

Anglican Church of Australia Diocese of Bathurst



The Right Reverend Ian Palmer
The Bishop's Registry
3 Church Street (PO Box 23)
Bathurst NSW 2795

Wednesday 8th October 2014

A Pastoral Letter following Synod September 2014

Dear friends in Christ,

I am so grateful to our members of Synod who listened attentively, thought carefully and engaged well. Several people commented that the Synod came to realise just how serious the situation of the Diocese is. That's probably right.

My responsibility as your Bishop was brilliantly summed up by Tim Sharp in words I placed on a fridge magnet and gave to everyone, "**All a shepherd can do is to guide his flock through the valley of darkness; he cannot prevent the valley from being there in the first place.**" Please pray that I will have grace and wisdom to do this and that we will walk together through this dark valley.

I have three matters for our deeper consideration:

1. How is your church serving your town?

Let's not allow our difficulties take us away from worshipping God and serving our neighbour. The Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple (died 1943) said, "The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members."

So I asked the question, "How are our churches serving the communities, towns and cities where we are placed?" God's love for us and our love for God are shown in our worship and our service. I am asking each Parish Council to take this question seriously, and to prayerfully search out ways to show God's love among our neighbours.

I am well aware of individual and personal acts of service that people do, but my question is, "**How is your church, your parish, our Diocese, serving our communities?**"

2. How is our financial situation going?

Synod heard from the Bishop and the General Manager about the financial pressures we face. Our financial pressures are not limited to the Receivers and the Bank.

They are also internal:

- 1) The capital of the Endowment of the See has been eroded over many years – so we need \$140,000 in 2015 to support the Bishop (this amount includes a part time PA).

- 2) Professional Standards issues (including matters relating to the Royal Commission) are expensive – we need to budget at least \$100,000.
- 3) A lot of staff time is taken up with providing documents and information for the Court case we are caught up in, so we do need other staff in the Bishop's Registry. And there are additional legal fees and additional costs.

So, I asked for the Parish Assessments to be doubled. This is what we need. Of course Synod Representatives could not commit to this and neither could they agree to a budget that we knew would be impossible, so no vote was taken. Through a speed thinking exercise we tried to imagine how we might solve the problems we face.

The budget will come back to Bishop-in-Council. We must find a way forward to finance the ministry of the Bishop's Registry. Leigh Hayward, the Deputy Chancellor told us, "If we don't have a Bishop we don't have a Diocese."

3. Thinking outside the box (or the church building)

I asked the question about how we sustain our church fellowships scattered across the wide area that is our diocese. It is clear that we can no longer afford to support so many small church buildings for one service a month with the costs of insurance and maintenance.

In the diocese of Bunbury (WA) their scattered worshipping communities meet weekly in homes, share fellowship and encouragement around the Bible, partake in a monthly Eucharist with a priest, and serve their communities with joy. Relieved of the responsibilities of maintaining buildings these lay-led communities are flourishing.

Could this be a model for our diocese?

So to prayerfully consider and then take action!

How can our church serve our Community?

How can we help balance the Diocesan budget?

Can we grow in our love for God, for one another and our neighbours without a church building?

Thank you for your encouragement. The valley is dark and the way difficult, but we will come through – because Jesus Christ is risen and we are a resurrection people!

Warmly, in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Tau." with a horizontal line underneath.

...still on pilgrimage...

The Rt Revd Ian Palmer
Bishop of Bathurst