



THE RIGHT REV'D DR RICHARD CONDIE
BISHOP OF TASMANIA

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF TASMANIA

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In his letter to the Philippian Church, the Apostle Paul was writing about the glories of knowing Christ, about the power and participation in his resurrection, when he pulls up short, and says this:

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:12-14)

Even Paul, whose ministry had been so effective, whose influence so pervasive, and whose maturity in Christ was so exemplary, knows that there is more that the Lord has in store for him. I wonder if these verses could express well where we are, as a Diocese, at this point in our history. We have received so many blessings, but we are not yet all we could be. We have not yet arrived at our goal. So we press on, we strain forward for what is ahead to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of us. But more of that in a moment.

It is such a privilege to meet together as brothers and sisters in Christ gathered from the four corners of the diocese for this Synod meeting. We gather on the traditional lands of Stoney Creek Peoples here in Launceston and pay our respect to their elders past and present and any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples present with us.

We are grateful for the custodianship of the palawa / pakana people of the islands and waters of lutruwita / Tasmania and note their unceded sovereignty of this place. It is my hope that as a Diocese we can reiterate our wholehearted support of the Uluru Statement of the Heart and the establishment of a First Nations Voice in the Australian Parliament, as an expression of our commitment to reconciliation. This would be an appropriate response as we meet on this last Day of Reconciliation Week 2022.

OUR PLACE IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

Our Synod is taking place just three weeks after the 18th General Synod. I have written recently about the business of that meeting and don't want to revisit those things here. But I want to make some comments today about our place in the wider Anglican Church of Australia.

The Anglican Church of Australia has a rich doctrinal foundation expressed in the Fundamental Declarations of its constitution. They state that we are part of the universal church from ancient times and confess the faith of the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds; that we receive the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the ultimate rule and standard of faith; and that we will obey Christ, teach His doctrine, minister the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and uphold the threefold order of ministry.

These foundations help focus us as part of the church catholic, and also continually being reformed by our attention to the scriptures and the commands of Christ. I can't think of a better foundational statement for a denomination than this.

The Diocese of Tasmania is committed to these foundations and to applying the ancient teaching of the church, the scriptures, and the commands of Christ to contemporary questions. While we may be disappointed with the decisions and directions of others in our national church, we have a measure of independence in our structures that allow us to get on with work that God has called us to do. This Synod is able to express its own mind on these matters and has in the past upheld the doctrine of the church as we have understood it. While I am your bishop, we will continue on that pathway to uphold the faith and teaching of the church as it has been delivered to us.

It is true that there are strained relationships in the Anglican Church of Australia, especially in light of the 2020 Appellate Tribunal Opinion and the recent General Synod. My hope is that we will continue to reform and heal the Anglican Church of Australia by uniting around our common theological convictions. My prayer is that as other dioceses hold their synods, they will reaffirm the ancient doctrine of the church and hold back from the departures from the Bible that are contemplated.

My commitment to you is to continue to uphold the catholic faith, as set out in the fundamental declarations and applied to the contemporary questions of our day, and I expect all the ministers licensed to me to do the same. As the bishop's ordinal says, I will set myself to be "a chief minister and pastor in Christ's Church," and to "guard its faith, unity and discipline". I have committed myself to "correct and set aside teaching that is contrary to the mind of Christ". That's my job as your bishop and I gladly commit to pressing on with it.

SOCIETAL ISSUES

Some of the changes being advocated in the teaching and practice of our church have come about because of significant shifts in and pressures from society. Part of the reason we have been having discussions about marriage is in light of the changes to the Marriage Act that took place in 2017 that made same-sex marriage possible.

It is important to affirm that we believe that human sexuality is a gift from God. All people are made in the image of God and are precious in his sight and therefore worthy of dignity and respect regardless of their age, ethnicity, ability, sexuality or gender identity. Every Anglican church in Tasmania is a diverse community made up of many types of people including heterosexual and homosexual, transgender and cisgender people, and we want all to be safe and welcome.

We affirm that the teaching of the scriptures is to exercise chastity outside of marriage regardless of sexual orientation. We recognise that this is quite a counter-cultural idea in

our age of self-expression and self-validation. We want our churches to support and encourage people to live the way God calls us to.

Of course, it is true that we have not always treated people of diverse sexualities and genders with dignity and respect. I was pleased that the General Synod passed a motion of apology to those in the LGBTIQ+ communities who have been harmed by our past actions. The rates of self-harm, suicide and adverse mental health outcomes in these communities is a tragedy, and the church must bear some of the responsibility for this. I believe we need to do more work for the pastoral care and support of LGBTIQ+ people in our churches, and so today I want to invite interested members of the Diocese to join a working group to help us develop in these areas. We need to work hard at putting grace and truth into action. Please let me know if you want to be part of that.

We also have more work to do in the prevention of family violence in church and society. A disturbing report was tabled at the General Synod about the prevalence and nature of family violence in the Anglican Church of Australia. We know what a scourge it is in the wider community, and it was truly chilling to see that the prevalence of intimate partner violence was as high or higher in the church than the rest of society. I am thrilled that our Family Violence Working Group is distributing some materials about this to us this weekend.

We are encouraging our ministry leaders to study in this area, through access to literature, the Ridley Certificate Course on family violence and participation in the Sanctuary Project. All these things are aimed at helping those suffering family violence to get the support they need, and for our communities to be safe. The Diocesan Council has already adopted the *Ten Commitments for Prevention and Response to Domestic and Family Violence in the ACA*, and I am pleased that the Synod will also get to do that this weekend. I commend these initiatives to you.

The General Synod also passed a number of motions about our duty of care for the environment. We lamented our failures in these areas back in 2018 as we acknowledged that the Bible calls us to be stewards of the creation and our shortcomings to be faithful in these things. It is important that we show the care of Christ for the creation in our stewardship. I commend the General Synod motions to you and would be keen to see us develop our own policies in this area.

OUR VISION AND STRATEGIC PLAN

Five years ago, we set out on a new Vision for the Diocese of Tasmania. A lot has changed in our world since then.

There have been political changes: When we launched our vision, Will Hodgman was Premier, Malcolm Turnbull was Prime Minister and Donald Trump was President of the USA. We now have Jeremy Rockliff as Premier, Anthony Albanese as Prime Minister and Joe Biden as the President of the USA.

There have been social changes: Marriage equality legislation in December 2017, the National Redress Scheme in July 2018, Voluntary Assisted Dying laws introduced in Tasmania in May 2021, a Commitment to Reconciliation by the Tasmanian Government and encouraging signs in the new federal government. We continue to struggle with health care, education and affordable housing across our state and nation.

And of course, unexpected events like the COVID 19 pandemic that began in March 2020 and continues to have an impact day by day. We endured a lockdown for 4 months, no travel, and now unexpected cancellations as covid continues to move through our communities. The War in Ukraine beginning in February this year contributes to the global instability.

A lot has also changed in our church over the last 5 years:

- We held a season of Lament and Repentance during Lent in 2018. We brought before God our failures in child sexual abuse, family violence, disciple-making, indigenous relationships and the environment.
- We tackled our readiness to respond to redress, passing the Redress Fund Ordinance at our Synod in 2018 that ultimately saw 73 properties on the final list for sale, and the diocese and parishes making significant contributions. We have continued to revise and develop this response.
- We have established a working group for the rebuilding of relationships with Aboriginal Tasmanians.
- We established a working group on the prevention of Family Violence.
- We pivoted at the start of the pandemic to online church, and numerous changes to buildings, services, and ministries have unfolded. It has been hard, but has also brought many opportunities. The Show Hope ministry in Hobart and the Digital Church project are just two of these.
- We have seen structural change in parishes
 - Reducing from 48 to 43 parishes (none due to COVID) including new Community Ministries at Kentish and Bruny Island.
 - Planting two new Churches – Southern Beaches and Salt in Brighton.
 - Making provisions for full-time stipendiary incumbents in 7 parishes that previously had honorary clergy, part-time clergy or were under the ESM model (which is no longer operating) – namely Circular Head, the Midlands, Deloraine, Wynyard, Cygnet, Quamby and Break O'Day.
 - Holding steady in our average overall service attendance across the state (even during COVID and despite reduced numbers of parishes and centres)
 - Revitalising and growing a group of smaller parishes including The Huon, Circular Head, and Lindisfarne, with many others working on this as well.
- There has been generational transition in our leadership. The average age of the clergy team has significantly decreased (from 54 years in 2016 to 48 in 2022) and new younger lay Anglican board and committee members have taken up roles.

- There are many new Ministry Leaders, including 21 out of 43 Rectors who have been appointed in the last 6 years. Most of the staff in the Diocesan office team are new since June 2017.

But with all of that change our Vision *to be a Church for Tasmania making disciples of Jesus* remains as relevant as it did right at the beginning.

VISION PROGRESS

We have made good progress over the last 5 years, as we have pursued our 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

It has been wonderful to recount progress in those different areas.

In our Parishes we now have many places where there is a clear pathway for people to become disciples. There is more evangelism taking place with Alpha and Christianity Explored courses popping up across the diocese. There are more local prayer meetings taking place. There are more parishes attempting ministry with young people and families and a growing number of people doing internships in that area. We have seen parishes committing to World Mission, which is one of the best indicators of local mission vitality. All of these are signs of parish health. It is not universal, and there is much more to do, but these are great indicators that the vision has taken root in the majority of our parishes.

We enjoy good relationships with Anglican agencies and schools, and I am pleased with the growing alignment between them and our diocesan vision. We continue to work closely with Anglicare, with Bishop Chris as CEO and Stephen Carnaby as Chair, and I am in regular contact with them about the work. I am pleased to encourage the Diocese to fully support the Anglicare Winter Appeal which was launched this week.

The three Anglican Schools are working well with the Diocese, and our chaplains are exercising fruitful ministries in them, with the Principals and Board Chairs demonstrating a commitment to the Anglican ethos. Our hope is that renewed governance structures will come into place soon to see these Anglican schools flourish into the future. We continue to work closely alongside BCA, especially in its support of our work in King Island, Southern Beaches, the digital church project and the Salt Church plant. We also enjoy our close relationship with the Church Missionary Society and rejoice in its growth and health.

The continued development of missional chaplaincy in hospitals, aged-care facilities, and prisons has also been a feature of the last few years. We are now the provider of chaplaincy in all our public hospitals having recently secured the contract for the Mersey Hospital. An expansion of chaplaincy in the prisons has also been made possible through the work of

the Clarendon Foundation and Anglican Health and Welfare. Again, there is more to be done, especially in the field of aged-care chaplaincy, but we have made excellent progress.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2027

I have long been an advocate of five year planning. I think it is easy to overestimate what can be achieved in one year, and underestimate what can be achieved in 10 years. Five years seems to be a sweet spot for a stretch that is visionary and bold yet is not too far or too speculative to end up meaning nothing.

I have a little confession to make. I had hoped to bring a new strategic plan to the Synod this year full of fanfare and excitement, with a glossy brochure and some bold initiatives that would surprise and enthuse and stir up our passions. I wanted there to be new plans and exhilarating strategies, and a fresh vision for where we are heading. But the more I worked on it the more I realised I couldn't bring that to you.

You see as I reflected on the Vision – *to be a church for Tasmania, making disciples of Jesus* I realised that we can't really improve on that. For one thing the job is not finished, we have so much more to do, to be that church and there are so many more disciples to make. And for another thing, this is simply what we do! This is the church, this is our job, this is our commission.

Then I got to thinking about the convictions that drive the Vision – those 5 things that have been foundations for us:

- 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

We could tinker with them, refine them, maybe get a 5% improvement. But I'm still captivated by these convictions. I believe them, and I see them driving our ministries right across the diocese.

It was then that I realised our plans don't need to change all the time. Novelty is not the goal. But like the title of Eugene Peterson's book on discipleship – our vision is a *Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. We are committed to this for the long haul. Our tactics might change from time to time, and we have a few new ones in the mix, but our core doesn't change. We are going to be striving to be a church for Tasmania making disciples of Jesus, under the convictions of this Vision, until Jesus returns. We are always going to be committed to local congregations, agencies, schools, and chaplaincies in our institutions.

Mission is hard in Australia. Our nation is long past its Christian origins and the tenets of secularism have settled in. We are weak and relatively ineffective. So, if we are going to see

lasting change, if we are going to see a church FOR every part of Tasmanian life, if we are going to have any success at making disciples, then we just have to keep at it.

As Paul says: "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."

Since 2019, a group of about 20 key Diocesan leaders have been gathering together with some church consultants to work on how to focus our efforts. The group came up with 4 strategy areas to focus on as the areas needing immediate attention: Parish revitalisation, Church planting, the Leadership Pipeline, and Partnerships with our agencies and schools. Let me tell you what has been happening.

Parish Revitalisation – that is, focussing on how our parishes move from maintenance to mission. To help this along we are making sure all Ministry Leaders have a coach, regular reviews, and professional development. We are equipping our churches to develop and grow a disciple-making pathway. We are providing focussed support from the DMD for a "development group" of 15 Parishes, 11 of which have had new rectors since 2017.

Church Planting – You have already heard about "Multiply Tas", and our partnership with City to City Australia. 7 churches are currently involved in a consultancy to see how they can multiply ministry in their context – Wynyard, Burnie, Deloraine, Ulverstone, Northside, Cathedral and Battery Point.

Leadership Pipeline – that is, making sure we grow enough leaders to see us into the future. We are supporting ministry leaders to develop local pipelines of leaders. We are running diocesan events with our young leaders (mainly "Consider Ministry" dinners with the Bishop). We are continuing to train people through the Bishop's Training Event, and partnering with Ridley and other colleges to equip our people. Archdeacon Ruth Hanlon has been supporting and raising up women in leadership, and in God's kindness we have ordained 19 Deacons and 20 Priests over the last 6 years.

Partnership with Schools and Agencies – We continue the important work of connecting in partnership with others; to work alongside Anglicare, BCA, CMS and our schools, deepening those relationships and seeing what synergies there might be between us.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Aspirational Values

When I think about what I want to characterise the Diocese of Tasmania by the time I finish as Bishop, the following are some of the values I would like to see in the culture. I have called them "Aspirational Values" as we aspire to grow in them. I want us to work towards

embracing the values of transformation, boldness, perseverance, joy and generosity. Sometimes our Anglican heritage pushes us in the opposite direction to these: to become static, risk averse, and to retreat. Being comfortable will not serve us well for the future, but we must press on to something better.

- Transformation
 - God does not leave us as we are, personally or collectively. We will embrace personal transformation to be like Christ through encountering God in prayer and in his word. We will seek transformation and growth in our ministry endeavours and especially our churches. We will work towards seeing transformation in the lives of others.
- Boldness
 - We can have confidence that because God does the work, we can step out boldly in his power, not our own. We will pursue innovation in our ministries and take bold risks to advance our mission entrusting the outcome to him.
- Perseverance
 - Serving God can be hard, and we need to stick at it for the long haul. We need the generations to change and for a disciple-making culture to be embedded in our life. For this to take place we will need to persevere.
- Joy
 - As we do all this, we are joyful because the joy of the Lord is our strength. He lightens our burdens and gives us pleasure in serving him and enjoying him. We want the diocese to be a positive place of confident joy in Jesus.
- Generosity
 - This is our stance towards each other and to outsiders. It makes us open to diversity, and appreciative of others. We have some really good things happening in our parishes and the diocese and we will gladly share with others, through partnerships across our dioceses and the national church.

FOCUS FOR THE NEXT 5 YEARS

1. Spiritual Leadership

Our biggest need in fulfilling the vision is to **grow and mature spiritually** as disciples of Jesus. To do this, we need **ministry leaders** who are continually deepening their walk with Jesus by prayer, the word, the fruit of the spirit, service, and lives transformed by the Holy Spirit. These leaders can model this for us and also equip us all for spiritual growth.

We need an increasing **culture of prayer** across our churches, schools, agencies, chaplaincies and other ministries. We want to see continued improvement in this in our parish report card each year.

In a world and church which often lacks confidence in the scriptures as the authority for our faith and life, we need Ministry Leaders who are **unashamedly biblically orthodox**, who can clearly apply God's word to life, and are humble and gentle in their correcting, rebuking,

and training in righteousness. We will continue to select and train Ministry Leaders for this task.

To ensure Ministry Leaders can focus on their task of spiritual leadership, we will be working to **reduce and simplify the administration and compliance load** on Rectors in particular. The Registrar will spearhead this project and report back to Synod in 2023.

We are aware of the effects of pressure on our Ministry Leaders, and will continue to monitor this, and put in place support structures. This includes the transition to **external Professional Supervision** over the next 18 months.

We will continually develop our **support for Ministry Leaders and spouses**, to recognise their role, and support and equip them in their ministry partnership. The Partners in Ministry program and ministry leader dinners will be key to this.

2. Church Planting

The single most effective method of evangelism and church growth is planting new churches. So we will continue to develop our **church planting strategies** focussing on: places, planters, people, plans, preparation, provision, and progression. We will continue to develop our working relationship with City to City Australia, to resource and enable this plan.

We will support the 7 parishes that have begun with **Multiply Tas** to establish new congregations, and in the next 3 years aim to have another 5 parishes join Multiply Tas for a total of 12.

We will work towards two **Diocesan Church plants**, one in Hobart and one in Launceston in the next 5 years. A church in Hobart focussing on the University's relocation to the city centre and in Launceston in the Riverside/Legana region.

3. Parish Transformation

We will continue the move from maintenance to mission. Half of our Parishes have a clear **mission pathway** to make disciples of Jesus, or an overarching vision including aspects of that. We will encourage and equip the remaining parishes to put this in place over the next 5 years, working with 5 parishes per year.

We will continue structural changes to ensure all of our parishes led by honorary clergy are well supported and transition to the next stage of ministry where needed.

Some parishes have experienced conflict or related issues, and so over the next 2 years we will be providing training in **mediation and conflict resolution** to a group of clergy and lay people who can be called upon to assist in future situations.

There are particular challenges in our **rural and smaller town parishes**, and so we will continue to work with BCA and others on effective strategies for rural ministry.

4. Children's and Youth Ministry Development

The Youth Ministry Development Coordinator will lead a working group that will assess the current state of Children's and Youth Ministry and develop strategies for the next 5 years and report back to Synod in 2023. We aim to see significant growth in the number of parishes intentionally ministering to children and young families.

5. Chaplaincy in schools, hospitals, aged care and prisons

We want to continue to be the **preferred Tasmanian provider** for institutional chaplaincy in our hospitals and prisons. We will need to work hard over the next few years to secure the **funding** for this work.

We will develop new opportunities for chaplaincy in the **government schools** in partnership with chaplaincy providers (e.g. SU) and continue to support and develop chaplaincy in Anglican schools.

6. Leadership Pipeline

We will continue to work with **youth and young adults**, through LiT, young leader dinners, and Consider Ministry Seminars to encourage them to consider vocational Christian ministry.

We will support **ministry internships** to allow people to test out their suitability for vocational ministry and prepare for further theological study.

We will examine ways to foster **cross-cultural ministry** skills, and specialised ministry with **children's and youth ministry**.

We will continue to work with **Ridley College** to grow a cohort of local on-line students, and also to send students to study on campus.

We will invest in developing **younger leaders for our boards**. We will continue to support and resource the work of the **Ministry Development Officer for Women** to encourage women in vocational and other forms of Christian leadership.

7. Partnerships

We will take every opportunity to place gospel minded people who are aligned with our vision on the **governance boards** of Anglican Institutions. We will work with those boards to help them develop Anglican ethos values and statements to guide their work.

We will continue to develop our positive diocesan contribution to our Anglican School Boards, Principals and Chaplains, developing with them Anglican orientation material for staff and teachers.

We will continue to partner closely with **Bush Church Aid, and the Church Missionary Society** to enable local, Australian, and global mission to take a priority.

AND SO, TO WORK

All of these words are an expression of how we are hoping "to press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of [us]". We have not yet obtained it all, not yet reached our goal and there is more to be done. Of course, all these plans are in pencil as our best thinking now, but subject to what God will do among us and where he will lead. I found a great quote in bible commentary on the books of Acts last year. It goes like this:

The presence of Jesus among us by his Spirit does not exempt us from careful planning and courageous leadership. But it does demand that we not take *our* plans too seriously. ... The presence of Jesus demands that we formulate and reformulate our fallible plans in order to keep in step with his invincible plan. We must stay alert to unplanned, unexpected opportunities for witness and service, remaining patient and full of hope when encountering setbacks, and being sensitive to the surprising resource he gives to all his people".

(Dennis E Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the history of redemption*, P&R, p27-28)

What an exciting adventure to follow after the living God. Like Paul, "forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, [we] press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus.

The Lord be with you.