54th Synod of the Diocese of Sydney
Presidential Address
14 September 2026

People matter to God.

To King David this is a marvel almost too wonderful to comprehend. He says in Psalm 8:

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! …When I look at your heavens… the moon and stars which you have set in place, what is man (humankind) that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?[1]

Even the bible writers struggle with the idea that people matter to God.

Our own experience makes us wonder. In the face of unexpected tragedy, pitiless evil, the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the innocent we wonder, 'Does God see? Does he care?'

Yuval Harari in his book *Homo Deus – A Brief History of Tomorrow,* raises the question of humanity's future in an AI world. If AI makes better decisions, solves more problems, and produces better outcomes faster and cheaper than humans – what are humans for? Is humanity relevant or necessary anymore?

The Bible says, people matter to God.

This is a truth we learn from creation. The first chapter of the bible tells us that human beings, unlike any other of God's creatures are made in God's image. The pinnacle of creation is not any star or sun, not any mountain or sea, not any plant or animal – but the human couple, male and female.

As God's image bearers humans possess unique dignity and irreducible worth, having been made 'a little lower than the heavenly beings, and crowned with glory and honour'[2] the Psalmist says.

And yet, our first parents refused the high calling of their creation and asserted a futile and pathetic independence from the source of all their life and good and blessing. They refused God's good word, they refused God's loving rule, they refused life as God had ordered it in the garden. And we have all followed in their footsteps.

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[1] Psalm 8:1, 3-4
[2] Psalm 8:5

But people matter to God. What is true in creation, is true also in redemption. 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.'[3]

People matter to Jesus.

The Lord said, 'The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'[4] 'Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'[5] He raised the lifeless body of Jairus' daughter with a word, and he did the same for the son of the widow of Nain.

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prays to his Father, 'Not as I will but as you will'[6] and resolves to drink the cup of God's wrath so that by his death 'he might break the power of …the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.'[7]

People matter to God. It is a truth we learn from the new creation. The apostle John peers into heaven and sees a Lamb as though slain, and 'a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages', crying out with a loud voice 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!'[8] Many peoples, many languages; one song, one Saviour.

People matter to God, so when we speak of our purpose as Sydney Anglicans in terms of making and maturing disciples of Jesus through the Spirit-dependent proclamation of the gospel, we do so because the risen Jesus left us a mission – to make disciples of all nations.

We do so because we recognise that Jesus is glorified as people come to put their trust in him who loved us and gave himself for us.[9]

We do so because it is God's purpose from eternity that all things in heaven and on earth should be united under the Lordship of Jesus,[10] and every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.[11]

And we do so because people matter to God.

People – every person - is made in God's image, endued with inalienable dignity and worth that is independent of their sex, age, ethnicity, education, health or productivity. People are precious.

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[3] John 3:16
[4] Luke 19:10
[5] Matthew 11:28
[6] Matthew 26:39
[7] Hebrews 2:14-15
[8] Revelation 7:9-10
[9] John 17:10, Galatians 2:20
[10] Ephesians 1:9-10
[11] Philippians 2:11

People are lost. The Scriptures describe people without the gospel as 'dead in trespass and sins', 'captive to the prince of this world', 'children of wrath', 'separated from Christ, without hope and without God in the world.'[12] This is a devastating but accurate spiritual diagnosis of every human being including you and me, before we came to know Christ; and it is an accurate spiritual diagnosis of our friends and neighbours and colleagues who do not yet know and have not welcomed Christ as Lord and Saviour.

The fate of the lost is dreadful. Without the salvation that Jesus alone has secured, the fate of humanity is desperate. Separated from God and everything that is good in the world, enduring the penalty of God's just judgement eternally in hell.

People are precious. People are lost. The fate of the lost is dreadful. The gospel of Jesus is beautiful.

The angel said to Mary, 'you are to call his name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'[13]

Jesus said, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good Shepherd, and I lay down my life for the sheep.'[14]

John says, 'This is how we know what love is, Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.'[15]

Isn't the gospel beautiful?

A Prayerful Goal for the Conversion of the Lost

In 2024 the Synod received the Attendance Patterns report which showed among other things that total Sydney Anglican adult attendance at church declined by 7% in the decade from 2013-2023. We repented of any failure to give priority, attention and resources to seeing the lost saved and invited every part of our fellowship to respond to attendance decline by making prayer, evangelism, church health and leadership development our chief priorities.[16]

Last year, the Synod gave thanks to God for two years of growth (of 11% and 4.5% consecutively) and called on the Lord to do an even greater work to bring 'many thousands each year to salvation through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ'.[17] Synod invited all parts of the Diocesan fellowship to join in a special five year focus to prayerfully seek to grow attendance in churches by five percent for each of the next five years through conversion of the lost through faith in Jesus. Because people matter to God.

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[12] Ephesians 2:1-3, 12
[13] Matthew 1:21
[14] John 10:10-11
[15] 1 John 3:16
[16] Synod Resolution 47/24
[17] Synod Resolution 13/25

Five percent growth for five years is not a necessary or sufficient measure of the health of your church or the faithfulness or competency of the leadership. But it is intended to focus our prayers, our hearts, our imagination, our effort.

I've been so encouraged to hear from rectors that as they have raised this with their ministry teams, Parish Councils, lay leaders it has provoked lively conversation – what are our resources? Who are we not reaching? What needs to change? Who can we partner with?

People are precious. People are lost. The gospel is beautiful. What can we do?

The Power of Local

The 5% goal does not offer a single program or any program, other than prayer. This is because of our conviction that you know the place where the Lord has set you. You know the gifts with which God has blessed your church – whether you are 50 or 80 or 200 or 600 members. You know the people who are your neighbours, and the community of which you are a part.

In June this year, it was a great joy for me to join with the parishes of Wentworthville, Stanhope, Toongabbie and Parramatta, working with the Sydney Anglican South Asian ministry network that goes by the name 'Satya' for a week of activities to engage people of Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist background with the gospel of the Lord Jesus. Across those four catchment areas, on average, about 40% of residents were born in South Asian countries, about 30% are Hindu.

I was so encouraged by the cultural diversity and gospel unity of the churches – Sydney Anglicans of many ethnic backgrounds working and praying together and being bold and prayerful in inviting South Asian friends and neighbours, not only to hear the story of Jesus, but to experience the welcome and hospitality of the local Christian community. Each event through the week was thoughtfully designed with the cultural frameworks of South Asian people in mind and adopted the practises of cross-cultural mission at home – humility, curiosity, patience.

At Stanhope we had a culture and food night including a shared meal, Christian musical items in four languages, as well as a talk and Q&A. The local MP was invited along and generously stayed for the whole evening. He said to me that as he travels to faith groups, service groups and sporting clubs in his electorate, the one that most clearly reflected the whole breadth of the cultural diversity of the local area was the Anglican church. How wonderful! And how wonderful it is that across the Diocese this is increasingly the case.

The Gospel for the Nations

Last year's resolution of Synod embracing the prayerful goal of 5% growth by conversion invited churches to have regard to the 31% of the population born overseas, and to engage with these people in culturally responsive and cross-cultural ways.

Let me share with you some stories of individuals from just one church in Western Sydney that has sought to do just this. (I've changed the names.) I'll share a few stories, and I'm grateful to rectors who have shared these with me.

Lucy walked into church and asked about Sunday services. She only spoke Mandarin so a staff member used Google translate to explain that services have AI translation and prayed for her. Lucy began to attend services and took part in a Chinese inquirers course with a Mandarin speaking church member. Lucy confessed faith in Christ and was baptised before returning to her home country.

A few years back Mia said she found Buddhism an unsatisfying answer for her life. A friend invited her to church. Mia and her husband Sebastian joined a course and while Mia had given up on Buddhism, she and Sebastian were still not sure what they thought about Jesus. They kept coming regularly to church and 12 months later they both shared that over the journey they had made a commitment to Jesus.

Stephen saw the church's inquirer's course promoted online and contacted them. He grew up in a Sikh household but was on a faith journey. He came to church for a couple of weeks prior to the course and then attended the course. He made a profession of faith in Jesus and is planning to be baptised but continues to wrestle with the impact of this decision on his wider family.

One church, four individuals, four or five cultural and religious backgrounds. People matter to God. One gospel, one Saviour, one Lord.

Working Together in Mission

In 2024 Synod invited every part of the diocesan fellowship – parishes, Mission Areas, bishops, regional councils and diocesan organisations to give sustained focus to prayer, evangelism, church health and leadership development.

I'm delighted to report that in response, the South Sydney regional council offered every parish a 50% subsidy to undertake a ministry consultation; the South Western regional council has offered to pay for any parish (in the region!) to complete the Youthworks Effective Ministry Tool assessment. And every parish has access to a grant to pursue a mission activity from an 'evangelism menu'. The Western regional council also assists ministers undertaking leadership development with external providers. Not all Regional Councils have funds at their disposal! Those that do are using them imaginatively to strengthen leaders, churches and evangelism.

Mission areas continue to collaborate in evangelistic activity. The Macarthur mission area has joined for evangelism training once a term for three terms focussing on bringing the gospel to those from Hindu, Muslim and Roman Catholic backgrounds. More than 300 people have participated each term. The Upper North mission area held a conference for staff and lay leaders addressing the two arms of the Five Year Focus: increasing evangelistic endeavour and reaching the next generation.

Wentworth mission area had its first combined prayer meeting and 100 adults came together from eight parishes to pray for their unsaved friends, family and neighbours. This year's diocesan day of prayer for the spread of the gospel had about 500 people attend across the regions, doubling last year's attendance.

And last month, the thirteen parishes of the Warringah mission area collaborated in a mission called Hope for the Beaches – with two guest evangelists and a range of outreach activities. In preparation for this season of gospel proclamation, 300 people from the thirteen churches attended a prayer meeting and 500+ attended a training event in personal evangelism. Enterprising, collaborative, gospel-minded mission! I hope these things encourage and inspire you.

Youth and Children Matter to God

The second arm of the 2025 Synod resolution 13/25 encouraged all parishes to shape their allocation of resources during the special five year focus with clear regard to the insight that 24.1% of the population are children and young people and 78% of Sydney Anglicans became Christians before the age of 18.

People matter to God. Young people matter to God and children matter to God.

It is extremely pleasing that this year, Standing Committee can report that all 33 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse have been fully implemented in the diocese. This has been the result of sustained work especially by the Safe Ministry Board, the Office of the Director of Safe Ministry, the Standing Committee and the episcopal team, along with every parish. I thank God for them all, and I thank you.

I can tell you that when I meet with survivors who have experienced child sexual abuse at the hands of clergy or lay leaders in our diocese, they are keenly interested to know, and in many cases, surprised, relieved and grateful to hear that every person in the diocese who is involved in ministry to children, and many people who are not directly involved but exercise leadership in various ways, are required to undertake safe ministry training and to keep it up to date. Some of these survivors have expressed to me that this simple piece of information representing as it does massive cultural and institutional change and investment by us all, is of real meaning and significance for

them in their journey of healing. I find this incredibly humbling, and something for which I thank God.

The National Church Life Survey consistently reports that 80% of respondents came to Christ before the age of eighteen. No doubt, in many cases, this is due to the thoughtful, deliberate and prayerful work of Christian parents to teach and model the Christian faith to their children, including involving them in the life of the local church as a priority for the whole family. But it is also true that many Christians in our churches today, did not grow up in Christian homes but came to hear of Christ from their friends, through the ministry of SRE in public schools, or at Anglican schools, or local church youth groups.

For that reason, it is wonderful that 300 young people from ten churches in the Chatswood/Lane Cove mission area came together in August for an evening of training in evangelism; 600 attended an event held by Inner West Youth, including from thirteen Anglican churches; 500 high schoolers from 8 parishes in the Northern Region joined together for fellowship and outreach; Barker College played host to an Alive evangelistic rally for 500 young adults with many making first time commitments to Christ, who are being followed up by local churches. Dave Jensen from ENC coordinates the Alive rallies which have also taken place at St Luke's Dee Why last week, and Inaburra School two weeks earlier. Collaborative effort by schools, diocesan organisations and churches to bring the gospel to children and young adults. Because they matter to God.

I am immensely grateful for the more than 1840 teachers of SRE across our diocese (including 110 senior ministers). In the Wollongong Region a Year 5 girl from a non-church going family was attending SRE and the church's mid-week kids club. She decided to come to church – by herself – with permission from her parents. Now she's invited another friend of hers, to join her on Friday and Sunday! In the South West region, a boy who did not attend SRE was invited by his Christian friend to the church youth group. He's being baptised later this year, and he's asked the minister for an invitation to youth group for a non-Christian school friend. In the South Sydney region a mother heard about SRE while visiting a church. She signed her son up online and he started attending year 7 SRE. He got interested so he started attending the lunch time group, then youth group, and has now become a Christian and is inviting his friends to youth group.

McCrindle have identified that there is a greater openness to spiritual conversations among Gen Z than among other generations, including Gen X and the Boomers. McCrindle have also confirmed the insight that among Gen Z, young men are more open to such conversations than young women.

In the South West two young men checked out different religions online. Dissatisfied with what they found, they started to read the Bible together. After reading the Bible by

themselves for some time, they decided they'd become Christians so they turned up at one of our churches and asked to be baptised. Six months later, they were.

At a church in the South Sydney region, three young men turned up together wanting to know about Jesus. They've been coming consistently for several months. In the Northern region, a young man joined one of our churches after becoming a Christian through the ministry of his Anglican school. After a few weeks, he told the senior minister that he had four friends who would like to meet him to talk about Jesus. The minister arranged for them to come to his house for dinner. When the day arrived, the young man rang the minister – not to cancel - to ask if it would be OK to bring ten friends instead!

Let me share a story of one Anglican school partnering with local churches and seeking to proclaim Christ to the student body all year. Every year, Year 7 and Year 11 have a Christian Studies Assessment involving visiting a local church and writing a reflection. 700 students take part and 15 Anglican churches, along with others. One student, let's call her Amelia, attended church for the first time as part of the assessment task. She liked it, so went back the next week of her own accord. By the end of the year, she was regularly attending and had become a Christian. She volunteered to serve in the kids ministry and completed all the training, and throughout her final year of High School she served at Kids Church in the morning and attended church in the evening. Her Mum agreed to come along with her to church, and she plied the school chaplain with her questions on the sidelines of Saturday sport.

The Lord is building his church! He is at work in people before us and ahead of us, he is at work through his people to bring others to himself. His servants can be children and young people and can even be new Christians. Of course! Do you see the crowds, coming to Jesus, one person at a time?

Diocesan Organisations Serving the Mission

Evangelism and Ministry Partnerships

From the middle of last year the Provisional Board of Evangelism and Ministry Partnerships (EMP) has continued to work at the request of the Synod to bring together three of our central diocesan ministry organisations - Evangelism and New Churches, Ministry Training and Development and the Anglican Media Council.

I am tremendously grateful to the staff of ENC, MT&D and the AMC, and the Provisional Board and the Interim Head, Phil Colgan for their careful, prayerful, and mission-minded commitment to this work. Please pray for them all as they continue to pursue this work.

The staff and Provisional Board have begun to imagine the kinds of ministry benefits that might emerge from a more aligned and collaborative approach to their work. The report of the Board you have received in your Synod papers refers to several. A church planting strategy that coordinates all the relevant parties and addresses amongst other things, a comprehensive church planting 'pipeline' that would help us to identify, support and deploy church planters, and the locations and contexts of diocesan church plants.

To grow the number of believers we need to see our churches grow, and we need more churches. Not only in the new suburbs of Sydney but in established suburbs with established churches, where thousands more people are making their home.

Sydney Anglican Property is working closely with EMP, Regional Councils and churches to support this work. Because people matter to God. Here's what one woman said about one of our greenfields church plants: "If this church wasn't here, I would still be feeling lost, and I don't like to feel lost! You have no idea what a blessing it has been to me and my family…This is not just a building. This is a place of hope."

EMP hopes to increase mobilisation for evangelism so that all Sydney Anglicans might be disciple making disciples, bring renewed focus and support for ministries that seek to reach those beyond our current parish structures, and to support parishes reaching people who have poor access to the gospel.

God is raising up workers for the harvest, and we want to support the well-being of the servants of the Lord – for their marriages and families, for their churches, and for their joy. Those who lead our churches make many kinds of sacrifices for the sake of the Lord and his gospel – forgoing many things they might otherwise have had, and enduring things they might have otherwise avoided. They do it with their eyes open, they do it gladly, they do it from Spirit-borne conviction of the Lord's direction and provision. And they are not alone – many in our churches make similar sacrifices. We want those who lead in ministry to last, to be equipped for new challenges and helped to endure.

And communication. The Lord is active among us. We want as many people as possible to know what the Lord is doing - to be encouraged, to be inspired, to be helped to rejoice, to pray, to persevere. Fundamentally we want to get the gospel out to the world. Because it's not easy. It's a battle. We're in a spiritual war. People who are blinded by the god of this age. Our weapons are prayer and the word of God, the power of the Holy Spirit. Don't think I'm making it sound easy. But God is building his church. Our prayerful hope is that EMP will facilitate greater collaboration to see the multiplication of believers, churches and leaders across the diocese.

Moore College

This year, two of our organisations share a milestone anniversary of 170 years of service of the gospel in our diocese. When Moore College opened in March 1856 Frederic Barker had been Bishop in Sydney for barely a year. The College was established through the gift of Thomas Moore but it was Barker who shaped it as a training college for ministers of the gospel.

Calling on the faithful to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send men to be trained at Moore College, Bishop Barker said this:

An apostolic Church requires in common consistency, men of apostolic spirit, of untiring energy and glowing zeal, while seeking the salvation of souls; men who, night and day, from house to house, from station to station, to men singly, to multitudes in the great assembly, will preach Christ, and by their life and doctrine set forth the glory of God, and set forward the salvation of men.[18]

Bishop Barker employed the archaic use of the word 'men' meaning 'people' as the object of salvation. Barker's wife Jane was an equally vigorous evangelical and energetic promoter of the gospel in the Colony. And I like to think they would be delighted to see that 34% of the current student body of Moore College are women, I dare say, 'of untiring energy and glowing zeal' who by their life and doctrine set forth the glory of God and the salvation of people through faith in Jesus Christ.

Today the total number of students enrolled at Moore College in accredited courses or units is 454, 153 of whom are women. They include students from 19 countries including New Zealand, England and Northern Ireland, Singapore, Malaysia, Pakistan, the United States and Germany. The Aussie students come from every State and the ACT. Sixty-two per cent are Anglicans but the other thirty-eight per cent are drawn from more than 20 denominations including FIEC, Presbyterian, and Baptist along with Christian Reformed and Pentecostal.

One of the things that gives me great joy when I talk to students and ask them what influenced them to train for full time ministry at Moore, is their frequent testimony that they were so shaped by the ministry of the graduates of the College that they had a clear desire to study where those who most helped them as growing Christians, had themselves been shaped and trained.

Similarly, students of the College typically speak with warmth and appreciation of their relationships with the faculty who teach them (and the staff who serve to keep the College functioning safely and effectively). Our College Faculty are men and women who combine deep learning with deep commitment to the academic, spiritual and personal growth and health of every student. This approach to theological education

[18] He Still Speaks – Selected Addresses of the Rt Revd Frederic Barker, Bishop of Sydney and Metropolitan of Australia 1854-1882 (ed. G van der Jagt, 2025, Unpublished) p. 68.

and ministry training that is intentionally embedded in a context of prayer, ministry and community is rare, but vitally important.

The pressing needs of the College are more faculty who share not only our theological convictions but also our vision for theological education and ministry training in community; and sound and ample accommodation options for the varied needs of our student body. Please pray for the College Executive led by the Principal, Dr Mark Thompson, and for the Governing Board as we seek to meet these challenges, and please pray for the Governing Board as we undertake the prayerful process of appointing the next Principal who God willing will commence in 2028.

Anglicare

The project that was perhaps closest to Bishop Barker's heart, at least in the first decade of his episcopacy was the work of the Church Society, established in May 1856. Today, the primary successor of the Church Society is Anglicare, although at the beginning, the Church Society was involved in church planting and in the establishment of schoolhouses and the appointment of schoolmasters, so perhaps there are a few organisations today that could claim to be Bishop Barker's grandchildren.

In 1856, there was little doubt in Bishop Barker's mind that the best way to provide care for the citizens of the Colony and especially those who were most in need, was to establish local churches as centres from which the 'ministrations of the Church of England' could be dispensed - including the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, the education and catechising of children, missionary work among Indigenous people, and the charitable contributions of church members for relief of the poor.

Archbishop Howard Mowll launched the first annual Archbishop's Winter Appeal in 1934 and said:

"…it is one of the characteristics of the Christian faith that it is concerned with the needs of men's bodies as well as their souls. The Master who fed the hungry and healed the sick surely calls upon us to minister generously by one means or another to the needs of our less fortunate … and under no compulsion save that of a sense of Christian duty and love."[19]

In its 170th year, 45% of parishes have four or more touchpoints with Anglicare through the year and only 6 parishes in the diocese have no discernible partnership. The Family and Life Skills team have run 141 training sessions in 70 parishes across the diocese covering topics such as parenting, mental health and pastoral care. These are opportunities for church members to be equipped and for the church to connect with your local community. There are 62 parishes hosting the Mobile Community Pantry

[19] Quoted in, 170 Years of Anglicare, Anglicare Sydney 2026, compiled by Christina Mahoney, p.11.

which provided 28000 low-cost bags of groceries and fresh food to 22000 customers in 2025. Forty six percent of pantry customers went on to attend another church run activity.

Anglicare employs 177 Chaplains in residential aged care, seniors communities, hospital, prison, and emergency settings. They are front line gospel workers. There are 13 Community Chaplains partnering with churches in heavily socially disadvantaged areas to bring gospel-minded friendship and practical care. Anglicare's Cross-Cultural team supports 82 parishes with resources and training for their English Classes. The Multi- Language Bible Resource Hub this team developed in consultation with churches has now been live for 3 months and has already had 5800 views.

Anglicare provides social housing for 900 men, women and families experiencing housing stress in 24 locations, and following the acquisition of two residential aged care businesses, now provides care for 5300 residents across NSW, Qld, SA and Vic including 23 new residential care chaplaincies allowing residents and their families to hear and respond to the gospel of the Lord Jesus in the place where they live.

Statistics? People! Hurting, needy, troubled, precious people. People who matter to God.

The Gospel for Sydney's Indigenous People

At its meeting in 2023, Synod encouraged all parishes to be better informed about the Indigenous history of their area, and to find ways to prayerfully and practically partner with Indigenous ministries in the diocese. In response, I also established a small group of people to work towards a process for hearing the stories of God's work among and through Indigenous people in our diocese.

The Indigenous History Project seeks to accomplish two things over the next few years. First, to provide a forum for Indigenous people to tell their stories, including their experience of engagement with the Sydney Anglican church and second, to commission more formal written reflection on this part of our history. In the words of our Director of Indigenous Ministries, the Rev Michael Duckett, amid the grief with which Indigenous communities typically live, we want 'to trace the hand of God's grace'.

Recently, I had the privilege of spending a day with a small group of Sydney Anglican Indigenous brothers and sisters, in Glebe. As longstanding servants of the Lord shared the story of their lives and ministries, I was struck by several things which I had not previously appreciated.

The policy of removing children from their families and communities (the Stolen Generations) continues to have a pervasive impact on Indigenous communities. Not only those who were themselves removed (of whom many are still living, and members

of our churches) but their children and grandchildren, and extended family live with the pain of 'not knowing' – who and where their family are, and where they themselves 'fit in' and 'belong', or where they are from. For many, the grief and loss that has resulted from forced removal and displacement is palpable.

Nevertheless, so many of our Indigenous brothers and sisters humbly and confidently give thanks to God for his sustaining, protection and provision amid trauma and injustice. I was inspired and humbled by the endurance, perseverance, forgiveness, trust, humour and hope in God that was expressed by speakers from three generations. There was not a hint of self-pity.

I was convicted that our Indigenous brothers and sisters have a just claim as members of Christ's family to be heard, respected and valued. This should be the shape of all relationships in church, yet the experience of Indigenous people has often been different. I remember the shock of hearing of one older saint (still living) who as a child, along with her family, was compelled to have church outside on the lawn because the church building was for white people. I am sure that you share my dismay, but I suspect that few of us would ever guess that such things took place in Sydney Anglican churches so recently.

By God's grace, and the labour of many Anglo-Australian and Indigenous pastors and leaders, the church of Christ has been planted among Australia's Indigenous people, and God has raised up from among them, godly and faithful leaders. Will you join me in praying that the Lord would raise up many more Indigenous men and women to serve him in Sydney, among the largest Indigenous population in Australia. And will you pray that we will hear and honour this part of our history with equal measures of humility and hope as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples meet at the foot of the Cross of Christ, where the Lord has broken down the dividing wall of hostility so as to make peace, creating 'one new humanity out of the two.'

I have recently written to all rectors and parish councils inviting every church to give prayerful consideration to partnering with our Sydney Anglican Indigenous ministries in personal, prayerful and practical ways, including financial support. A number of churches and individuals across the diocese already support Indigenous ministry in these ways, and I want to invite all parishes to fulfil this debt of love to the Indigenous community in Sydney. We have tried to connect parishes in each region with a specific Indigenous ministry, and I hope that many will respond warmly and generously.

Freedom to Proclaim the Gospel

The Statement of Funding Principles includes a new priority for the next triennium of financially supporting religious freedom advocacy. This is work that has required extensive engagement over recent years, especially by Bishop Micheal Stead as Chair of the former Religious Freedom Reference Group but which up to now has relied on

sources of funding independent of the Synod. Bishop Stead will continue to be funded by the EOS. Additional Synod funding for religious freedom advocacy will allow the diocese to expand our capacity to respond to growing threats to religious freedom. The Statement of Funding Principles simply notes that this will come before you as matter for approval at next year's Synod.

As Australian Christians we treasure our freedom to proclaim the gospel. We endorse the religious pluralism implicit in our Commonwealth Constitution.[20] We have no desire to prevent others from worshipping according to their conscience and we will defend, and frequently have defended, the freedom of other faith communities in Sydney to practise their religion, to build houses of worship and faith-based schools for the education of their children in accordance with the tenets of their faith.

In this context, we affirm the freedom to choose your religion, to choose no religion, to change religion and to invite others to do so. We exercise the freedom to critique other religions, and we do not deny others the freedom to critique us. We are free to say that we do not believe that Buddhism, the faith in which I was raised, can reconcile you to God; we are free to say that Islam and Judaism, the other Abrahamic faiths err when they reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. And they are free to say it is we who have erred.

We delight in the freedom publicly and privately, in our homes, churches, schools, residential villages, on the streets and in written publications to engage these most important conversations about the nature of God and the knowledge of God, the way of salvation and the eternal destiny of every person. People matter to God! The New Testament teaches us and insists that we are to approach such conversations respectfully, humbly, prayerfully. As far as it depends on us, we seek to live at peace with others.

In seeking to maintain the highest level of religious freedom, we are bound by Scripture to reject utterly any form of incitement to hatred or violence against those who do not share our faith or choose to live their lives according to their own convictions.

Rejecting Antisemitism

The horrific antisemitic terrorist attack at Bondi Beach on 14 December 2025 was motivated by the violent ideology of Islamic State and specifically targeted the Jewish community who were publicly celebrating Hanukkah. I take this opportunity again to express our sympathy and solidarity with the Sydney Jewish community who have

[20] The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth. (Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia, s116)

demonstrated strength, resilience and dignity in its wake. Some of these people are members of our churches, Jewish believers in Messiah Yeshua.

I first made a public statement condemning antisemitism on 13 October 2023, four days after the demonstration that commenced in Sydney Square outside our Cathedral and culminated on the steps of the Opera House. Between October 2023 and the attack on Bondi Beach in December 2025, a wave of antisemitism resulted in attacks on synagogues, Jewish schools, Jewish university students and academics, and Jewish politicians, as well as countless acts of intimidation and harassment including by way of public demonstrations that routinely employed inflammatory language that according to ASIO Director-General Mike Burgess, was directly connected to inflamed community tension.

Over that period of rising antisemitism prior to December 2025, I took the unusual step of issuing a further four public statements condemning antisemitic activities. I did so because I believe that the history of Christian antisemitism made it incumbent upon me to proactively repudiate such actions and openly and as proved necessary, repeatedly, express support and solidarity with the Jewish community.

I am grateful for those who have tabled a motion to be considered in this Synod expressing love and solidarity with our Jewish neighbours.

In the last four years, Bishop Stead has been directly involved in making submissions to parliamentary inquires or committees on 34 separate pieces of legislation or proposed reforms affecting religious freedom. Often these submissions have pointed out how legislators, while seeking to achieve one kind of public good, have knowingly or unknowingly constrained the freedom of others to teach and practise the tenets of their faith, including passing them on to their children. For example, proposed legislation intended to prohibit so called ‘hate speech’, could have inhibited the freedom of Christians to teach the exclusivity of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone, or the shape of the holy life including in areas of beginning and end of life, marriage, and sexual morality and identity.

We recognise that lawmakers must balance the freedom to worship, or not, with the necessity to keep people safe. We do not accept that the latter requires restriction of the former.

Archbishop’s Team

This year two long serving members of the Archbishop’s team have retired and/or are moving into new roles. Peter Hayward, along with Julie, has served the Wollongong region as Regional Bishop since 2010. If I reflect briefly on Peter and Julie’s ministry, I am thankful to God for their generous and prayerful care for the ministry families and churches of the Wollongong Region. Peter has an unwavering commitment to the

salvation of the lost including through collaborative, region wide evangelistic efforts like the Jesus is_____ campaigns, and just last year, Hope for the Illawarra. Peter was at the forefront of leading church-planting in the diocese in this century including as planter of Glenmore Park, and then in overseeing greenfields church planting in the growth corridors of Sydney.

As an assistant bishop in the diocese, Peter has served on the Chapter of St Andew's Cathedral and St Michael's Cathedral, he chaired the Diocesan Resources committee including in the vital post-GFC recovery period. He has had a consistent gospel-hearted concern for the least reached in our diocese, including those in marginalised communities and Indigenous communities. He was involved in the Gafcon Bishops Training Institute from its formation, becoming a mentor and model to majority world Bishops across the Anglican Communion. If I speak personally, I am deeply grateful for Peter's generous welcome and help as I took up this role. I have appreciated his wise counsel, his grasp of our corporate history and his personal encouragement. We will have the opportunity to pray for Peter and Julie later in the Synod.

Kara Hartley became Archdeacon for Women's Ministry in 2012. She has been a dedicated, faithful and gracious servant of the Lord and his gospel in recruiting, supporting and equipping women for ministry in a wide range of roles and responsibilities across the diocese. She has been a model of godly leadership – biblically wise and faithful, personally attentive, compassionate and gracious. She has been an enthusiastic, untiring and effective advocate for women in ministry.

In addition to her primary role in supporting women in ministry, Kara's contribution to the governance and ministry organisations of the diocese has been remarkable. She has served on Standing Committee, the Governing Board of Moore College, the Doctrine Commission and MT&D to name a few. In these contexts she has brought theological rigour, gospel-minded discernment and mission clarity. I think Kara's leadership as Deputy Chair of the Domestic Abuse Task Force from 2015, and Co-Chair of its successors, has been transformative in the diocese. To shine the light of the gospel into the darkest places of our corporate life and ministry is incredibly hard, enormously important and an enduring gift to our fellowship. Kara has done this with resolve, confidence in God and his word, and an unwavering commitment to what is good, healthy and just. I'm delighted by Kara's appointment to the Ministry and Mission team at Moore College.

Conclusion

People matter to God.

For many, it is the very last thing that they imagine might be true.

A truck driver in his 50s turned up at one of our churches in Western Sydney. He was struck by the authentic and relational way in which church members led in public prayer, and the way the Bible spoke to real life. He joined a course and found God's grace towards him in Jesus refreshing and compelling. He is now assured in his faith and sings with joy.

A man in his 20s with learning needs came to a church in the Wollongong region wanting to join a bible study. The church worked with Youthworks' Accessibility Ministry Advisor to create a supportive environment. Six months later, the whole group had been blessed, and the young man has requested to be baptised.

A Middle Eastern woman started to attend English classes at a church in the Northern region. The Everyday English team gave her a bible in her heart language. She started to attend the Easy English Bible study and church services, using the Sunflower translation app. One of the ministers suggested she connect with a congregation that speaks her language at a different Anglican Church (in a different region). Last month she was baptised and continues attending English classes at the first church, and services in her own language at the other church. Both churches are praying for her family to come to know Christ too.

A newly married couple with only vague religious background in their youth came to a church in the Northern region feeling dissatisfied with the world but finding it hard to understand the Bible. The church has prayed regularly for many years that the Lord would save their neighbours, so when the couple arrived at church, they received a warm welcome. Over eight months they read through a gospel with the MTS apprentice, as well as attending church and reading their bibles. Along the way, they both confessed faith in Christ. He is now preparing for confirmation, and she is preparing for baptism.

Why am I telling you these stories? Because they are beautiful. Because they are just a glimpse of what God is doing among us. Because I can't think of anything that should occupy our time more than praising God who is building his church by the proclamation of the gospel of his Son. Sins forgiven, souls saved, lives transformed, prayers answered, eternity fulfilled, the day of the Lord brought near.

People matter to God. Heaven rejoices in one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10), and heaven resounds to the sound of ten thousand times ten thousand angels who sing,

‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain! By his blood, he ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and nation.’[21] Worthy, worthy, worthy is the Lamb!

Therefore, says the Lord, ‘Go, making disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age!’[22]

Amen!

Kanishka Raffel
Archbishop of Sydney

[21] Revelation 5:9-12
[22] Matthew 28:19-20