

**THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE ELECTION SYNOD
BY THE RIGHT REVEREND DOCTOR PETER STUART
SATURDAY 14TH SEPTEMBER 2013
AT BISHOP TYRRELL ANGLICAN COLLEGE IN MINMI**

Members of Synod

WIYALITA YIRRI YIRRI – “We gather to speak in a sacred way”.

Our hearts and minds are now turned again to address what is essential for our shared life. We do not have a diocesan bishop and we are incomplete until we do. By circumstances of our history our government as a church can continue without a diocesan for an Administrator can exercise the constitutional powers of the diocesan. By circumstances of having an assistant bishop as the Administrator we have been able to sustain that element of our life that is reserved to those in episcopal orders. But, we are limited in what we can undertake, for example we cannot set a forward vision. So, it is right that we turn our hearts and minds again to the work of discernment knowing that the diocesan and national Anglican family is praying with us as we gather.

In April we met as a Synod and endeavoured to elect from five nominees. In May we changed our election rules. Now we gather again. When nominations closed there were two people who had been put forward but one has subsequently withdrawn. If it is of our mind to elect Bishop Greg Thompson, currently the Bishop of the Northern Territory, we should do so today. If it is not then under either of the options outlined in the ordinance we will meet again no later than mid-December.

We have, as a Synod, said that the work of electing a bishop is something that we want to do in this way. Given that this is our express wish, we should do our task, on behalf of the whole diocese, with glad hearts and prayerful diligence, celebrating that we have been called to this ministry.

In our work we must respect the nominee and his family being alert to the vulnerability that such a process brings with it. In our work we should be looking for and listening to those things that enable us make a decision in line with God's will.

It is essential that we respect the different approaches that members of Synod will have in reaching their decisions. Some work with intuition and are assessing the mood, others work with detailed information, some are highly analytical needing time to turn over in their minds what they have heard and others process things through a field of values. Some have come with their minds made up or will make their decision quickly. Some will take time to ponder the information. Each in their own way is waiting on the Lord. As the Synod we need to move with sufficient speed but also make sure a sufficient number are ready to express their mind.

Under the processes that operate today there will be a video presentation followed by a verbal presentation from two people. After this, members of Synod may ask questions which will be answered by the nominator, who may confer with others. When the time for questions has concluded there will be time for speeches. Members may only speak once. This includes the two people who made the verbal presentation but there is no right of reply speech. Once we adopt the motion to proceed to the election we will move to prayer. In a very real sense our final step is to listen to God after listening to each other.

The Synod has various mechanisms available to it. I would encourage us not to resort to them too quickly but they are there if we look like we are getting stuck. We can move into committee, we can meet in separate houses and we can take a break. When we vote we must be confident that we have heard sufficient before moving to discernment. This does not mean that we will have an answer to every question or that all the questions will have been answered to the questioners' satisfaction.

I understand that we must work together in order that we may discern our common mind. I will be interpreting the ordinances, standing orders and custom from the perspective that as the primary decision making body we should have the best chance of reaching the decisions we want to make but once we have gone through a decision gate we should keep moving. Above all I know that we are seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

At the special session of Synod I warned against judging a Synod by how eirenic it is. Conflict and debate is not necessarily unholy. Our outcomes must be that we have treated our nominee well and discerned together whether he is called to be our diocesan bishop.

As we work together we must feel able to ask discerning questions. Our processes increase the vulnerability for a nominee, for all answers are by proxy and a nominee does not get to speak directly for themselves. Synod should not groan when comfortable or uncomfortable questions are asked or statements made. We can expect that all is done in a Christlike manner with honesty and integrity both within the chamber, around the urn and if some should decide to text each other. It is not a requirement that something is said only once but we need to be cautious about repetition. We need to be careful with one another for we gather as the Body of Christ.

Since the special session of Synod in May, I have become aware of some possible conflict between the two houses with some laity expressing a concern that "the clergy weren't listening to us" to which some clergy have said "we were but we didn't agree with you". I am sure there have been a whole lot of variations on this theme. Synod is a bicameral body which for the sake of the church and convenience normally meets as one chamber. We make provision for the houses to meet separately and are obliged to vote separately whenever as few as eight members of a house ask for it. In some votes, like the vote for a bishop, we have made voting by houses mandatory.

In electing a Bishop we could have followed some of the approaches of other dioceses. We could create an electoral college comprising all the members of the synod and do away with the houses. We could have a committee to elect on our behalf. But, despite some difficult synods with complex content, we have chosen the synodal path. We have also affirmed the importance of a 2/3rds majority of each house coming to agreement. In this we have said that neither house can out vote the other and a substantial majority is the best way of affirming the new bishop's ministry amongst us. Again, there are alternatives but we have not chosen them.

I think it will be important for us as a synod at some time in the future to consider some of these alternatives. Our processes are now so public and the Bishop Nomination Board is given very limited capacity to help the Synod in its discernment. Sadly not every member of Synod is careful about the way they describe Synod discussions such that nominees, their families and people in the community have a rich sense of some Synod conversations but devoid of the context. These factors alone make it a risky venture for people to enter the discernment journey with us thus possibly reducing the number of people prepared to do so.

Our task today is to honour Greg Thompson for allowing us the privilege of exploring his call with us and to discern together whether he is called to be the 13th Bishop of Newcastle. He has already accepted and been affirmed in the call to lead God's mission and ministry by example. He has already embraced and been embraced in the vocation

- of caring for the Christ's pastors and for those in need
- of exercising Godly leadership and maintaining wise discipline
- of promoting peace and unity among God's people
- of encouraging obedience to Christ
- of encouraging faithfulness to God's Word - teaching and proclaiming the Christian faith
- of presiding over the worship of the church
- of exercising care in the calling and appointing of clergy

for he is a Bishop in the Church of God.

To be the Bishop of Newcastle is to express the vocation of bishop in a particular context. The Bishop of Newcastle has a direct pastoral, guiding and governance relationship with 62 incumbents, 4 school principals, 2 agency heads, the Diocesan Business Manager, the Director of Professional Standards, the Diocesan Council and the Trustees. The Bishop of Newcastle relates not only to incumbents but to all clergy in active ministry whether stipended or serving in local mission as well as to ministry teams called as part of the vision of becoming ministering communities in mission and in other ways. We have around \$1 billion in assets though much of this is tied to land, churches, halls and rectories. We have thousands of people participating each week in worship, ministry and mission. As a diocese we have grown to expect our bishops (the diocesan and assistant) to be present most Sundays of the year in parish communities and to take an active part in ordination formation, Cursillo, NSTM and clergy education. We expect our bishops to speak well on our behalf even if we disagree with them. We look to our bishops to represent us in the community and to offer leadership in the public debates. We get to know our bishops very closely and want to see and share in their journey of deeper relationship with Christ.

You will have noticed that I have not spelt out the particular issues facing the Diocese. Our context as an election synod is that we met yesterday as an ordinary synod and so, to some extent, have touched on those concerns. I think our discernment should be less focussed on the particular issues and most concerned with the capacity for godly leadership. We are not electing a diocesan bishop for today's concerns alone, as pressing as they might be. We are not looking to a diocesan only to meet us in our story and affirm it. Rather we are looking to a diocesan who is able to offer insight and challenge who has the character and competency to engage with us in the demands of the day but also to lead us in Christ as the opportunities and needs change. We are looking for the diocesan to carry our tradition and continue to make us part of a bigger pilgrimage.

All sorts of people have a view about how a bishop should exercise his or her ministry. There are two which I think are very helpful for us right now. Gary Bouma writes

It is not easy being a bishop. Everyone has a different view of how the role should be played. The cross-pressures are enormous, the responsibilities among the most onerous of any leader and the guidelines available never adequate to specify satisfactorily the course of action or the way to pursue it. The decisions a bishop makes both as to how to be a bishop in general and how to be bishop in each situation are lonely decisions, there being few with whom to share these issues. Being bishop - being prophet, priest, servant-king and shepherd - requires wisdom, courage, willingness to listen, to learn and to change. What a tall order! No wonder we are called to pray daily for them.
(Bouma, Gary *On Being Bishop* in Cadwallader, Alan (ed) EPISCOPACY - Views from the Antipodes, ABCE 1994 p 61)

Stephen Ames writes

When the Church gathers in the power of the Spirit, and speaks and acts through its bishops to invoke the Spirit on one who is to become a bishop, then the creative action of the Spirit makes that person a bearer, representative and sign of the character of the whole Church ... The being of the bishop will only be truly realised in (bringing forth) relationships of mutuality and reciprocity reflective of the divine life and in upholding a "holy order" that sustains such relationships. In this way, the bishop bears and represents the character of the whole Church as it is and as it is called and gifted by Christ. (Ames, Stephen *Real or Chimere Episcopacy?* in Cadwallader, Alan (ed) EPISCOPACY - Views from the Antipodes, ABCE 1994 pp 39 - 40)

We have already been deeply at prayer and begun the work of listening to one another. It is a privilege and great responsibility that has been entrusted to us as a Synod. Our work stands in a long and sacred tradition. In 1 Samuel 16, Samuel has gone to Jesse. As each son passed Samuel said "no" to Jesse's increased frustration. Seven sons passed by before the youngest one was looked at. This one who was striking in appearance was the one of which The Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.' Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward.

We are in an interesting process. Ours in no straight line - we have been around a few circles and will again. In the right time we will hear the call "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one" with the confidence that the spirit of the Lord will come mightily upon the one God has called and chosen.

And now to God who is powerful and mighty be power and glory for ever. Amen.

KAIYU KAN KAIWAL KILLI BIN BIN YANTI KATAI

I commend to the Synod the work of electing our Bishop.