

Proclaiming Christ and Acts of Kindness¹

The question. What is the place of Anglicare in the Diocesan Mission?

In 2002 the Archbishop and Bishops of the Diocese of Sydney issued a clear call to the diocese for a renewed mission in proclaiming Christ. In our statement we declared that we had committed ourselves

in unity of heart and spirit to give example, energy and leadership to this Mission [...] and together they invite the whole Anglican community in Sydney (with all other believers) to join them by taking the initiative to see that Christ is proclaimed to all people.

Since then the Diocesan Mission has been conducted in a thousand places and a thousand way throughout greater Sydney, in suburbs, inner city and semi rural areas, in small groups and large gatherings, in simple bible studies and services of elaborate rich ceremonial, in heritage churches, modern auditoriums, in halls, schools, universities, community centres, workplaces and private homes. A new energy and focus is evident in the diocese.

It is too seldom noticed that the focus of the Mission is to glorify God. How is God to be glorified? By one central activity, proclaiming Christ

To glorify God by proclaiming our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ. . .²

And the fundamental aim of this mission of proclaiming Christ is

To multiply Bible-based Christian fellowships, congregations and churches which equip and nurture their members and expand themselves, both in the Diocese and “in all the world”.

This leads to an obvious question. What about other activities which the Christian community does but which are not in an obvious sense proclaiming Christ? In particular what about the kind of things that Anglicare typically does?

Of course a number of our ministries do proclaim Christ. But others do good for people in other ways. Much of our welfare, aged care and so for the are not so much proclaiming Christ as the doing of acts of mercy and kindness, what the New Testament calls “good works”. What about them?

These kind of questions are not new. Christians, and especially Evangelicals, have often had to reflect on the range of different responsibilities they have, and especially on the question of the relation evangelism and other good works.

This question has a special urgency for Anglicare at this time for two reasons. Firstly the diocesan mission is encouraging us to ask searching questions of all our institutions and activities. Secondly Anglicare (Diocese of Sydney) is facing important and urgent issues of its identity and structure arising from the unsustainable cost structure of its present activities.

So it is important to understand how, and in what way, Anglicare’s possible activities fit the mission.

¹ Based on an address given to the Sydney Anglicare Festival 6 May 2005 by Bishop Robert Forsyth.

² The full statement of the Diocesan Mission is “To glorify God by proclaiming our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit, so that everyone will hear his call to repent, trust and serve Christ in love, and be established in the fellowship of his disciples while they await his return.”

There is another prior question. What is the place of the diocesan mission itself?

Is the diocesan mission meant to be the only game in town, or is it only the main game in town?

If it is meant to be the only game then everything we do here in the diocesan community would have its *raison d'être* in the diocesan mission. And all our activities and institutions that did not contribute (either immediately or in the long run) to proclaiming Christ and building Bible based churches should be abandoned.

On the other hand, if the mission is to be the main, but not the only, game in town then there will room for other activities and institutions that have other Christian rationale than that of contributing to proclaiming Christ and building bible based churches, as long as they were consistent with, and do not undermine, the main focus of proclamation.

As we will see, the intention is that the diocesan mission is to be the focus, but not the total life of the diocese. It is the main game, not everything.

Come to think of it, what is the diocese?

You will notice I have used the language of the 'diocesan community.' One of the subsidiary questions underlying any discussion of the diocesan mission is, come to think of it, what is the diocese? What is it that has the mission?

We can understand the diocese in two very different ways. We can mean the legal and financial superstructure of St Andrew's house, the standing committee and so forth, so often referred to as 'them'. Or we could mean the Anglican Community in Sydney, the people who regard the Archbishop of Sydney as their senior pastor, which is not 'them' but 'us'.

Although the institutions and structures have an important place to play in a mission, in this context we are not defining it in institutional or infrastructure terms but rather by community terms. And so the Diocese is really what we have called in the Archbishop's Mission statement 'the whole Anglican community in Sydney'. It is us and our mission.

So the question becomes initially what is the place of good works and acts of kindness and mercy in the Christian life?

Acts of kindness and goodness at the heart of the Christian life.

The answer to that question not hard, if then we start at the right place. The heart of the Christian life.

The Christian life is lived by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But with and from that faith there must always be a life of goodness and kindness, or to use the Biblical phrase "good works". Three texts will suffice.

Jesus words to his disciples in Matthew 5

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

The letter to the Ephesians speaks of the believer resurrected with Christ from being dead in sins, not because of, but for, good works.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

And Titus 2.11 the community God is building has a particular character, zeal for good works.

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, ¹² training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

And then in Titus 3.8 devotion to good works is the purpose of the instruction

I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone.

By terms such as good works or good deeds the New Testament is referring to acts of mercy and kindness, as well as lives of godliness.³ They are presented to us as the essential result and fruit of the proclaiming of Christ.

So to ask whether these good works need to be justified in terms of the diocesan mission would be to fail to understand the Christian life. It would be like asking whether, for example patience, or love, or faithfulness in marriage are justified by the diocesan mission. It is a non question.

Such good deeds are inevitable feature of the Christian life. The Christian life, and thus the life of the diocese, cannot be reduced to proclaiming Christ only. No one ever intended that it should be.

Now it is true that good works can and do contribute to the proclaiming of Christ. A number of times in the New testament that is the very reason given for them. Take 1 Peter 2.12

¹² Conduct yourselves honourably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

But they cannot be reduced to evangelism aids or be justified solely on their contribution to proclaiming Christ.

³ To quote John Dickson in his forthcoming *Promoting the Gospel* (Blue Bottle Books 2005?) The Greek phrase *kala erga* ('good deeds') appears in numerous New Testament texts where it always refers to *acts of goodness/kindness*: Matthew 5:16; 1 Timothy 5:25; 1 Timothy 6:18; Titus 2:7; 2:14; 3:8; 3:14; Hebrews 10:24; 1 Peter 2:12. The grammatically singular expression 'good deed' (*kalon ergon*) is used in three slightly different ways in the New Testament: (1) of a single act of kindness/goodness (Mark 14:6); (2) of an act of healing (John 10:33), which is probably to be thought of simply as another type of 'act of kindness/goodness'; (3) of the 'noble task' of church eldership (1 Timothy 3:1)—here the word *ergon* carries its other meaning, 'office/task'. We should probably add to this discussion the Greek phrase *agatha erga* ('good deeds') which is synonymous with *kala erga* ('good deeds')—*agathon* is just another Greek word for 'good'. This expression too always refers to *acts of goodness/kindness*: Acts 9:36; Romans 2:7; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Timothy 2:10; 5:10; Titus 2:7; 3:8; Hebrews 10:24; James 3:13; 1 Peter 2:12. In none of these instances is there even a hint that 'good deeds' includes speaking to others about Christ, as valuable as that is.

Good works in the Diocesan Mission statement

The importance of acts of good deeds in the Christian life is there in the very diocesan mission statement. Remember it is “To glorify God by proclaiming our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit, so that [...]” So that, what? What outcome are we looking for?

[...] so that everyone will hear his call to repent, trust and serve Christ in love, and be established in the fellowship of his disciples while they await his return.

Serving Christ in love will involve serving others in love in good deeds.

The process of refining the mission statement in the Mission Task force in 2002 involved an important discussion on this very issue. “Shouldn’t we have a twofold focus for our mission, and not just one” a member asked, “that of proclaiming Christ and of doing good also?” In the discussion that followed it was decided that no, we will have a mission with the single focus of proclaiming Christ. But this was not to remove the God given obligation to be a people “zealous for good works”. The necessity of acts of mercy and good deed was not to be denied by the mission statement, even if it did focus so clearly on proclaiming Christ. In fact it was intended that the success of the mission will indeed lead to more such activities.

So we see that proclaiming Christ is not and was never intended to be the only activity of the Christians or churches of the diocese of Sydney. There is no need to be anxious if we decide to give some of our obligation to good deeds an institutional form in such an organization, as for example Anglicare.

The need for a wider theological approach

In one sense this is enough. But our answer however needs a more theological dimension. Not in moving away from the texts of Scripture but seeing the issue in the wider sweep of Scriptural and Christian truth. This is needed for two reasons. It is very important for us here in the Diocese of Sydney to be clear what exactly are we saying about the place of good works in relation to gospel proclamation. The proper standing and support of Anglicare (as it reinvented) depends on such clarity.

And theological clarity is especially important in the face of an unfortunate tendency of some in the wider scene to over theologise the place of good works, often in reaction to perceived under emphasis on them. So we are told that ‘evangelism and social concern were inseparable in the mind of Jesus’ or that because the Gospel is ‘good news to the poor’, then what ever is good for them is a kind of evangelism; or that, because we are told to seek God’s kingdom and *his righteousness*, then working for justice is ‘kingdom’ work, or because Jesus healed people and did good in his miracles, so our own acts of kindness and help are also signs of he kingdom of God. However, rather than helping, such overstatements actually give good works a bad name in the Biblically literate and evangelistically concerned Diocese of Sydney. A tendency to exalt such social concern to a point where it is almost equal in importance to proclaiming Christ will always cause reaction and disengagement among us.

The theological centrality of proclaiming Christ.

The reason we focused our diocesan Mission so centrally on proclaiming Christ was not a simple matter of reading off bible texts. To be frank, there are many more New Testament commands for Christians to engage in good works than there are for them to engage in evangelism. But, that in itself doesn't decide the issue. Understanding the deep sweep of Scripture and its message is decisive.

Here I must be brief. But you can see how the issue of the relation between doing acts of mercy and proclaiming Christ involves the wider questions of what is God like, what is he doing in the world, what is really important for humanity in relation to God and his purposes. The issue needs to be seen therefore in that big picture of the announcement of God's coming reign through Jesus Christ, who was crucified for us humans, is now raised from the dead, the first fruits of a new creation, who will come in glory to judge the secrets of men's hearts and in whom there is forgiveness of sins. These matters of the coming judgement and triumph of Christ, must dominate our understanding of the church's ministry and mission.

Let me make an important clarification. The priority of proclaiming Christ does not arise because the Christian faith is concerned only about heaven and not earth, or individual souls and not the wider creation. Our hope after all, is the resurrection of the dead, not simply going to heaven when you die. Our commonwealth may be in heaven, (Phil 3.20) but we wait, not to go to there, but as Paul writes, but from there 'a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.' We are waiting in other words, ultimately for the triumph of Jesus power over all aspects of creation.

The crucial issue is not physical vs. immaterial at all. It is about what is now and what is then. It is all about timing.

Recently I came across this very fine statement of the big picture⁴

God has unveiled, in Jesus Christ, his glorious plan for the rescue of the whole created order from all that defaces, corrupts and destroys it. The excitement and drama of that initial achievement and that final purpose pervade the whole New Testament, and set the context for understanding why God has called out a people by the gospel, and how that people is to understand its identity and order its life.

We are that people called out by the gospel, and understand our identity and order our life in the context of living between the 'initial achievement' (the death and resurrection of Christ) and the 'final purpose' of his coming in glory.

The reason why proclaiming Christ is a priority for us is because at this time a person comes to share in "God's glorious plan" only by hearing the word of Christ and believing in him. By faith a person becomes an inheritor of the kingdom of God, and faith comes through the message of the kingdom of God. It is not yet experienced in its full reality. "In hope we are saved." (Rom 8.24) That is why the Christian community is committed to sharing the word of Christ with their fellows,

⁴ The opening words of the Windsor Report, on the troubles in our Anglican Communion, released 2004 (which like Beethoven's 5th Symphony starts brilliantly whatever you think of its latter movements.)

restating in their own words the message of Jesus “The kingdom of heaven is near, repent and believe the announcement”

This is not just a matter of the priority of proclamation. It is also a matter of the real needs of our fellow Australians. Through the lens of this gospel, see that unemployment not as big a problem as unbelief, nor is homelessness as the danger of hell. The theological case for the centrality of evangelism can be given in one simple sentence of Jesus: ‘What does it profit someone to gain the whole world but forfeit their life?’ (Mark 8.36)

But what of Jesus own good works as a model for us?

But, you may object, didn’t Jesus himself do much more than just proclaim in words the kingdom of God? Didn’t do works of mercy?

Indeed Peter’s summary of the ministry of Jesus, when speaking to Cornelius, is in just such terms.

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; [...] he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (Acts 10.38)

So, it might be argued, here is the theological basis for the place of good works in any church’s mission. Indeed, it can be said, doesn’t this show that doing good has an equal place to proclaiming Christ? Jesus doing good was as important as his proclamation and there, it is said, social action or works of kindness and evangelism are two arms of the Christian life.

I don’t think you can go in a straight line from Jesus’ acts of healing, deliverance and so forth to our good works in providing for the sick, feeding the hungry and so on.⁵

Jesus miracles are part and parcel of his proclaiming the kingdom of God. He did not ‘speak’ only in words. In these acts of power, in some sense the reign of God is already there. God is already reigning in his divine power in casting out demons or healing the sick. To his critics Jesus declares

But if it is by the finger of God [Matthew has ‘by the Spirit of God’] that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. Luke 12 .20

So Jesus tells his disciples to go ahead of him, and,

cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you. Luke 10.9

But, someone might say, isn’t this exactly what our acts of kindness and doing of mercy are, signs of the presence of the reign of God here and now among us?

I don’t think so. And for this reason. Jesus’ mighty works are different from our good works in that they are done by the explicit supernatural or spiritual power of God. This is what is so striking about them. Jesus works show an authority over the evil spirits, the waves of the sea, illness and even death which in the gospel

⁵ In fact, at least from the point of view of John’s gospel, Jesus miracles are always a sign of something else than meeting the immediate physical needs of the people. ‘Do not labour for the food that perishes,’ Jesus says to those who have been fed with the bread in the wilderness, ‘but for the food that endures for eternal life which the Son of Man will give you’. (John 6.27) I need to stress, however, that contrast here is not between material and spiritual, rather it is between what is immediate and what is truly lasting in the reign of God.

accounts constantly astounds people. His works may be deeds of kindness, but they are also deeds of power (Mark 6.2). This is what qualifies them to be signs of God's reign breaking in.

Jesus did not open a clinic or a hospital, nor did he advocate welfare reform or economic reform, as good as all these may have been. He showed such authority and power that it had the unmistakable mark of the direct hand of God, or at least, as some of his opponents surmised, the prince of demons. (Mark 3.22)

Our human and non miraculous good works, be they personal acts of kindness to our running of welfare programs, schools or hospitals, may well be expressions of Christian compassion and goodness, but they are not signs of the in breaking power of God's rule as we see in Jesus.

Our good works not signs of the kingdom, but signs of the character of the God who will be king

This is not to say there is no link between Jesus works and ours. His mighty works show something of the character of the God whose kingdom they announce. He is the God who wills good for humankind and his creation. That is why such supernatural (if I can use that fraught word) works are not just signs of God's power, "believe it or not", but are signs of God's power in doing good. Our unsupernatural works may not be quite signs of the coming kingdom, but they are still signs of the character of the God who will be king and of his concern for all aspects of human and created life.

And in this way, Christians who follow the Lord Jesus Christ will be like their heavenly Father and will seek the good of all. He makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matt 5.45) This is all we need to justify acts of mercy and kindness. We are imitating God. You can't get more theological than that.

Let me add that this kind of discussion about 'proclaiming Christ' vs. 'good works', as important as it is, has the potential to separate that which in real life goes together. The mature Christian does not operate with two distinct categories when dealing with others in order to switch between them, this time good works, that time proclaiming Christ. Doing good for others will so often involve applying the insights of the gospel to a situation. Proclaiming Christ will so often involve the involvement in acts of kindness.⁶

Anglicare and the mission at last!

My argument so far does not mean we need an Anglicare. We don't need Youthworks to have a ministry among young people or Evangelism Ministries to proclaim Christ. We don't need an Anglicare to be a people "full of good works". We must never reduce any of our ministries to the institutions given to express and enhance what the people of God are to do anyway. Anglicare is not the institution to which we outsource our good works and acts of kindness with government funding!

⁶ I am indebted to Peter Fischer Anglicare General Manager Welfare for pointing this out to me.

Anglicare is a particular institutional manifestation of the Anglican community in Sydney so pooling its resources and building expertise better to do its acts of mercy and kindness in the society. The very corporate nature of Anglicare enables us to achieve what in more private and church contexts alone we can't do.

At last I return to my opening question. What is the place of Anglicare in the Diocesan Mission? Anglicare may well contribute to proclaiming Christ. But that is not its justification for existence. The Christian life consists of doing acts of kindness that need no justification by any evangelistic purpose of diocesan Mission, as important and significant they might be. The Anglican Christian Community in wider Sydney has rightly embraced the call of its archbishop and bishops to a renewed diocesan mission of proclaiming Christ. But it doesn't have to restrict every one of its institutions to that priority. There is always the place for acts of kindness.

Finally, two crucial areas where Anglicare needs to be impacted by the Mission

Does the Mission have any impact on Anglicare?

Anglicare doesn't have to defend itself in view of the Mission. However, because of the Mission, any organisation established will be looking sideways as it were continually at the focus of the diocese, even while it is performing an activity which is important and justified in its own right but which is not that focus. There are two areas of impact.

Firstly, because the Mission is putting our attention to the establishment and building up of churches and congregations, Anglicare is presented with a significant challenge about whether it is going to adequately connect with and assist those churches and congregations in their acts of kindness and mercy. The 1990s were a high point in the corporatisation both of Anglicare and of many other such 'charitable' organisations in Australia. Now that Anglicare is facing a rethink, one of the most important areas for discussion is whether a corporate model is adequate for the actual Christian community in Sydney. There is a disconnect between Anglicare and 'the parishes' which must be overcome.

The shape of the Mission will help determine, I think, the shape of Anglicare's ability to help the churches, if not necessarily in proclaiming Christ, but certainly in obeying Christ in lives devoted to good works. To this extent, Anglicare does have an important and continuing role.

Secondly the mission presents Anglicare with the possibility of direct involvement in evangelism and church planting where appropriate. One of the most difficult of the four policy areas to apply is the second half of Policy 2,

[...] and also to take further initiatives to create fellowships by penetrating structures of society beyond the reach of the parish church with the gospel'

Anglicare's work with and on behalf of the churches of the diocese may well bring it into touch with areas of society way beyond 'the reach of the parish church'. Here the gospel also must be heard and fellowships created. Anglicare must not let its main task of performing acts of kindness prevent it from seeking to fulfil this aspect of policy 2.

It goes without saying that Anglicare would not compromise any undertakings from any sponsors or donors in this process and that cooperation with other agencies and churches in the diocese would be sought.

The mission of Anglicare in this model would become is to be summarised: 'good works all the time and evangelism and church building whenever we can'.

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