ANGLICANS TOGETHER INCORPORATED

PRESIDENT'S REPORT
FOR THE 2018 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Reflection – Church and State

The relationship between 'church' and the 'state' has often been ambiguous and sometimes hostile. When church leaders make comments that are critical of government some will say that 'the church should stay out of politics'. Yet, if they support the government they are accused of 'being too close and cosy' in their relationship with it; and if they say nothing, then they are considered to be 'out of touch' and not contributing to the good of society.

Likewise, people with religious convictions who are elected to parliament often come under greater analysis and criticism regarding their views and as to whether their faith might have an undue influence over government policy. Interestingly, no one applies the same level of scrutiny to economists who hold to particular economic models or scientists who employ particular ethical principles in pursuit of their research. It is a truism that everyone approaches life with a 'point of view' that shapes his or her understanding and behaviour; it is called an ethic.

In theological terms, the church is simply the body of believers who gather to worship God. However, most people understand 'the church' to be the institutional construct that is the visible manifestation of the invisible mass of believers. In our contemporary world we should perhaps talk more of 'churches' rather than of 'church' as there is no one institution that is 'the church'.

The state, on the other hand, is clearly an institutional construct that includes land and people that are governed corporately. In theory, all people must belong to a state to which they owe some form of allegiance. In our situation, not all must belong to a church.

An initial point of tension arises over the issue of loyalty. Most religious institutions will argue that loyalty to God must take precedence over loyalty to the state. This view has sometimes led to civil disobedience and even open conflict with the state and sometimes between religious groups with which there is disagreement. The ability of the state to cope with these tensions varies.

It is impossible to identify a single 'biblical' approach to the relationship between the institutional expressions of religion and the state. Indeed, the Old Testament narrative records a movement from localised tribal religion and government, through political warlords, to a monarchical nation-state, and finally a vassal state in a much larger empire. Likewise, religious leadership shifted from tribal leaders and religious 'high places', to priests and prophets, to a form of established religion based on the temple, and finally a teaching ministry conducted in synagogues. The New Testament also seems to accent of a diversity of political and religious practices.

St Paul sets out an agenda for church-state relations in his Letter to the Romans.

> *'Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad'.* (Romans 13:1-3a)

Politicians have sometimes quoted this text in an effort to get church leaders to be silent about criticism of government policies. Nevertheless, it has provided an important legitimising force for the authority of the state until the modern era.

Jesus, on the other hand, seems to haves a different perspective. On the one hand when confronted by the Pharisees over allegiance to the Emperor, he says, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21) This seems to uphold a conservative view of duty to the state but also promotes one's duty to God. However, Jesus also challenges power politics and the status quo in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). He also makes the issue of allegiance clearer a little later, saying,

> 'No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth'. (Matthew 6:24)

The Scriptures do not support anarchy, but rather uphold the importance of the state and ruling authorities, instructing people to be obedient to the law and good citizens toward one another.

In the early fourth century, the Roman Emperor Constantine established an alliance between the institutions of church and state, by which Christianity became the official religion of the Empire. From then on it was mostly accepted that while the church and state were separate, they also provided unity through a common purpose that came to be known as 'Christendom'.

The Renaissance, (and its subsequent religious expression, the Reformation), brought about several changes in the relationship between the state and church. This era saw the rise of the nation state, a political construct based upon people of a common culture and economy. Nations then sought to have greater control over their destinies and therefore over the power of the church.

Those nations where the Reformation held sway became increasingly outside the Roman Catholic Church's sphere of influence. A new religious polity called 'established religion' emerged as an answer to the church-state nexus. In this case, the state legitimised the particular religious expression by making it the official one for the nation. This practice often led to conflict and persecution of minorities, however, toleration of dissenters ultimately provided a solution, as long as they remained loyal to the state.

In many instances, established religious institutions became an arm of the state and worked to support it. Any aspect of a prophetic or reforming agenda was suppressed, while promotion of clergy in the church became more a matter of state patronage of those who were considered 'sound'. Unsurprisingly, public dissatisfaction arose concerning the established churches, which in turn gave rise to new religious movements and denominations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

As religious expression became more diverse and the link with the state declined, the ability of the churches to speak with one voice disappeared. Christians seemed to spend more time emphasising their differences rather than proclaiming a unified gospel to the world. The twentieth century became the era of religious fragmentation and marginalisation.

As with the pre-Christendom era, the post-Christendom church cannot expect to be supported by the state, and neither should the state seek to be legitimised by the church. Nevertheless, the church does have a duty to be a voice and practitioner for justice, compassion, transcendence and hope in the world as it seeks to proclaim and live out the gospel of Christ.

In many ways, society now organises itself around humanistic rather than theistic concerns, leaving religion to become a cultural artefact disconnected from the concerns of the 'real world' and an activity consumed by those who are 'into that sort of thing'. Now privatised and consumerised, the churches have, for the most part, lost their prophetic voice and are easily ignored.

The churches have sought to push back against this situation; but despite the adoption of contemporary management and marketing practices, 'relevant' liturgies, new evangelism programmes, and the creation of political lobby groups, they have nevertheless continued to decline. The churches will probably continue to be pushed to the margins of society while they remain reactionary to social change; obsessed by matters of internal polity, power and control; and are self-justifying in matters of thought, belief and practice.

On the other hand, in a stand-off, the secularist world-view struggles to understand the religious and often seeks to deny it a place in society. Such a denial often includes a rejection of the spiritual aspects of human nature. Yet, it is our spiritual nature that helps us to understand the inner workings of our human nature, making life meaningful even in the face of hardship and disaster. The need for an encounter with the spiritual remains a basic human need and it will be sought out. The question for the churches is: will they be ready or even wish to engage with those who seek God in a new and open way?

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)
	The Rev'd Dr Max Wood
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.

2018 Annual Dinner

The 2018 Annual dinner is scheduled for 25 October at the City Tattersalls Club. The speaker this year will be Ms Anne Hywood, General Secretary of the Anglican Church of Australia. Her topic will be 'A National Church – Actual or Virtual?'.

Communications

Newsletter. I thank Moya Holle for her continued work producing the Anglicans Together Newsletter three times a year.

Website. I also thank Dr Colin Bannerman for maintaining our website

Networking

St James' Institute. The Executive has met with Christopher Waterhouse, Director of the St James' Institute, and looked activities that can be co-sponsored by both groups.

Strategic Plan

A brief on the new Anglicans Together Strategic Plan is at Attachment A. It was developed through a series of focus group meetings, analysis, and discussion between the facilitator and the Executive Committee. I thank all those who participated in the process and especially Nick Ingram from Clear Thinking, who facilitated the process.

The Plan sets out the following:
- The background and history of Anglicans Together,
- Our vision, ethos and broad goals,
- Enabling objectives in the pursuit of these goals, and
- Activities to be pursued over the next five years.

RECOMMENDED that the Annual Meeting endorse the Strategic Plan to be instituted over the next five years.

Conclusion

2018 has been my fifth year of being President of Anglicans Together. I have enjoyed the activities and engagement but am aware that one should not do these things for too long and that fresh ideas are needed from time to time. I am therefore noting that my tenure is nearing its end and am happy to pass the baton to another, either at this AGM or the next.

The Reverend Andrew Sempell
President, Anglicans Together

7 Oct 18

Attachments:

A. Brief: Anglicans Together Strategic Plan 2018

ANGLICANS TOGETHER

STRATEGIC PLAN 2018

1. Where are we now?

Our Formation:

- Anglicans Together (AT) was formed in 1992 in response to emerging trends towards a conservative mono-culture in the Diocese of Sydney.
- Our purpose was to promote inclusiveness within the Diocese, while still embracing unity.
- We saw our role, among other things, as creating lines of communication and providing forums for different viewpoints to be expressed in the Diocese.

Changes in the Diocese and our Response:

- Over the last 25 years the Diocese has become more mono-cultural. Clergy see it as increasingly unsafe to be seen to disagree with the 'Diocesan authorities'.
- We have, to some extent, withdrawn, as part of this cultural change, and have become less of a lobby group and more a "network of parishes that do not reflect the majority".
- While we have taken a step back –we are still providing vital fellowship and network to several parishes who would otherwise feel isolated from the Diocesan power structures.
- At the same time, the Diocese has taken a step back from many of the traditional activities it undertook. This is increasingly leaving a vacuum for someone else to fill.

Decision Point for the Anglican Communion:

- The broader Anglican Church of Australia and the global Anglican Communion are facing tough decisions over the next few years about its identity and who belongs and who might be excluded.
- Our local situation is tied to this national church debate.

2. Where do we want to be?

Our Vision:
The Sydney Diocese becomes accepting of:
- diverse expressions of Anglicanism within its bounds, and
- its place in the wider Anglican Communion so that parishes may thrive and grow in all their diversity.

Our Approach:
We will focus our actions in three self-reinforcing domains:
(i)   Supporting inclusion,
(ii)   Being vocal and visible, and
(iii)   Creating connections both within the Diocese and with the wider Communion.

3. **What do we need to do to get there?**

    Delivering on our Three Domains:

*   **Supporting inclusion by –**
    *   resourcing parishes who differ from the mainstream,
    *   networking these parishes, and
    *   driving structural changes in the Diocese to support minority parishes (such as changes to nomination process).
*   **Providing visibility by –**
    *   being a voice and modelling good disagreement in the Diocese,
    *   symbolic actions,
    *   synod visibility, and
    *   meeting with the Archbishop.
*   **Creating connections by –**
    *   bringing in national and international perspectives and connections into the Diocese –both from worldwide Anglicanism and from other Christian denominations, and
    *   helping parishes to realise that they are valued members of the Anglican Communion.

4. **What do we now do over the next five years?**

*   **Supporting Inclusion:**

    (i)   Start to build networks and momentum by having an event and sending a personal invitation to the rector of each minority parish (and extend it to two lay leaders). The event should have a headline speaker. And it should have a workshop session at the end: presenting AT's new vision; and commencing a consultation process with these parishes as to what AT can do to support them,

    (ii)   Develop a strategy to change the nomination requirements for parishes to make it easier for them to nominate rectors who are less in the diocesan mould, and

    (iii)   Commence a youth network amongst our parishes.

*   **Providing Visibility:**

    (i)   Developing a Synod strategy,
    (ii)   Reviewing our communications strategy,
    (iii)   Having an annual meeting with the Archbishop, and
    (iv)   Developing a "subversive voice" with young people.

*   **Creating Connections:**

    (i)   Using the Anglicans Together newsletter as a platform for wider Anglican Communion,
    (ii)   Collaborate with the St James Institute to hold co-presented events,
    (iii)   Interaction with the Primate and bishops, and
    (iv)   Engage with Trinity College, Melbourne and the University of Divinity.