

ANGLICANS TOGETHER INCORPORATED

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT
FOR THE 2015 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

General

On our new website we proclaim that:

“Anglicans Together promotes an inclusive expression of Anglicanism in the Diocese of Sydney. Anglicans Together supports the idea that the Anglican Church is both catholic and reformed.

It allows for difference as described in the Lambeth Quadrilateral. We wish to show that our God, as seen in the Lord Jesus Christ, is not a God that can be defined by one point of view but the genius of the Anglican style is that we can draw upon the revelation of God to all God's people. Anglicans Together is an association incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 1984 to:

- *maintain, foster and develop the life of the Anglican Church in Australia;*
- *confirm our common allegiance to the Anglican Communion as an integral part of the larger body of Christ's church;*
- *maintain the comprehensiveness and respect the diversity of belief and practice as it has developed within the Anglican Church;*
- *promote unity and co-operation with the Anglican Church in the best interests of its mission and the credibility of the Gospel in Australian society; and*
- *foster member involvement and participation in Synod with informed debate, coherent reasoning and constructive criticism”.*

It is important for us (and indeed the whole church) to maintain an outward focus and positive attitude toward bringing the gospel into the life of the wider community – a community that is rapidly becoming less engaged with the life of the church.

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 in this past year.

Diocesan Appointments and Farewells

At Synod last year, the Archbishop announced the appointment of the Reverend Peter Lin as Bishop of the Georges River Region commencing his ministry early this year. More recently he has announced that the Reverend Michael Stead to be the next Bishop of South Sydney and the Reverend Kanishka Raffel as the new Dean of Sydney. We welcome these appointments and also express our appreciation for the long and dedicated service of The Right Reverend Rob Forsyth as Bishop of South Sydney and his wife Margie.

During the year we also farewelled a number of parish clergy who have had an association with Anglicans Together; notably the Reverends John Cornish (Epping), Gwilym Henry-Edwards (Enmore), and James Butt (Balmain). The Reverend Philip Bradford also retired as Rector of Hunters Hill but he remains very active in the life of the Diocese and Anglicans Together. We have also welcomed the Reverends Dr Max Wood (Mosman), Michael Armstrong (Hunters Hill), and Peter Yeats (Balmain) to ministry in the Diocese.

Vale

We were saddened to note the death of former Dean and Regional Bishop Ken Short, and also of Melbourne Bishop Barbara Darling during the past year.

2014 Sydney Diocesan Synod

Last year's meeting of the Diocesan Synod spent a considerable time reviewing the **2020 Diocesan Mission**. It took several days of debate and consisted of considerable nuancing of the meanings of particular phrases and words. For an outsider, such as myself, it appeared a self-indulgent exercise in which participants sought to 'show off' their orthodox theological credentials rather than engage with the document or substantially improve it. Interestingly, the Mission makes no mention of worship or the place of sacraments in the life of the church, the concepts of grace and hospitality are not mentioned, and there is little about relationships or a call to love one's neighbour. In short, I think we could have done much better.

Considerable time was also given to who can be **members of Diocesan boards and councils**, and of schools in particular. The Synod resolved to require certain 'faith statements' to be subscribed by all who serve on such boards. Competency in governance was not given an equal priority.

A new policy concerning **large property receipts** was presented but deferred until the 2015 Synod because of the level of debate and amendments that arose from it. Insufficient time had been allocated for its discussion and it was clear that a high level of disquiet was being expressed concerning it. Consultation has since been held and it will be interesting to see what happens in the future regarding it.

A report from the General Synod on the **'Viability and Structures of the Anglican Church in Australia'** was received in the last session of the Synod. This was perhaps one of the more important matters for the national church before the Synod but again little time was given for its discussion. The Anglican Church in Australia is going broke and there is a need for change but the structure of the church makes it near on impossible to change.

Three major questions arose from the report:

1. *“How can we maintain 23 largely independent but vastly different sized Dioceses (huge variations in geographic spread; and in population densities, declining in regional and rural areas, and ever expanding in coastal metropolitan areas)?”*
2. *What to do about the resulting vast differences between the individual dioceses regarding financial and other resources?*
3. *What is our response to the community’s amazement as it learnt, as a result of the Royal Commission into Institutional Child Sexual Abuse, that the Anglican Church in Australia does not speak with one voice, or govern with one set of rules, unlike the Church of England in the United Kingdom?”*

The response from a number of speakers as Synod were rather fatuous and unhelpful, appearing to express more an attitude of denial rather than a desire to face up to the problem. This issue is not going to go away as a number of Australian dioceses are already unviable and the fall-out from economic failure and professional standards mismanagement will have ongoing consequences.

2015 Annual Dinner

Around 120 people from 18 parishes and other Diocesan organisations attended this year’s Annual Dinner on Friday, 28th August 2015 at the City Tattersall’s Club. The speaker was Bishop Stephen Pickard, Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, on the topic of *‘Religion and Violence – Myth and Reality’*. His address is available on the Anglicans Together website.

Contrary to popular attitudes, he proposed that violence emanates from human selfishness and competitiveness rather than religion. In contrast, he argued that religion provides a way of containing human violence and restoring the brokenness that arises from it. His paper provoked a good degree of comment and Bishop Pickard was interviewed by the ABC Religion Report as part of his presentation.

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. In the past year, Dr Colin Bannerman developed a new website for Anglicans Together. While the presentation is similar to the former design it now has a cleaner look that can be viewed on a laptop, tablet or iPhone. It also has greater flexibility to allow for the adding and removing of pages and for the provision of updates and amendments. We thank Colin for all the work he has done on the website.

Networking

St James’ Institute. Some joint activity between Anglicans Together and the St James’ Institute was developed over the past year and we will look at holding some more combined activities in the future.

NSW Ecumenical Council. We continue to maintain a good relationship with the NSW Ecumenical Council and its General Secretary, Fr Shenouda Mansour.

MOW Watch. Recently I gave an address to the Annual Meeting of MOWatch Australia on “Fathers, Heretics and the Failure of Mission”. The address is available on the website.

Conclusion

There are many challenges facing our world today and with which the church has a responsibility to engage. These include:

- terrorism, violence and the global movement of refugees,
- the effects of climate change and the degradation of living conditions,
- the widening economic gap between rich and poor that gives rise to social and political instability,
- the effects of violence and discrimination against women,
- the unjust treatment of minority groups based on gender, sexuality, race and class, and
- the intellectual and emotional dissonance that arises from fragmented and sectional approaches to the activities of education, philosophy, politics, economics and religion.

The church’s failure to engage with the world arises from a failure to appreciate the nature of community. There is a need for balance between individualism and communitarianism that allows for diversity and change while also preserving that which is defining, creative and community enhancing. Indeed, the diversity principle is to be seen in nature, where greater diversity leads to a healthier environment because it has the capacity to thrive in a range of conditions and adapt when things change. A mono-culture, on the other hand, is vulnerable to change and can quickly die if there is a profound environmental change.

The past fifty years has demonstrated that the institutional church has been vulnerable to change and has shown little ability to adapt, which has led to conflict, fragmentation and decline. Indeed, in many instances church institutions have become more of a monoculture, seeking greater conformity rather than diversity in belief, structure and practice. We are now in a parlous state.

A challenge is to see the community as a gift from God rather than something that we create and control. We are given one another in both good and ill, creativity and brokenness, and with joy and sorrow, to be the people of God – a light to the nations. Yet tribalism, arrogance, fear, dishonesty and selfishness destroy community and the trust that it needs to thrive. We have much to pray about both within and without the church.

The Reverend Andrew Sempell
President, Anglicans Together

27 September 2015