usually taking about 10 years from the time a person considers they might be called to ministry, to being deployed. So, we need to begin with our youth and young adults, helping them enter onto the path of leadership, so that in 10, 15, or 20 years' time, we have the clergy and lay ministers to serve in our churches. A little shout out for the LiT camp for Grades 9-12 from Anglican Camping that helps this process – please [check it out](#).

I have recently posted our policy on Women in Ministry on the Diocesan website. It reads as follows:

The Diocese of Tasmania encourages the ministry of both women and men in all spheres of our church life. We support the ordination of women in the Church as deacons and priests, and women have significant leadership roles in the Diocese. We recognise a diversity of views on this topic. We do not require a specific view to be held by our ministry leaders, however we expect all our ministry leaders to act with charity in accordance with this policy, and to be raising up and training more women to serve as God has gifted them.

We have been working on the pipeline, and have a great group of people coming through, but the next strategic plan will focus our efforts even more on this important work.

Church Planting

I believe we need to get more serious in our efforts to plant and multiply our congregations and churches across the state. I believe this will be the most effective way we can see new people reached with the gospel, and to see the reinvigorating of existing ministry. I am pleased to let you know of a new partnership we have entered into with City-to-City Australia, called "Multiply Tas" to help us with this aim.

I am grateful to the Parish of Clarence South for releasing Jamie Bester for ½ day per week to drive forward this initiative on behalf of the Diocese. I thank them for partnering with us in this way. We are grateful too for the generosity and commitment of City-to-City in joining with us in this work. We look forward to much gospel fruit.

Culture

There is more I could say about the future vision but will finish with a couple of comments on culture. The most important thing we can do, in being effective in achieving our Vision is to work on culture. The more we can grow a culture that sees disciple-making as the normal and central activity of the church, the more we will see Tasmania changed. This will be a culture that values evangelism, conversion, and opportunities to engage with unbelievers as a natural part of our life. It will be a culture that expects growth and anticipates the power of the Spirit in our ministries. It will be a culture that rejects the narrative of decline and the impotence of the gospel.

Our current culture is positive, but not quite where we need it to be in terms of its universal focus on disciple-making. We will need to work hard at thinking of ways to move us in the direction we need to go; to teach the values we want to see, to celebrate them and to live them out. So please expect some work in this area as we work on our future vision.

4. THANKS

I want to convey my thanks to a number of people for their contribution to the Diocese over the last year. As I move around Parishes each week, I am constantly encouraged by the quality and commitment of lay leaders in our Parishes, who give so much time and effort to their local mission. Thank you for your efforts. The men and women who serve on our Diocesan Council deserve a particular mention, for the effort and time they put into governance across our Diocese.

I came home from the recent Ministry Leaders' Day in Longford with a heart full of thankfulness for the clergy and lay ministers who make up our front-line ministry team. I am so grateful to God for our unity of heart, and the quality of people the Lord has brought together. We are so well served by you. Thank you for partnering in this ministry.

My thanks to the Diocesan Office team: in Accounts, Redress, Professional Standards, Registry, Youth Ministry and Chaplaincy – we thank you for all that you do to support and enable ministry to happen across the Diocese. We have grieved the loss of Mr David Peters since his untimely death late last year and continue to miss his input. A special note of thanks to my team of James Oakley, Stephen Carnaby, Tess Delbridge and Kelvin Todd – I couldn't do any of this without you.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion I want to come back to where we began. Psalm 127:1 says: *Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.* It is right that at Synod we report about our Vision and Strategies and the things that we have been doing, and it is important that we focus on the outcomes of our efforts. But at the same time, we need to not lose sight of what is most important. We can do all the work we want, but unless the Lord is the one at work building the Kingdom, unless we are doing his work, we are wasting our time and effort.

The Diocese of Tasmania belongs to the Lord; He is building this house. Our work is a spiritual endeavour, where we put ourselves into God's hands; where we pray to him in the name of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit to have mercy on us, and to ask HIM to prosper the work of our hands. We rely on him. God is the one who moves human hearts, ours and those of the world we are seeking to reach. God is the one who will see us through the challenges of secularism, through the attempted revision of doctrine and the word of God in our denomination, through social problems and the like. It is God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills and has all the resources we need for justice-making in redress, and the ministry that he wants us to do. And even though we have responsibilities to be good stewards, custodians, and strategists, God is the one who will work out his purposes.

Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians that some of us plant and others water; we all have our roles to play; but it is only God that makes the kingdom grow. As we look back over the past year, and the last four years of our Vision and Strategic plan, we must give thanks to God for the things that HE has done, the ways in which HE has blessed us, the growth that HE has brought about. And as we cast our minds to plans for the future, we do so only if he wills it, putting ourselves humbly under his hand and sovereign purpose. We are simply co-workers with him in this venture.

So let the Glory be to him.

The Rt Revd Dr Richard Condie
Bishop of Tasmania
21 May 2021