



Presidential Address

First Session of the 51st Synod of the Diocese of Sydney

The Most Reverend Doctor Glenn N Davies

9 October 2017

Members of Synod, brothers and sisters, saints of the Most High, welcome to the first session of the 51st Synod of the Diocese of Sydney.

As we gather together in the presence of God, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet. In his wisdom and love, our heavenly Father gave this estate to the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. Upon this land they met for generations until the coming of British settlers. As we continue to learn to live together on these ancestral lands, we acknowledge and pay our respects to their elders, past and present, and pray that God will unite us all in a knowledge of his Son, in whom all things were created, in heaven and on earth, whether visible or invisible—for all things have been created through him and for him.

Recognising those who have been custodians of this land is not a perfunctory gesture, but an acknowledgement that many have gone before us and many will come after us—we are but passing through. As King David stated some 3,000 years ago:

We are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors; our days on earth are like a shadow, and there is no abiding. (1 Chronicles 29:15)

The first inhabitants of this land were created by God to tend this land as stewards of his common grace. With only general revelation in the created order as their guide, they were allotted this land ‘that they should seek God, in the hope that they might reach out to him and find him’, as the apostle Paul declared to his first century Athenian audience, ‘for in him we

live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:27-28). Yet in God's mercy, with the arrival of white settlement, these first peoples of the land were introduced to the gospel and the message of salvation for every tribe and nation. A number of Christians among these settlers spoke of Jesus, the one who saves, and by God's grace, many Aboriginal people were saved. While we have much to regret in the establishment of a British colony that dispossessed the Aboriginal people of their land, and led to the destruction of Aboriginal culture, we do rejoice in the ministry of people like Richard Johnson and Thomas Hassall, who reached out to the indigenous population of their day with the gospel of God's love. That task continues to be our first priority—a gospel for all people.

The Unchanging Gospel

I am not sure what activities were taking place in the Sydney basin 500 years ago, but in another land and among a foreign people far removed from Australia's shores a young monk was nailing 95 propositions on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. He too was concerned with the gospel of God's grace, which he saw as being distorted and corrupted by the teachings and practices of the Roman Church. While posting ideas for discussion on the noticeboard of the day was not necessarily controversial, Martin Luther's 95 theses nailed to that church door on Saturday, 31 October 1517 began a debate of such moment that it sparked what we now know as the Reformation. While principally confined to the reformation of the church, Luther's call to Christendom to return to the Scriptures for the final authority in matters of faith and doctrine revolutionised society as a whole. Luther's commitment to the authority of Scripture, and to the saving work of Christ as the only ground of our justification before God galvanised many in Europe and across the channel to England and Scotland. It also sadly galvanised the Roman Church to oppose this movement with such ferocity that many lost their lives for the sake of the gospel.

I am grateful for many churches across the diocese who have taken the opportunity this year of celebrating our heritage as a reformed Church by teaching these Reformation truths, encapsulated in the works of Luther, Calvin and Cranmer. I am especially grateful for the

German Consul General's generous offer to promote and provide a special exhibition of the impact of Luther in this 500th anniversary year, in both the Cathedral last month and now currently on display at Moore Theological College. We cannot assume that our own people, let alone the general population of Sydney, fully understand the significance of the Reformation upon the church of God, grounded in the rediscovery of the authority of the Word of God. Every opportunity that we have to shine the light of the gospel into the darkness of our society ought to be welcomed with open arms.

The 2016 census data indicate that Australia is a religiously diverse nation with Christianity remaining the most common religion at 52% of the population, compared with 88% a mere fifty years ago. That more than 30% of the population now declare themselves to have no religion is a sobering statistic. While we may seek to soften this decline in religious adherence with reference to the inclusion of the 'no religion' box as the first option in the question about religion, the fact remains that we are seeing a significant drift away from any willingness to identify in some way with Christianity—for we all know that 52% of the population do not attend church each week! Of this number, only a small proportion gather weekly with God's people for prayer and praise, which ought to be a reliable indicator of a lively faith in the Lord Jesus. Hence the mission field in our own diocese, let alone the nation, is wide open.

Our Mission 2020 values have not changed and our priorities continue to be relevant to the communities in which we live.

1. Reach all the lost of our diocese with the life-giving gospel of Christ.
2. Deepen spiritual maturity among our members.
3. Equip our members to exercise their gifts.
4. Respond to the changing face of our society.

Bishop Peter Lin will provide an update on Mission 2020 tonight. While we can be heartened by progress made in some areas, the challenge to reach out to all the lost remains imperative.

It needs, of course, a spiritual maturity among our members so that they fully grasp the plight of the lost, the reality of hell and the coming judgment of God. It also means that we need to be equipped to exercise our gifts for kingdom growth as we encounter the changing face of our society. Above all it requires a prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit to glorify God and love our neighbour by proclaiming the Lord Jesus Christ, calling upon people to repent and living lives worthy of him. Our vision is to see Christ honoured as Lord and Saviour in every community. That starts with each one of us, in whatever community God has placed us.

I am pleased to hear of many parishes training their members and undertaking evangelistic endeavours in their local area. Many take the opportunity of engaging a Moore College team of students who set aside a week for mission in their annual calendar. Next year, at the initiative of Bishop Peter Hayward, the Wollongong Regional Mission will involve all its parishes in partnership with Evangelism and New Churches, Anglicare and Anglican Schools, with a special emphasis during the Moore College mission week of 18-25 March. In 2019, Bishop Edwards is planning a Northern Regional mission throughout the year, as is Bishop Lin for the Georges River Region. Do pray for these special opportunities for gospel proclamation, as it is only by the Spirit of God that people are converted and become disciples of the Lord Jesus. For it is the gospel that our society needs more than anything else, as Luther knew well. May it be the passion for each one of us to glorify God's name, or in the words of the Reformers: *Soli Deo Gloria* (glory be to God alone).

A Changing World

Brothers and sisters, as the penetration of the gospel diminishes in our society, we find ourselves being moved in a more libertarian direction under the influence of those who want to abandon the mores of the past. Yet at the same time these permissive forces who espouse the virtue of 'tolerance' are seeking to impose restrictions upon those who wish to maintain the values on which our nation has been founded. This has become nowhere more apparent than in the current debate surrounding the postal survey on same-sex marriage. While the

advocates of the 'Yes' campaign have been unrelenting in their attempts to redefine marriage, they have also been virulent in their opposition to those who hold a contrary view. The innocent inclusion of drinking Coopers beer in the Bible Society's promotion of an informed and civilised debate between two politicians, each holding opposing views on same-sex marriage, is a case in point. It resulted in an uncivilised, unwarranted and malicious campaign through social media to boycott Coopers Breweries. Similarly, a Christian doctor who appeared in an advertisement opposing same-sex marriage was subject to a campaign to have her medical registration withdrawn. Witness also the ludicrous attempt to rename Margaret Court Arena, merely because Margaret Court, one of our greatest Australian athletes, went public on her opposition to same-sex marriage.

Earlier this year we produced a booklet *What has God joined together? Jesus' Good Message about Marriage for Australia*. This was distributed to all parishes in hard copy and made available online at the Sydney Anglicans website. I am especially grateful to Bishop Michael Stead for his chairmanship of the committee that composed this document, which I am pleased to say other denominations of the NSW Council of Churches, with our permission, have readily republished as their own document (casting aside the Anglican logo in the process!). The booklet is worthy of careful reading. Yet despite our best efforts I still meet Anglicans who are unaware of its existence. As a diocese we have also become the founding members of the Coalition for Marriage, along with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, Marriage Alliance and the Australian Christian Lobby. Since its formation a further 80 organisations have joined in common cause.

The Standing Committee has also enthusiastically backed our participation in the Coalition for Marriage and has taken the bold step of drawing down one million dollars from the Diocesan Endowment to promote the 'No' case. Brothers and sisters, the stakes are high and the cost is high. Yet the cause is just and it is a consequence of our discipleship to uphold the gift of marriage as God has designed it—a creation ordinance for all people. By so doing, the

wisdom of God is made manifest. As Moses told the people of Israel concerning the statutes of God's law—

Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who when they hear all these statutes will say: 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' (Deuteronomy 4:6)

I therefore make no apology for encouraging all Australians, especially Anglicans, to vote 'No' in this postal survey. I believe that a change in the definition of marriage is unwarranted, not just because it is in opposition to the teaching of Scripture and our Lord himself in Matthew 19, but because I believe marriage, traditionally understood as a union of one man and one woman, is a positive good for our society, where marriage and the procreation of children are bound together as the foundational fabric of our society, notwithstanding the sad reality that not all married couples are able to conceive. Moreover, I consider the consequences of removing gender from the marriage construct will have irreparable consequences for our society, for our freedom of speech, our freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. It is disingenuous to think otherwise, given the evidence to the contrary in Canada, the US and the UK. Moreover, it is a sad reflection upon the state of the Anglican Communion that some provinces have been molded into the patterns of their surrounding culture, such that they now approve the marriage of same-sex couples and purport to pronounce God's blessing upon them. The Scottish Episcopal Church has already decided to take this perilous path, and it is likely that Canada and the US will soon change their canons to follow suit. These developments confirm the importance of GAFCON as a renewal movement within the Anglican Communion, committed to the truth and authority of the Bible.

In the Australian context, the outcome of the postal survey on same-sex marriage is yet to be determined, but the question of how we manage to hold different views in a democratic and free society still remains. As the Prime Minister recently stated, he believes in religious freedom 'even more strongly' than he believes in same-sex marriage. Yet it would not appear that such a sentiment is widely held in our society. The challenges that lie ahead of us as

Christians are not merely the proposed changes to the wording of the Marriage Act (if and when that may occur), but in the freedom to speak of what we believe, as it affects the nurture of our children, the teaching in our churches, and the education of our students in Anglican schools.

Yet proposals to change the Marriage Act are not the only dynamics at work against the Christian ethos. In recent days we have seen the introduction of Bills into the Legislative Council of NSW to allow for late term abortions and to legalise Assisted Suicide (under the euphemistic nomenclature of ‘Assisted Dying’) with minimal protections for the elderly. The latter Bill is still before the Upper House, and we are expecting a further attempt to legislate for abortion following the defeat of the former Bill. These matters were uncontested a generation ago, but are now receiving a significant level of popular support. I have written on your behalf to our parliamentarians expressing my opposition to each of these Bills, as they both demean the value of human life, whether at its beginning or its end. Abortion and euthanasia abandon the truth that all humans are made in God’s image and therefore all life is precious in his sight. Indeed, this fundamental doctrine affects all of our dealings in life. It also motivates our evangelism, that his image-bearers might be forgiven and restored to the glorious inheritance God has promised for his people. Our social awareness and social activism in these arenas is a natural extension of the honour we give to those who bear God’s image, and therefore is an essential part of our mission, in keeping Christ’s commandments.

During this Synod we shall receive two reports of major significance: one on domestic abuse and the other on sexual identity. Sadly, domestic abuse in its physical manifestation of violence or in its psychological manifestation of spiritual or emotional manipulation seems to be on the increase in our society. Even more alarming is the fact that such abuse occurs in Christian families, and even clergy families, which should never be the case as it dishonours both God and his image-bearers. The report of the Domestic Violence Taskforce has done us a great service in developing a Provisional Domestic Abuse Policy and Good Practice Guidelines. The provisional nature of this policy will allow Synod members to provide their feedback, with a

view to the final form of the policy being adopted by the Synod next year. I am very grateful for the hard work that has been undertaken by the Task Force, particularly Canon Sandy Grant (as chair) and Archdeacon Kara Hartley, and trust that Synod members will give careful attention to their proposals, so that our awareness of the pernicious nature of domestic abuse might be enhanced and responded to both with justice and pastoral sensitivity.

The second significant report concerns Sexual Identity. We have been well served by the Social Issues Committee together with the Doctrine Commission and other specialists in this area who have provided us with a theological and pastorally sensitive analysis of gender dysphoria or gender identity disorder. I trust you have read this report, despite the confronting nature of its topic. The image of God is at the heart of who we are as humans, both physically and spiritually, and so the current rise in gender confusion is a topic that demands careful investigation, especially for our schools, and I am grateful for the careful and comprehensive work that has been produced by the Social Issues Committee, especially the contribution of Dr Karin Sowada, Dr Claire Smith and Dr Megan Best, and I trust the synod will approve in principle the Initial Principles of Engagement of the report. There is more work to be done in this area, as in our response to domestic abuse, but the more we can train our clergy to address these issues biblically, theologically and sensitively the better we shall be able to help those who are suffering from the effects of living in a fallen world.

As Christians, we also need to model tolerance and grace in dealing with contentious issues and listening to opposing views, as not all Australians will agree with our beliefs regarding ethical and social issues in our society. Where better to start exercising such tolerance and careful listening than in this chamber, as we discuss matters of controversy, with strongly held views on either side in the debates that lie ahead of us! Likewise in the market place of ideas, including Facebook and other social media outlets, our speech should be full of grace and humility, winsome and wise, persuasive in argument, but courteous in tone. In our Saviour's words, when commissioning his disciples for evangelism: 'Behold I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves' (Matthew 10:16).

Syrian/Iraqi Refugees

Two years ago, in response to the Federal Government's decision to allow an additional 12,000 Syrian/Iraqi refugees to come to Australia, I launched an appeal to assist these refugees fleeing the political crisis engulfing their homeland. I am grateful to Anglicare for agreeing to coordinate our response, and appreciative of other organisations, such as Anglican Deaconess Ministries (ADM), Moore College, Anglican Aid and Youthworks for offering assistance. However, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to you, the diocesan family, for donating more than \$746,000 to this appeal. This is an extraordinary level of commitment, given the many calls upon your resources. To this amount Anglicare has provided an additional amount of \$200,000 from their own funds, for which I am also very grateful, so that the total expenditure by the time the program concludes in June 2018 is expected to be just short of one million dollars.

Between July 2015 and June 2016 there were approximately 4,000 humanitarian visa entrants and 12,000 between July 2016 and June 2017. Of these, the Fairfield and Liverpool areas have received significantly high numbers, while others have settled into Bankstown, Auburn, Blacktown, Wollongong, Mount DrUITT, Ryde, Merrylands and Parramatta. Although originally the Government predicted that the majority would be unlinked and coming on refugee visas, the reality is that 80-90% are linked and proposed mainly by family members.

Anglicare has been working closely with government agencies, diocesan organisations and local churches in the settlement of these refugees. Although the delay of eight months in the arrival of these refugees created certain frustrations in the community, Anglicare sought to manage these unfulfilled expectations as well as possible. However, once significant numbers of these refugees arrived in May 2016, Anglicare worked with Moore College and ADM on different aspects of the program, including conducting training and assessing micro grants from ADM for parishes to aid their own response.

Mobile pantries have been well received in the Bankstown and Liverpool areas, as have trauma counselling, ESL classes, complex settlement case work by Arabic speaking staff members,

Early Learning Through Play (for children), distribution of Bibles in Arabic provided by the Bible Society, and material aid across the suburbs.

Some of these refugees have been Christians, others have not. Yet our response has been equally as generous to all refugees. When I launched the appeal two years ago I received criticism for including Muslims among those whom we would assist; I also received criticism from those who thought we should only be reaching out to non-Christian refugees. I am glad to say that Anglicare has followed the advice of the apostle Paul: 'as we have opportunity, we are to do good to all people, especially the household of faith' (Galatians 6:10).

I encourage you to continue to welcome refugees and people seeking asylum into our communities and to seek ways to reach out in cross-cultural ministries and show God's love both in practical help and through sharing the gospel.

Bishopscourt

In the final Synod of my predecessor, the decision was made to sell Bishopscourt at Darling Point. This was a topic of divided loyalties and differing views, strongly held, though the final outcome in both houses was a significant vote in favour of the sale of the residence, which had been held in trust for the Endowment of the See for over 100 years. After two years of marketing, an offer was finally accepted for the sale which took place in December 2015. Since early 2016 my wife and I have been living in Haberfield in rented accommodation, while the Endowment of the See Committee has been vigorously seeking a new residence for the Archbishop of Sydney. This has been a protracted exercise as few houses are suitable to the kind of living and hospitality that is appropriate to the office of Archbishop, as well as being relatively close to the city. I am therefore pleased to announce that after examining numerous possibilities, the Endowment of the See Committee has come to an arrangement with the parish of St Barnabas' Broadway to surrender their interest in part of their land in Forest Lodge, for the purposes of building both a residence and a function centre for the Archbishop. The land in question was originally held in trust for the Endowment of the See and in 1974 was transferred to the parish, when the NSW Government was planning to resume land for a road

corridor where St Barnabas' Church stood. Although these plans never eventuated with a change in government in 1976, the land remained in trust for the purposes of the parish until now. Last month the Standing Committee passed an ordinance so that the land could once again be held in trust for the purposes of the Endowment of the See. A payment of \$3.25 million dollars will be paid to the parish, from part of the proceeds of the sale of Bishops court, earmarked for the acquisition of a new Bishops court.

This has been a very pleasing outcome for the diocese, as we are now able to construct a purpose-built residence for the Archbishop, close to the city, with suitable accommodation for guests and a function centre for larger gatherings. It is also anticipated that with a second storey on the function centre a further meeting room might be constructed for the parish's ongoing ministry to university students as well as for other diocesan needs. The parish of Broadway has long held the vision of constructing such a centre for their university ministry, and I am very grateful to the parish council and the congregation for their goodwill and generosity in supporting the return of this land for the benefit of the diocese, as well as the Endowment of the See. We anticipate that completion of architectural plans, development approvals and building construction will take up to two years, well in time for the next Archbishop to take up residence in the new Bishops court.

Anglican Church Property Trust

The work of the Property Trust has been essential in the outcome of this variation of trusts. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Anglican Church Property Trust Act 1917, which governs all parish property in the diocese, and some non-parochial church property. However, in my experience the role of the Property Trust is not well understood. First, it is not widely understood that parishes do not own their property; rather, it is held in trust for the purposes of the parish, it is not *owned* by the parish. This structure has allowed us the great benefit of being able to vary trusts, as the occasion arises when it is not expedient to maintain the trusts with their original intention. It also enables the diocese to have one insurance policy for all parish property, rather than each parish having to negotiate its own insurance premium, let

alone the wide variation in costs that would ensue across heritage-listed properties and relatively new buildings. The Parish Cost Recovery system enables the Property Trust to spread the load of insurance evenly across the parishes, as a proportion of their net receipts. The Trust also enables prudent, centralised investment of funds held on behalf of parishes, which is managed by a competent third party, that is currently exceeding its respective benchmarks, all for the benefit of the parishes whose funds are invested.

Thus in many ways the Property Trust is a reflection of our existence as an episcopally led and synodically governed diocese, rather than a mere fellowship of independent churches. While the Property Trust delegates certain responsibilities to wardens, any significant alterations or extensions to the buildings in the parish, or leases or licences of property producing income over a certain amount, require the authorisation of the Property Trust. This centralisation of property oversight, while at times frustrating for wardens, has proved its worth when parishes lack the expertise to undertake major building projects. However, Synod should be aware of the frustration that the Property Trust experiences when parishes do not comply with guidelines. For example, the widespread non-compliance concerning State Government community grants for parishes has incurred reputational damage for the diocese as a whole, which almost led to the diocese being excluded from any future State Government grants.

While it is true that the Property Trust has been traditionally, necessarily conservative in exercising its fiduciary responsibilities under the 1917 Act in relation to risk management, it is also mindful of its role as a servant of the parishes rather than a master, and in recent days it has consciously sought to be more nimble and creative in its responses to parish enquiries. The Property Trust is well served by its Synod-elected trustees, whose range of skills and experience, including three clergy with direct knowledge of parish life, and whose generous use of their time provide the kind of leadership that is needed for the complex responsibilities that pertain to their office. There is always room for improvement, but the level of expertise and experience among the trustees and the Property Trust's executive team in the SDS is a

significant resource for our parishes as they exercise their stewardship of the property held in trust for their ministry and the advancement of the gospel.

Development of Clergy

The maintenance of church properties is an important, even if time-consuming activity for parish councils. However, the maintenance of our personnel is even more important. A lot of time, money and effort goes into the training of our clergy. We require four years of theological education at Moore College for our rectors, so that they may be able teachers of God's word 'for the equipment of the saints for the work of ministry' (Ephesians 4:12; cf. Priority 3 of Mission 2020). Over the past year through some generous benefactors, Bishop Ivan Lee has been working with a consultant and coordinating a review of the overall demands of parish life for clergy and how the bishops can assist them to be more effective ministers of the gospel. This has involved extensive feedback through Mission Area meetings.

Full time paid ministry is demanding—spiritually, intellectually and emotionally. Our clergy and lay ministers need to be robust and resilient for the demands of pastoral care and leadership amid the stresses and strains of contemporary ministry. We often forget that clergy spouses, and especially wives, also bear the brunt of the stresses associated with full-time paid ministry. Last year in association with Anglicare we developed the Clergy Assistance Program, which has proved highly successful, both for clergy and their spouses, in addressing issues before they develop into intractable problems. This year through SDS we have added the Clergy Contact Person to offer assistance to clergy and their spouses, who are finding it hard to manage the pressures of parish ministry. Being made aware of the early signs of stress is an important part of helping our clergy, and while we can all play a part in this, wardens and parish councillors would do well to watch out for early signs of stress and fatigue in their clergy. One of the motions before us will encourage parishes to commit to an amount for professional development for ministers in their budgets. Furthermore, Ministry Training and Development has established a new Lifelong Ministry Development program to start in 2018, which will also address matters of resilience and maintaining the balance of ministry, family and personal

well-being. Each of these initiatives is directed at assisting our clergy to be better servants of the Lord Jesus, and if I may address the lay synod representatives, I suggest you consider how your parish might assist your clergy to be the faithful and effective pastors that we all desire. Likewise, if I may address the clergy, I suggest that you be open, and not defensive, in listening to and receiving godly feedback.

General Synod Legislation

Those who are well accustomed to Synod will notice a large amount of legislation coming before us this session. Part of the reason for this is that General Synod met in Queensland last month, where a raft of legislation, known as Canons, were passed. Many of these relate to the issues that have been raised by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. While the Anglican Church may share different views on a number of issues, there is fundamental agreement concerning the importance of protecting children from abuse. Regrettably, our Church has failed children and other vulnerable persons in the past, through little screening of lay ministers and clergy, poor understanding of the effects of abuse, and inadequate training in knowing how to deal with both survivors and perpetrators of abuse. Although legislation is never the panacea for the evil of child sexual abuse, it is an important aspect of the Church's response, as it can make provision for sanctions against those who mishandle allegations regarding such abuse. The canons before us will each need to be adopted by ordinance before they can come into force in the diocese. A number of representatives from our diocese have been involved in the composition of these canons and I am especially grateful to Mr Garth Blake SC, whose championing the cause of ensuring our churches are places of safety for all people, particularly children, has been a driving force in our national Church for many years. I trust the Synod will carefully consider each of these adopting ordinances with a view to passing them to demonstrate to our society that we consider the safety of children in our midst to be of paramount concern.

Of course, for some of you this will be your first Synod, but I trust not your last! The business of Synod you may find confusing at times, as we follow procedures which in some ways

resemble the procedures of parliament, with movers and seconders for motions, set time limits on the length of speeches, and a certain formality in our mode of addressing the chamber which is different from everyday discourse. You will get the most out of Synod if you understand the Business Rules, a copy of which you will find in your papers. It is not the kind of document you would read for entertainment—more likely insomnia—but it is a handy reference guide for enabling the business of Synod to proceed as smoothly as possible. My Chancellor sits beside me in case I need his advice on any matter of principle or point of order that might arise in the course of our meeting. You have already had a taste of formal motions earlier this afternoon, but don't worry, other motions will be contested and arguments put forth one way or the other. My advice to you all is to weigh the arguments, discern the impact of the motion, and vote in accordance with your conscience, without fear or favour. Most votes are determined on the voices, while at other times we might vote by houses or even vote by secret ballot, if the Synod so decides. The passing of ordinances are framed differently from other motions, as they function like acts of parliament, and are therefore binding legislation upon us as a diocese, as opposed to resolutions which express the opinion of the Synod at a particular point in time. When the Synod wishes to amend the text of an ordinance, we then move into a committee of the whole Synod, where I ask the chair of committees to facilitate any amendments that the Synod wishes to make. Different rules exist for speaking and moving motions in committee. After the committee has done its job, it reports back to the Synod so that the ordinance can be considered in its amended form.

There are various personnel who assist me in my presiding over the Synod. I have mentioned the Chancellor, my legal advisor, and to his left are the Chair and Deputy Chair of Committees, and on my right sit the Registrar and Deputy Registrar, who tend to keep me in order—or try to. Another important person is our Diocesan Secretary, who as Secretary of the Synod is responsible, along with his faithful staff from the Sydney Diocesan Secretariat (known simply as SDS) for managing the affairs of Synod. From the first mailing you received to the last business paper on Tuesday of next week, we shall have been served by Robert Wicks and his team, and for which we should be all extremely grateful. Without his guiding hand, we would

be much the poorer. However, I expect this will be Rob's last Synod session as Diocesan Secretary. For it is my great pleasure to announce that the Board of SDS has appointed Rob as the new Chief Executive Officer of SDS. This is a great honour and an appointment with which I heartily concur. He has been Acting CEO since the departure of Mark Payne late last year, and Rob has demonstrated the ability and skills necessary for taking up this position on a permanent basis. However, for this session of Synod, Rob will be both CEO and Diocesan Secretary, but I have told him he only gets one vote!

Final Remarks

Times may change, new questions may be formulated, new criticisms may be advanced, and fresh challenges will be encountered by the church in every generation, but by God's grace the gospel will continue to be proclaimed. Our time in the second decade of the twenty-first century is no different, notwithstanding the significant shifts in community values and expectations that have evolved since the turn of the millennium, because we have an eternal gospel, as Martin Luther had. We too must stand firm for the sake of the gospel and the truth of God's word, for we have a Sovereign Lord, who commands the seas and the waves, who will raise up every valley and lay low every mountain.

When our Lord returns, once again

the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places made plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Isaiah 40:3-5)

That is our inheritance and our future—let us not lose heart, but trust in the promises of God and the return of Christ our King. May that heavenly vision be before us as we attend to the business of Synod, so that what we do in this chamber may be pleasing in God's sight and bring glory to his name.

