



PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
To
THE 14th GENERAL SYNOD
Of
THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA
Saturday 20th October 2007
by
The Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall
Primate

Introduction

It is my privilege and joy to welcome you, in Christ's name, to this Fourteenth General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia.

Some of you might baulk at the use of the word "joy" as we gather for a General Synod. I use it advisedly, though. Just pause for a moment and look around this Synod hall at the faces gathered from every diocese in the country, from every part of this nation. I think with me you cannot but feel gratitude and joy for our brothers and sisters in Christ when we call to mind the great diversity of mission and service they represent. As St Paul wrote to the Phillipians, "I thank my God every time I

remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for you all, because of your sharing in the Gospel from the first day until now. (Phillippians 1:3-5).

It is right that we should feel joy and gratitude for the diversity of places and variety of ways in which the Anglican Church serves God's people, from the largest urban centres to the smallest, most isolated rural communities, to long established schools to the very newest in brand new communities, to large and small community service organizations, to ministries to Defence Force personnel both here and on postings overseas. That so many have responded to God's call to serve Christ and to make Christ known in all these places and ways is cause for great thanksgiving. And that we can come together in this way to pray, to reflect on the tasks of mission entrusted to us and tackle issues in the life of the wider church is cause for joy.

I am enough of a realist, however, to recognize that joy might not be the first word that leaps to mind at the prospect that lies before us. We certainly face a daunting agenda.

There is yet again a large volume of detailed legislation. From the very first General Synod, since the new Constitution was adopted in 1961, there has been concern about the amount of time spent on legislation compared with other matters. Some of us will resent the amount of time we spend dealing with technical legal matters and will be impatient to move on to what they see as mission matters. Others will see that getting the law right is a, perhaps even the, primary responsibility of the General Synod. Wherever you stand, I hope you will see that Standing Committee, and those responsible for arranging the business for this Synod, have tried to do justice to both of those responsibilities. If we work with care and discipline, it should be possible for us to achieve significant outcomes in both areas in the course of this week.

Mission and Attendance

The Thirteenth General Synod in 2004 passed an extensive resolution making mission and attendance the strategic priority from 2004 to 2007. We resolved to tackle declining attendance by developing a mixed economy consisting of both inherited and

fresh expressions of church working together in partnership. The resolution set out a bold and extensive agenda for the Standing Committee and for the church at large.

Three years down the track we cannot say that we have done it all, but significant steps have been taken. I want to acknowledge the work of the Task Force on Mission, and in particular the leadership of Bishop Andrew Curnow and those who joined him on that group. In August 2006 the Task Force published *Building the Mission-Shaped Church in Australia*, adapting for Australia the British *Mission-Shaped Church* report. 3000 copies were printed and by April 2007 had virtually all been sold making it something of an achievement in Australian religious publishing. In turn this book stimulated our theologians to reflect on some of the ecclesiological issues generated by the *Mission-Shaped Church* movement. Each member of this Synod has received a copy of a special edition of St Mark's Review on this theme.

The Task Force arranged for key people from the Church of England to visit Australia and conduct a nation-wide series of seminars and training events. We were pleased to host Bob and Mary Hopkins and George Lings who spoke to literally hundreds of clergy and lay people in various venues around the country. Other leaders both from within Australia and from overseas have also contributed to training events and conferences so that since 2004 some 2000 Anglican leaders, clergy and lay, together with some 3000 leaders from other churches have participated in mission shaped church events of one sort or another.

At the Task Force's initiative the Standing Committee appointed the Reverend Stuart Robinson as National Mission Facilitator. The generosity of the parish of Chatswood in the Diocese of Sydney made Stuart available one day per week from August 2005 until now to undertake this national ministry. Stuart has been energetic and active, visiting fourteen of our twenty three dioceses, preaching, conducting training events and stimulating thought and action about mission. He has produced another important book *Starting Mission-Shaped Churches*.

We are very pleased to have with us at this General Synod Archdeacon Bob Jackson from the Diocese of Lichfield in England. At the last General Synod we had some small group work based on Bob's book *Hope for the Church*. Since then he has

published a second book *The Road to Growth* which has enlivened imagination and action in many parts of the church. A summary version of that book entitled *Going for Growth* presents the main ideas concisely for discussion in parish councils or other small groups. A copy has been provided to every member of General Synod. It is wonderful that Bob is with us to continue this strategic focus on mission. We look forward to his daily Bible studies, his sermon at the eucharist tomorrow and his input to the keynote session facilitated by the Task Force on Mission.

Properly understood, the mission of the church is multi-faceted. Most Anglicans by now are familiar with what have come to be called the five Marks of Mission. Over twenty years ago, now, the Anglican Consultative Council (in 1984 and 1990) said the mission of the church is

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Those five Marks of Mission have won wide acceptance throughout the Anglican Communion.

What is not quite so well known is the work that has gone on since 1990 undertaken by MISSIO, the Standing Commission for Mission of the Anglican Communion. Useful as the Five Marks are, we would do well to take on board MISSIO's more recent work and adopt a revised form of the marks of mission as we move forward.

The church does not have a mission apart from Christ's mission. It was Jesus himself who said "as the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20.21, 17.18). And secondly, whatever we do, in word or deed, every aspect of mission is directed towards making known the good news of the Kingdom. So rather than simply being one of a number of marks of mission what has been the first mark should be developed and made an over-arching heading:

- The Mission of the Church is the Mission of Christ to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.

The other marks then flesh out dimensions of that one mission.

The original five marks make no reference at all to worship. But St Paul said “as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Cor 11.26). The very act of gathering to celebrate the eucharist itself proclaims something to the world about the reality of God and the significance of Christ’s death. It is part and parcel of the way in which the church makes known the good news of the Kingdom to the world. A further mark of mission then needs to acknowledge that to worship and celebrate the grace of God is an indispensable part of mission.

The very way of life of the church itself communicates to those around us. It is part of the mission of the church to live as one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. If we are divided among ourselves, that speaks loudly to the world around us. If holiness is not evident in our corporate and individual lives, that says something. Part and parcel of who we are and what we are called to do in Christ’s name is to live as one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

In the light of these brief reflections I would encourage this General Synod and our church as a whole to develop the original five marks into a more fulsome understanding of mission in these terms:

The mission of the church is the mission of Christ to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom:

to teach, baptize and nurture new believers,

to respond to human need by loving service,

to seek to transform unjust structures of society,

to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth,

to worship and celebrate the grace of God and

to live as one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

Seen against that framework, I believe the agenda before us in this General Synod clearly engages each of the dimensions of that holistic understanding of mission. Our continuing focus on mission and attendance will bring clearly into view proclamation,

evangelism, baptism and the nurturing of new believers. The keynote session on the millennium development goals together with the matters we will address concerning justice for indigenous Australians will tackle questions of social justice and human need. It is a great pleasure to welcome Mrs Helen Wangusa, the Anglican Communion Observer at the United Nations, who will address us in relation to the Millennium Development Goals. A session on the environment will tackle our stewardship of creation. We will also be thinking about the nature of our life together as church both within Australia and in the wider Anglican Communion. All of this will be embedded in worship.

Let us have in mind then this developed formulation of the marks of mission and be aware that most, if not all, of our agenda this week is about one aspect or another of this mission.

The Marks of the Church

Let me say just a few things more about the traditional marks of the church. These four marks of the church – one, holy, catholic and apostolic – are sometimes felt to be in tension with each other, and are even pitted against each other. For example, in current debates the unity and catholicity of the church can sometimes feel like they are pitted against the distinctive holiness of the church.

We need to remind ourselves that we cannot sacrifice any one of the marks of the church in favour of another. It is simply not possible for us to give up the call to a distinctive holiness in response to an anything goes notion of inclusiveness. But it is equally true that we cannot set aside the call to unity and catholicity out of a too narrow view of moral rectitude.

The marks may appear to us at times to be in tension with one another. If so, it is in the midst of that tension that we are called faithfully to strive to discover how God wants us to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. And if the marks appear to be in tension with each other, it is only in appearance because at root each of them is founded in Christ himself.

The church is one because of its foundation in Christ. It is not simply an organizational or political entity. It is a spiritual entity whose unity depends finally on the unity of God.

The church is holy not because of the sinlessness of its members. The holiness of the church is not manufactured by the moral behaviour of those who belong. Rather, the church is holy because it is set apart by God for a particular purpose in the world. It is infused by God's Holy Spirit. People in the church are not any more sinless than anyone else. It is not individuals that make the church holy but God who sanctifies the church through a constant process of forgiveness and renewal, through Jesus Christ, to serve his purposes in the world.

The church is catholic not because of its universal extension in space and not because of the numbers of people who belong. Nor is it catholic because of its cultural variety or its continuity through time. Although all those things are true, the basis of the church's catholicity is its identity in Christ. What links together all the local churches across time and space and distinguishes them from all other human groupings is Christ's identity present, alive and determinative within the life of the church.

And the church is apostolic not because of a simplistic theory which directly links us to the Apostles but because the church is the authorized representative and the ambassador of Christ, sent by him into the world as he was sent by the Father.

In all four ways, the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic because it is founded on and in Christ. It is that fundamental theological reality which we must struggle to express as fully as possible in reality for the sake of the church's mission, which is Christ's mission.

The Anglican Communion

With this foundation in mind let me turn then to the current situation in the Anglican Communion. As you all are well aware, the Anglican Communion internationally has been in some turmoil since 2003 when a man living openly in a same-sex union in the United States was elected and consecrated as a bishop in The Episcopal Church. In addition the Diocese of New Westminster in the Anglican Church of Canada moved

to authorize the blessing of same sex-unions and there were some moves locally in the United States of America in this direction too.

In October 2003 the Archbishop of Canterbury established The Lambeth Commission on Communion to examine these issues. The Windsor Report was published twelve months later. It contained a number of requests to The Episcopal Church in the United States and to the Anglican Church of Canada as well as to some primates and bishops of the Communion who had transgressed diocesan and provincial borders to intervene beyond their own jurisdictions.

In February 2005, the Primates of the Anglican Communion requested The Episcopal Church to respond to the Windsor Report requests. The 75th General Convention of the Episcopal Church went some way in June 2006 but there was debate about the extent to which The Episcopal Church had satisfied the Windsor requests.

In February 2007 the Primates asked for further clarification by The Episcopal Church. The Presiding Bishop and the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church invited the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Joint Standing Committee of the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council to meet with them. That happened just a few weeks ago. Robert Fordham and I were in attendance as members of the Joint Standing Committee.

Consecration of persons in same sex unions

One sticking point was whether the Episcopal Church would consecrate another openly gay person. The Primates asked the House of Bishops to confirm that the General Convention meant that “a candidate for Episcopal orders living in a same sex union shall not receive the necessary consent” to proceed to consecration as a bishop (Primates Communique February 2007; Resolution B033 75th General Convention 2006).

A Joint Standing Committee subgroup had already reported that “in voting for this Resolution, the majority of bishops with jurisdiction had indicated that they will refuse consent in future to the consecration of a bishop whose manner of life challenges the wider church and leads to further strains on communion”. That is to say, the majority will refuse consent.

Last month the House of Bishops confirmed that that report was “an accurate evaluation” of the General Convention Resolution (B033) and that “non celibate gay and lesbian persons are included among those to whom B033” applies. So, in respect of this first matter, the House of Bishops has given the assurance sought by the Primates and complied with the request of the Windsor Report.

Public Rites of Blessing of same-sex unions

The second request in the Windsor Report was for a moratorium on the development and authorization of public rites of blessing for same-sex unions. The 2006 General Convention said nothing about this matter directly, but it did decline to pass several Resolutions that would have moved in the direction of developing and authorizing such rites.

The sticking point was that the previous General Convention, in 2003, recognized that, at the diocesan level, some experiments were going on and the matter was left up to individual bishops and dioceses. So there was ambiguity about the position of the Episcopal Church on this matter.

The Primates asked the House of Bishops to “make an unequivocal common covenant that the bishops will not authorize any rite of blessing for same sex unions in their dioceses or through General Convention” (Primate’s Communique February 2007, of the Windsor Report 143, 144).

Last month the House of Bishops said “we, the members of the House of Bishops, pledge not to authorize for use in our dioceses any public rites of blessing of same sex unions.....” and noted that “no rite of blessing for persons living in same sex unions has been adopted or approved by our General Convention”.

The House went on to note that the Primates themselves in 2003 said there was a pastoral duty “to respond with love and understanding to people of all sexual orientations” and that “it is necessary to maintain a breadth of private response to situations of individual pastoral care”. The Primates themselves had made a distinction between authorized public rites and private and individual pastoral care which is reflected in the House of Bishops statement.

Primatial Vicar

A third request by the Primates in February 2007 was that the Presiding Bishop appoint a primatial vicar to represent her in some situations where a diocese did not wish to receive her personally.

Last month the Presiding Bishop announced to the House of Bishops that she had appointed eight bishops to represent her in this way and that she would be happy to involve others. In the course of the meeting several others volunteered to act in this way. The Presiding Bishop has made it clear that she thinks it best to leave the scheme open and flexible to allow each Episcopal Visitor and each Diocesan Bishop concerned to work out practical details themselves. The Presiding Bishop has required only two things of the Episcopal Visitors: first, that they do not encourage congregations to leave The Episcopal Church and secondly that they report to her from time to time on their ministry.

The House of Bishops affirmed “the Presiding Bishop’s plan to appoint Episcopal Visitors for dioceses that request alternative oversight...[It said] we believe this plan is consistent with and analogous to delegated episcopal pastoral oversight (DEPO) as affirmed by the Windsor Report (paragraph 152). We thank those bishops who have generously offered themselves for this ministry, we hope that dioceses will make use of this plan and that the Presiding Bishop will continue conversation with those dioceses that may feel the need for such ministries. We appreciate and need to hear all voices in The Episcopal Church”.

This seems to me to be a generous response to the substance of the request of the Primates.

Pastoral Council

The final request of the Primates to the House of Bishops was that a Pastoral Council with international representation be established to ensure proper care of dissenting minorities in the United States and to try to bring to an end interventions in the United States from outside Provinces (Primates’ Communique 2007).

The Episcopal Church had legal advice that it could not implement the scheme proposed by the Primates. The House of Bishops went on to say “nevertheless we recognize a useful role for Communion-wide consultation with respect to the pastoral needs of those seeking alternative oversight, as well as the pastoral needs of gay and lesbian persons in this and other Provinces. We encourage our Presiding Bishop to continue to explore such consultation in a manner that is in accord with our Constitution and Canons”.

There is a clear willingness to devise a scheme in conjunction with the wider Communion which responds to the substance of the Primates’ request.

Overall Impressions

It was very clear throughout the meeting that The Episcopal Church greatly values its place in the life of the wider Anglican Communion and strongly desires to maintain it.

At the same time it is also clear that a majority in The Episcopal Church is deeply convinced that it is right to include fully in the life of the church gay and lesbian people.

However, there is a wide variety of views in The Episcopal Church. The meeting of the House of Bishops last month worked very hard to find a way forward which retained the commitment of the majority yet was also respectful of minorities and of the need to walk together with the wider Anglican Communion.

On the basis of my participation in the meetings and my conversations with bishops of The Episcopal Church across the diversity of views, I believe their response is positive. I think that the House of Bishops has complied with the requests in the Windsor Report and, beyond what Windsor asked for, the substance of the requests from the Primates has also been met.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has now published the advice he received from the Joint Standing Committee of the ACC and Primates and has asked each province in the Communion to advise him of its assessment of the House of Bishops response by the end of this month. Given the timing of this General Synod it seems appropriate

that the Synod itself respond to the Archbishop of Canterbury and I understand a member will seek leave to introduce a motion to enable that to happen.

Whether or not this Synod agrees with my assessment, clearly not all the issues in this debate have been resolved. Far from it.

The House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church went on in its statement to remind other parts of the Anglican Communion of their obligations also stemming from the Windsor Report and underlined by subsequent meetings of the instruments of communion. Specifically the House called for an end to incursions in the life of The Episcopal Church by primates and bishops from other provinces.

Secondly, the House of Bishops reminded the rest of the Communion that the 1998 Lambeth Conference called all the provinces of the Anglican Communion to engage in a Listening Process designed to bring gay and lesbian Anglicans fully into the Church's conversation about human sexuality. We will take another step in that direction ourselves later in this Synod. The House also called on the whole Communion as it seeks consensus in matters of human sexuality to be clear and outspoken in protecting the civil rights of gay and lesbian people and to oppose any action or policy that does violence to them.

Issues of human sexuality will continue to be on the agenda of the Communion. However, I believe that these recent responses from The Episcopal Church, through its House of Bishops, make it more possible for us to pursue discussion throughout the Communion without them being undermined by further unilateral action.

Covenant for the Anglican Communion

It is important to recognize that the present strains and tensions in the Anglican Communion are not simply about human sexuality. They are also about the way in which decisions are made when there are differences in deeply held convictions. The Windsor Report made it clear that the autonomy of each member church of the Anglican Communion cannot be understood simply as sovereignty; as each church being free to do whatever it likes. Rather, autonomy must be understood as autonomy-in-communion. Being a member church of the Anglican Communion carries with it responsibilities and obligations to the other member churches.

Out of the current tensions has emerged the idea of a Covenant for the Anglican Communion. A Covenant could make explicit what until now has been only implicit. It could spell out the meaning of the bonds of affection which bind the Communion together. It could articulate the responsibilities and obligations that flow from membership of the Communion and in particular how the member churches relate to each other in situations of conflict.

Developing a covenant will be time-consuming and difficult. As it stands the time-frame envisages initial responses to the current draft covenant by the end of 2007. A revised draft would then go to the Lambeth Conference in 2008. A further revision would be reviewed by the Anglican Consultative Council in 2009. The ACC would then approve a formal proposal to go to the churches of the Communion. Each member church would consider that proposal through its General Synod or equivalent. In this scenario a firm proposal would come to us in 2010. Given that some General Synods meet only every four years, it may not get to some provinces until 2012. So that would be the earliest a covenant could possibly be agreed. And that would happen only if every church endorsed it at the first opportunity. The likelihood is that it would take longer.

As I say, putting in place a Covenant for the Anglican Communion will not be an easy task. It will require discipline and application and persistence. However, I think the attempt is worth considering because issues are bound to arise in the future over which there will be conflict. To have some clarity about how we relate to each other and how decisions are made would be useful.

I believe there is another reason why Australia, in particular, should be involved in this process. This Church may, by God's providence, have a special contribution to make.

In 1872, when the first national Constitution was adopted and General Synod formed, what was created was not an "over-arching authority that could dictate legislation to the dioceses". No, from the beginning the determinations of the General Synod "were in the nature of powerful recommendations" (Kaye, 2002, 162). The Constitution

“provided always that no determination of the General Synod shall be binding upon the church in any diocese unless and until such determination shall be accepted by the church in such diocese” (ibid 331, note 37). This means that “the General Synod’s contribution to national unity and effectiveness is thus dependent entirely on its power to exercise persuasive leadership” (ibid 163).

This contrasts sharply with the Anglican Church in Canada, the Church of England and The Episcopal Church in the United States, all of which have strong central power structures. The difficulty that arises in those churches, as we have seen, is how to contain diversity. Australia is virtually the opposite in that it has very strong regional diversity and a weak central structure. The question that arises for us is how to sustain national unity and coherence. In Bruce Kaye’s (2002, 163) estimation -

The advisory character of the resolutions and canons of the General Synod and the effective veto for diocesan synods on anything substantial is quite distinctive in worldwide Anglicanism. In other words, the kind of unity that exists in Australian Anglicanism at the national level is not the subject of institutional coercion to the same degree as is the case in other parts of the Anglican Communion.

This unique history and structure of the Anglican Church of Australia may mean we are in a position to make a unique contribution to developing a Covenant for the Anglican Communion. The international Communion itself is a family of strongly autonomous member churches related together by relatively weak central instruments of communion. The lack of a centre of authority and power in the Anglican Communion very much mirrors the structure of the Anglican Church of Australia. This means that our own Constitution which was many decades in the making may have something to contribute to the shape of a Covenant for the Anglican Communion.

The small working group set up by the Standing Committee to draft responses from Australia to the Windsor Report has already prepared two contributions in relation to the draft Covenant. You will be able to discern some Australian influence already in the current draft. I think we should continue to be involved in that communion-wide process and contribute what we can.

The General Secretary of the Anglican Communion

Before I leave matters concerning the Anglican Communion may I say how pleased we are to have with us the Reverend Canon Kenneth Kearon, Secretary General of the Anglican Communion. Canon Kearon has had an enormously busy agenda over the last few years dealing with the tensions that exist within the life of the Anglican Communion and leading the Anglican Communion Office in preparation for the coming Lambeth Conference in 2008.

The Standing Committee and the Provisional Business Committee has provided space for Canon Kearon to address the General Synod this evening. It will be important for us to hear from him as we consider the various communion matters before us. On behalf of this Church, Kenneth, I welcome you and say how glad we are that you have been able to find time to be with us.

The Agenda for this General Synod

Without devaluing in any way the importance of any of the matters that are to come before us, may I highlight several which I believe deserve our special care and, where possible, resolution at this General Synod.

Indigenous Issues

Important questions about ministry with indigenous Australians will come before us. I had the great privilege as Primate to attend the launch of the Kriol Bible at Katherine in The Northern Territory on 6 May this year. That launch marked the completion of a forty year project to provide the first complete translation of the whole Bible in an indigenous language. A number of partial translations into a variety of indigenous languages have been achieved but this is the first complete Bible in an Australian Aboriginal language. The vast ecumenical team involved in the project deserves our heartfelt thanks and congratulations. The Diocese of The Northern Territory and the Church Missionary Society have been sponsors of the project for many years so we can take some pride ourselves in this achievement.

The Standing Committee is supporting two important reviews related to indigenous ministry.

When the Diocese of Carpentaria and the Diocese of North Queensland were amalgamated some years ago it was intended that a review of the effects of the amalgamation would be conducted within five or six years. It is high time that that review was undertaken and the Diocese of North Queensland now has it under weigh with the assistance of the Standing Committee.

The second review concerns the expectations this church has of NATSIAC. When NATSIAC was originally created, amid enormous goodwill and hope, a very extensive agenda was set out for it. It is fair to say that the church has been unable to resource NATSIAC to the extent necessary for it to discharge all the functions identified under the Canon.

Moreover, the two indigenous bishops who serve this Church nationally are Assistant Bishops in the Diocese of North Queensland. While the national church provides some financial assistance, in recognition of the wider role of these bishops, it is true nevertheless that the financial burden falls on North Queensland, itself fairly poorly resourced. The sustainability and roles of the indigenous bishops and of NATSIAC need careful review. The Diocese of North Queensland and NATSIAC itself, with support from the Standing Committee, are looking at these related issues. I simply flag this whole area as an important one for serious consideration.

Women Bishops

Late last month I received the Appellate Tribunal's determination on the women bishops reference made in April 2005. By a 4-3 majority the Tribunal has determined that there is nothing in the Constitution to prevent a woman becoming a diocesan bishop in Australia. The combined effect of it becoming possible in 1992 for women to be ordained priest and the removing of maleness in 1995 as part of the test of canonical fitness has produced this outcome.

So basically there is now nothing in the Constitution to prevent a woman becoming a bishop. However the Tribunal's answer is qualified and nuanced and makes it clear that it is not open slather, as it were, for women bishops. It depends in part on the Constitution and ordinances of a particular diocese as well as on provincial legislation concerning confirmation as to canonical fitness.

A majority of the Tribunal, though not a statutory majority, has also indicated that the situation is different for assistant bishops. A majority held that the old pre-1995 canonical fitness test still applies to the Assistant Bishops Canon 1966 so bishops appointed under that Canon still need to be male. I note that the Canon is not in force in every diocese.

This situation presents something of a conundrum. It seems that this canonical inhibition could be removed by an individual diocese repealing the Assistant Bishops Canon and putting in place an alternative diocesan ordinance to authorize a woman assistant bishop. The national alternative would be for the General Synod itself to amend the Assistant Bishops Canon 1966 to import the new test of canonical fitness so that the same test would apply to both diocesan and assistant bishops.

Whatever one's view about women bishops in principle, I believe it is desirable to have both consistency in the test of canonical fitness for all bishops and to have as uniform an approach as possible to the appointment of assistant bishops rather than the prospect of numerous different ordinances around the dioceses.

I also advise the Synod that at this year's national bishops' meeting there was discussion about how to care for those who conscientiously object to women bishops should the determination of the Tribunal permit consecration of a woman. I hasten to add that the episcopal members of the Appellate Tribunal absented themselves from that discussion. The bishops present resolved that if the Appellate Tribunal should clear the way for the consecration of women, nothing further should happen, i.e. there should be no consecration of a woman, prior to the 2008 bishops' meeting. For this reason I have said publicly that I do not anticipate a woman will be consecrated as a bishop in Australia prior to April 2008. However, I recognize that a resolution of the bishops in a meeting like this has no binding force on any individual bishop. I simply inform the General Synod of that decision. Clearly, however, there needs to be further discussion about mechanisms to care for conscientious objectors.

National Register

In 2004 the General Synod passed the National Register Canon. Despite extensive work the register is not yet functional. While the Canon was passed in good faith, problems have arisen with its implementation. There is before us a revised Canon for

the National Register based on experience and learning to date. It is important that we put this mechanism in place and I hope, notwithstanding any complexities, that the Synod will be able to implement that important measure.

Special Tribunal Canon

Since the last General Synod the Appellate Tribunal has determined that the Special Tribunal Canon 2004 affects the order and good government of the church in a diocese and so does not come into effect until adopted by that diocese. This has meant a great deal of uncertainty. There may be as many as four or five different regimes in place across our national church for dealing with charges against bishops. This confusing situation is, I believe, clearly unsatisfactory. The fact that there is doubt about which laws are in place in a diocese is not helpful to anyone. A new Bill for a Special Tribunal Canon is before us. It has been crafted carefully taking into account the previous determination of the Appellate Tribunal to avoid affecting the order and good government of the church in a diocese. I think it is very important for this church as a whole that we put in place a mechanism like this. I hope the extensive consultation already undertaken around the dioceses will mean that it can be done at this session.

Conclusion

There are debates about what constitutes the church and where the church is to be found, whether the church is only the local gathering of Christian people or whether one can properly speak of a diocesan church or indeed a national church or even the international Anglican Communion as church.

For my part, this gathering of the General Synod is a very significant gathering of Anglican Christians in the nation and may prove to be an important gathering internationally as well as we make our contribution to the wider scene.

All church meetings, including General Synods, are a kind of cell of the church. We meet as the Body of Christ in a particular mode. The relationships between us should reflect that character. We need to have high expectations of each other and of what God is going to give us through these surprising and glorious other persons. Let us then approach Synod and the work before us in this frame of mind, confident in God's goodness.

This gathering should bear the character of Christ in our dealings with each other and in the face we show to the wider community and to the world.

We are one, because we are incorporated into Christ in baptism and bear in us and among us the gift of his Holy Spirit.

We are holy because we are rooted in Christ and set apart for his mission. He lives in us and so we are constantly being converted and formed in His likeness and growing into the fullness of the stature of Christ.

We are catholic because of this identity in Christ. We are one in Christ with all those who have been grafted into His Body in every age and place.

And we are apostolic because just as the Father sent Christ into the world to make known the Good News of the new era that dawned in him, so Christ sends us into that same world with that same mission.

Let our dealings with each other this week then transparently bear the marks of this identity. Let our discussions be marked by patience, understanding, goodwill, forbearance, forgiveness, charity and discipline. And may our work together set forward Christ's mission and God's kingdom.

Amen

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