

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT
FOR THE 2017 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Reflection

A community is not something created through the will of a group of individuals but rather a context in which humanity lives and operates. It therefore includes all people, both the likeable and unlikable, the good and the bad, the saint and the sinner. We belong to a community because we live in it rather than because we subscribe to a set of ideals or beliefs about it. Community can be likened to citizenship (or possibly family) – which is a state of being connected to each other politically, culturally and situationally, rather than belonging to a particular group of like-minded individuals.

While the institutional church articulates the desire for community, it nevertheless operates more often as a religious club by emphasising membership through the holding of particular beliefs and the practice of particular behaviours. So, on the one hand, it seeks to include people (and sometimes says it is open to all), but on the other hand it still seeks to exclude people who do not believe or do the right things! Of course, the narrower the definition of membership the more exclusive it becomes.

The church therefore fails to connect with many people, intentionally excludes others, and often lacks the diversity and openness expected of a healthy organisation. These are probably some of the reasons why less than 8% of Sydney's population now have any regular church involvement.

On the other hand, we can also imagine a mystical church (as against the institutional one) that is principally the inclusion of God's people in all their diversity and brokenness and without the strictures placed by denomination, class and creed. Indeed, the mystical church can extend down through history (over time) and across cultures (or space). It is for this reason that we tend to talk about the church in terms of being a 'communion' and emphasise the relational connectedness between peoples, which better satisfies the idea of 'covenant' rather than a club based on rules of belief and praxis.

The New Testament describes the gathering of Christ's followers in terms of 'koinonia', a Greek word meaning 'communion by intimate participation'. It emphasises the aspects of sharing and fellowship in communion with one another. It may well look like an unobtainable ideal, but nevertheless it is the goal of Christian communion. But there is clearly a problem; for the Bible talks in terms of unity, yet how do we account for the myriads of divisions, schisms and failings of a body that is meant to be a sign of God's presence in the world?

Responses to this vary from an apathetic shrug of the shoulders suggesting that 'it is the way of the world, nothing can be done, so we should just all keep doing our own thing', to a more belligerent position that suggests 'of course we should be unified and as my church is right then everyone else should join us!' A solution to this dilemma is to appreciate the distinction between the present state and the future hope; which is to say that the church lives and operates in the flawed present world and reflects this, but it is called to become God's kingdom in the future.

Schism, failure and sin may occur in the institutional church, yet we have no excuse but to recognise this, change our ways, and seek God's transforming power to become more a reflection of the

mystical communion. To fail to acknowledge this or to seek to excuse bad behaviour is to choose to remain in sin and brokenness, and the transforming power of God is therefore diminished, both in the life of the individual as well as in the wider world.

It is also important to recognise that the church is a very diverse organisation, and an aspect of this diversity is to recognise that God provides a huge range of gifts for the benefit of its corporate life. An implication of this is that the church needs this diversity of gifts (and people) to remain healthy, and that the gifts given it are from God for the corporate good, not only the benefit of the individual.

The church, as *koinonia*, demonstrates the intimacy of relationships in communion; which in turn reflects the communal nature of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Just as the Trinity is a set of relationships so is the church, especially in its gathering together and the Eucharist as the sign of this mystical communion.

Through the Eucharist, God and his people meet and have fellowship. An aspect of this fellowship is the nurture of God's people through word and sacrament, by which they are empowered to carry out God's mission in the world. It is also here that the people of God are unified as followers of Christ (both with those present as well as the wider mystical communion down through time and across the world), and the Holy Spirit provides the church with gifts and empowerment for ministry.

The church therefore does not exist for its own sake, but rather for others. Its structures, ways of operation and goals should therefore be a reflection of this principle. It is also in this way that the church takes on a sacramental role of being a means of God's grace (or unconditional love) to the world. In theological terms, this is called 'incarnation' or the embodiment of God in the world.

Executive Committee

The role of the Executive Committee is 'to promote the objects of Anglicans Together, and control and manage its activities in accordance with the Constitution'. Four meetings of the Executive Committee were held in the past year. Its membership was as follows:

President:	The Rev'd Andrew Sempell
Vice President:	Susan Hooke
Secretary:	Carolyn Lawes
Treasurer:	Wesley Fairhall
Members Elected:	Lyn Bannerman (Synod Coord) Caroline Bowyer The Rev'd Philip Bradford (Membership Sec)
Member Co-opted:	Moya Holle (Communications Coord)

I thank the members of the Committee for their ongoing commitment to the ministry of Anglicans Together over this past year.

2017 Annual Dinner

A very successful Annual Dinner was held at Cello's Restaurant in the Castlereagh Hotel. The speaker, The Very Reverend Professor Martyn Percy, Dean of Christ Church Oxford, attracted a good deal of interest and tickets were sold out two weeks before the event. Professor Percy's talk on 'Why be an Anglican?' was very well received, as he outlined the history of the church and its contribution to Christian thought and practice.

Communications

Newsletter. Moya Holle continues to do a great job producing the Anglicans Together Newsletter three times a year. I express our thanks to Moya for her great effort in this regard.

Website. I also thank Dr Colin Bannerman for the ongoing development and maintenance of our website, and encourage members of Anglicans Together to look at it regularly.

Review

From time to time it is important for organisations to review what they do and set plans for the future. The Executive Committee has been looking at this matter and decided to engage Nick Ingram from Clear Thinking to conduct such a review during the next six months.

The Reverend Andrew Sempell
President, Anglicans Together

24 September 2017