

# CHARGE TO SYNOD

## Presidential Address to the Second Session of the Fifty First Synod of the Diocese of Newcastle

*The Rt Rev'd Gregory Thompson*

BISHOP OF NEWCASTLE

## Loving Our Neighbour™

### INTRODUCTION

When we formally adopted revised liturgies as the Anglican Church of Australia in 1978, we moved from reciting the Ten Commandments each Sunday as part of the Communion Service to reciting the Two Great Commandment. In most parishes, week in and week out, as we gathered for worship we were reminded that *Our Lord Jesus Christ said: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* These great words of Jesus recounted by Mark in his Gospel echo the great teaching of the Old Testament in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. We hear the call to honour God, who has given us so much, with our entire being. The covenant relationship we enter into with God is that with thankful hearts we worship him and express to the world around his love, his peace and his justice. It is a loss that with the changes permitted by the 1995 *A Prayer Book for Australia* many parishes have become less practiced to hearing this ancient call to love God and love our neighbour on a regular basis. Our gathering as Synod must always be shaped by our desire to fully love and serve God who we have come to know in Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. In this Synod address, I want to spend most of our time in focussing on the second part of these commandments – loving our neighbour as ourselves.

In my presidential address last year, I focussed on the pressing needs of the diocesan family and introduced the idea of **"safe uncertainty"** from the social sciences. I shared with you some of the things I had learnt about the Diocese. Together we recognised that the certainty that we yearn for may not exist and may never have existed. As we live among people who have experienced world wars, the cold war, genocide, and racism we accept that the certainty often looked for is a myth. This myth is eroded further when we acknowledge the impact of globalisation and technological advances. We also recognised that to negotiate the maze of uncertainty we need some levels of assurance and comfort. We need to know that we are safe. I suggested to you last year that there were aspects of our diocesan life that were unsafe.

Since then I have led the Diocese in understanding that a significant reason for this lack of safety was a culture in which the abuse of children and young people went unnoticed and unaddressed. We did not hear the cries of our children and we did not see the sins of the perpetrators. Our diocesan culture was blind to what was going in our midst and silenced those who tried to speak up. By **"facing the past and shaping a healthy future"** we are beginning to name our cultural issues and address them.

One of the ways I have invited the clergy and laity of the Diocese to face the past, enable safety and shape a healthy future, has been to



introduce the work of Parker J Palmer and the Centre of Courage and Renewal. This work, centred on **"circles of trust"**, seeks to create safe spaces where people can explore those things that will enable them to strengthen their vocation as they integrate more deeply their soul and their roles as disciple, spouse, parent, worker and the like. They are encouraged to embrace their shadows and limitations as well as their light and their gifts. The circles of trust principles or touchstones are central to creating communities of wellbeing in which each person is invited to deeper wellbeing.

This year I want to focus this presidential address on other people. My call is for us to be **"an outward looking people"**. I want us to be more acutely aware of the needs of people in our communities and across the globe. I want us to be alert to the last three marks of mission for the Anglican Communion that invite us to embrace the whole of life –

- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

I want us in this Diocese to renew our sense of participating in God's mission by participating in his loving purpose towards people. In this address, with the assistance of a number of people, I want to direct our attention towards God's concern for those in need and his desire that they may know freedom and justice. ►

## OUR NEIGHBOUR – THE SURVIVOR OF SEXUAL ABUSE

I come to my next topic with a very heavy heart and a deep sense of the gravity that our conversation will bring. I want to reflect further on the culture that allowed sexual abuse to exist in our Diocese. I am going to do this by looking at the experience in another part of the Anglican Communion. My focus is on the victims and survivors of abuse and their families. As a community of the Gospel we are also aware of those accused of causing harm and their families.

Some recent events in the Church of England will remind us that one offender may have many victims. That offender may be popular, well connected and abuse over a number of years. We will see how much bravery and persistence is required for victims to come forward.

A few weeks ago, Peter Ball, a retired bishop from the Church of England, was sentenced to nearly three years in prison after pleading guilty to two counts of indecent assault. He also pleaded guilty to one charge of misconduct in public office, relating to the sexual abuse of 16 young men over a period of 15 years from 1977 to 1992. All of these criminal offences occurred while he was a bishop. Two more allegations of offending won't be put before the court. Overall, he offended against at least 20 young men by getting close to them by inviting them to explore their religious life and vocation to ordained ministry. As one of the leading police on the case said, he "used religion as a cloak behind which to carry out his grooming activity". When Ball finally admitted to his wrongdoing, it was after investigations over a number of years.

This conduct rightly shocks and scandalises us. Our anger is intensified when we hear from one of his victims that the abuse "stayed with me throughout my life's journey and even this far down the track [the investigation into him] doesn't feel like there's any real closure." This man's struggles intensified because it took a long time for people to be convinced the events actually took place. That victim will not see justice as he took his life in 2012.

I recount these facts because they are from a long way away and they are in the public domain. As we hear them, we

realise that for nearly 40 years people were victimised by someone they should have been able to trust. They were victimised again by systems and cultures that did not hear their voices.

In 2012, the BBC produced a television report on the Diocese of Chichester. We played this at a professional development day last year. As a group of clergy, we were confronted by what we saw and together realised that much of what was reported could have been said of our Diocese. We had cultures that did not respect the sanctity, dignity and wellbeing of our children. We had cultures that dissuaded people from speaking of their experience. We had cultures that protected abusers.

I am pleased to lead a Diocese where a number of initiatives have been taken, most especially by Bishop Farran and the diocesan leadership team. I am aware of the undermining they faced. I am committed to building on that work as we create a culture of transparency, safety and care. This approach has always included offers of pastoral care and counselling to all involved in investigations – complainants and respondents. The process of facing the past and shaping a healthy future is bearing fruit. We have had people who have been willing to come forward and speak of their experience. As confronting as this can be for us, it requires great bravery on their part. We must continue to hear what people are saying to us. We need to have practices in our parishes that affirm that children will be seen and heard in our churches and in our families. We must welcome our children and listen to them. We must also hear from the children of the past. We are going to do more of that today.

At the end of this address, two people, well known to us, will speak of their experience of abuse as young people. Rather than speak directly they have recorded an interview. This is troubling listening and I am so grateful that they have been willing to speak so that we might learn. ►





## OUR NEIGHBOUR – THE SURVIVOR OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Today people everywhere are struggling through life with damaged emotions, too often these emotions eat away at people who live with their terrible, shameful secret that is so often swept under the carpet – the reality of violence in their home.

One survivor spent eighteen years of her life in an abusive environment and as soon as she got away from the situation, she acted as though nothing was wrong. She never told anyone what had gone wrong in her private life. She realised she was an expert at building walls and stuffing things into dark corners, pretending they never happened.

They are many steps that people can take towards survival and receive healing. One of the first steps is to face the truth. One can't be set free whilst living in denial and pretending that the violence and abuse of power didn't happen. So often people are afraid of what people will think. Afraid of being rejected, misunderstood, or unloved by those they care about or that they might have a different opinion if they really knew all about the person. Verbalising to another by drawing upon knowledge, understanding and insight of those past situations can be of great benefit.

To share with someone that can be trusted, old hurts and offences that have been buried and hidden away and facing the past, can be the beginning of a new life.

Another approach is to recognise that humans have basic rights and to believe in that truth with the right to have thoughts and feelings acknowledged, the right to live a life free from fear, the right to live a life free from physical and emotional threats and violence, the right to be heard and treated with respect and the right to be loved and cherished.

As Christians, our call is love, and it is love that connects us to life because the presence of genuine care and love for each other reveals the presence of God.

Nelson Mandela captured a profound truth about the nature of love. "Love that comes from the heart connects us to all God's children. It also connects us to his creation – our world. God's heart of love moves us from the isolation of self to a connection with life that cannot allow any ultimate divisions or categories."

Love is everything that makes us human and so new experiences, new levels of love to give to others, helps the survivor of Domestic violence to begin to move towards being loved themselves. Our humanity in essence is love, because God is love, and because we are made in God's image, love is who we are. ►

## OUR NEIGHBOUR – THE HOMELESS PERSON

As we recognise the significance of sexual abuse in the home and domestic violence across the nation and in our communities we quickly learn of their impact. When people flee their homes for safety they often have nowhere to go. Australia has been experiencing high levels of homelessness for more than a decade. At the last census, there was an estimated 105,200 and closer to home we estimate the number of homeless people across our diocese to be about 5000.

I asked Samaritans to provide an indication of the work they are doing with homeless people. As I list some of the responses, you will quickly recognise the extent of the problem and the many ways it affects people's lives. Samaritans is responding to this crisis in a number of ways:

- As a major emergency relief provider in the region, our centres are often a point of contact for people who may be sleeping rough, living in cars, living temporarily with a friend (couch surfing) or leaving an institution. Our 120 emergency relief or ER volunteers support approximately 50 families each month as best they can with food vouchers, referrals to emergency accommodation and homelessness care packages. These care packages, consisting of toiletries and other essential items you need when you have nowhere to live, are supplied by Mothers Union groups and parishes.
- In the Hunter region on any given night, we support some 220 young people who are homeless. We support these young people in our 2 refuges, 11 transition houses and provide ongoing case work support as they move towards more independent living. When those young people come to us, approximately 90% will be unemployed, 60% will have mental health issues and 50% will have lived in a home experiencing family violence.
- Closely associated with this service, we have a 'Reconnect' program where our social workers engage with young people at risk of homelessness and support them to stay at home, get back to school and connect with their local community.
- Also in Newcastle, Samaritans offers a 'Foyer' model of accommodation for homeless young people who are undertaking vocational education. It's hard to escape homelessness if you don't have a job and the Samaritans Foyer helps the young person to set and achieve vocational goals. A group of 12 volunteer mentors meet with the students each fortnight to share their wisdom and knowledge, to listen kindly to the young person as they struggle to get ahead and encourage them in their education and career development.
- Samaritans has recently taken on the management of the Women's Refuge in Taree. The agency also manages a number of transition houses in the area where mothers and their children can begin to rebuild their lives after their traumatic experiences. These are essential services as we have often in the past come across situations where mother

and children have had to return to a violent home because they cannot find or afford anywhere else to live. The services in Taree receive ongoing support from the parishes of Taree & Foster /Tuncurry, who provide donations of clothing, food, household items and toiletries.

- In September, Samaritans celebrated the 20th Anniversary of Friendship House, a small, unfunded half way house service for men leaving prison. The service is staffed by volunteers who visit the house daily, spend time with the men as they make the difficult move back to community living. Almost one third of the residents are Aboriginal. Sadly, the imprisonment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people has almost doubled since the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody in 1987 and recidivism rates are high. Nationally, over 40% of men and women leaving prison become homeless and re-offend. We do better than this in Newcastle because of Friendship House.
- In Lake Macquarie, Margaret Stibbard Close is a block of units which provide good quality, long-term rental accommodation for men who were formerly homeless – a most cost effective model of helping homeless people called Housing First.
- A second major cause of homelessness in Australia is the lack of affordable and appropriate housing. For this reason, Samaritans has established a new social enterprise named Samaritans Housing. In Samaritans Housing, we will manage properties provided by government, ethical investors and properties owned by Samaritans itself. We believe this initiative has the potential to develop extensive affordable housing options across the diocese in years to come.
- And finally, each year on Christmas Day, Samaritans hosts approximately 1000 people for a very special Christmas Lunch. Guests include rough sleepers, people living in cars, many living in very substandard boarding houses, and many who are just plain lonely. The day is funded from donations and sponsorships and some 300 volunteers help out. The brief period of fellowship they share together is a wonderful experience for all who attend. All children and adults receive a gift as we seek to ensure that the joy of Christmas reaches the most marginalised in our community. ►



## OUR NEIGHBOUR – THE PERSON LIVING ON A LOW INCOME

Would you be able to live on \$600 per week? How would you go if from that \$600 you had to rent accommodation for yourself and two children? What would you go without?

Unless we are living that way, it is hard to picture what it would be like. Yet, this is the reality for many people in our Diocese. We are most familiar with the age pension as a good number of parishioners receive it. We are probably not as familiar with those who receive Newstart, Youth Allowance, single parenting payment or the disability support pension. Their struggle is greater than aged pensioners. As at 30 June, nearly 1 in 10 people in our region received this support from the Commonwealth Government - 38,885 on Newstart and 15,244 on parenting support as a single parent .

If I ask you to create a mental picture of this group of people I am sure all sorts of images are likely to come to mind. Our media often concentrates on them. It is likely that you may at least wonder whether some on Newstart are bludgers or whether those on disability support are rorting the system. You are likely to ask these questions even though we already have one of the tightest systems of welfare supervision in the world. These doubts have been seeded in our minds as part of political discourse.

An alternate picture is of the young woman who has escaped horrendous violence from her partner. She has taken her two young children and is trying to rebuild her life after years in which her self-confidence and self-esteem have been eroded. Another picture is of the man involved in manufacturing that has closed like all the other industries in his area. He would like to work but isn't sure that long term work is available even if he moves across the country - far from family, friends and support. Another image is of the refugee, once resettled, trying to make their way in their new country.

As a nation, we accept that there are always people who will be in need of support. We must reject approaches that suggest that life is luxurious for them. We must reject language that denigrates or diminishes them.

Fairfax economics editor, Peter Martin helps understand this. He highlights the work of British economist John Hills who "reckons that in Britain at least most people get back roughly what they put into the welfare system". He writes that, "Over a lifetime ... we fund pensions while we work and

then receive them when we retire. At any moment we can lose our jobs or lose our health or become disabled. Later we can recover."

Life on pensions and allowances can be very difficult. The 2015 Samaritans Rental Affordability Snapshot provides an insight into the difficulties faced by people receiving government support . Samaritans surveyed the rental properties in the local government areas which form part of the Diocese. In April, they collected data on the 4107 advertised properties. They wanted to work out whether the properties were affordable and appropriate for people living on low incomes. Only 442 satisfied the criteria for people on some type of income support payment. In 9 of the 11 local government areas there was no affordable or appropriate rental properties for:

- a Single person on Newstart Allowance;
- a Single person in a share house on Youth Allowance;
- a Single person over 18 years receiving Youth Allowance.

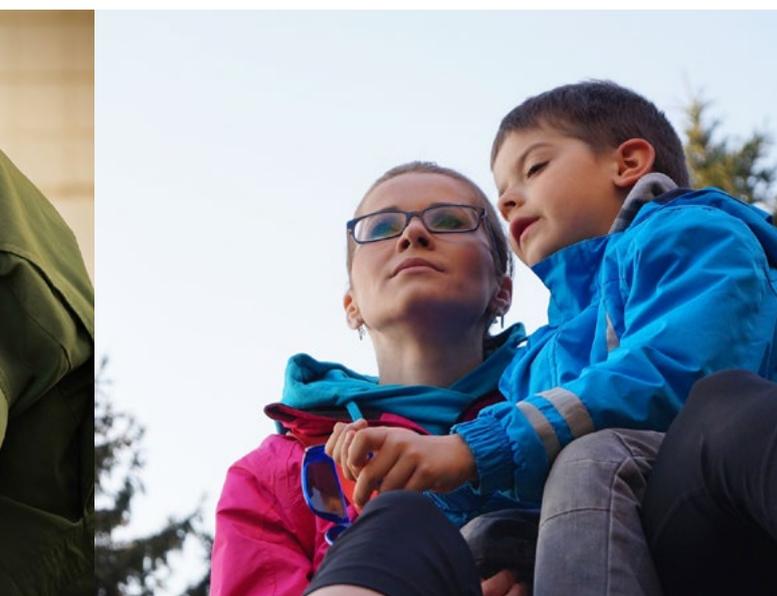
Eight local government areas had no affordable and appropriate rental properties for a couple with two children on Newstart allowance.

Anglicare Australia has been looking at changes in living standards for a broad range of family types in Australia between 2004 and 2014 . It found that living standards have increased in Australia over the past 10 years but that growth has been uneven. It wanted to look forward so they also looked at what living standards will be by 2024. It estimated that living standards will change much less in the coming years.

Anglicare Australia found that the gap between the richest and poorest had increased over the last ten years and is projected to widen further in the next ten years. Couples with children have done better in recent years than single parents. This looks likely to continue into the future. Anglicare Australia indicates that "for low income families the projections suggest families with children and without children are expected to have lower living standards than today by around 3 per cent. The main factor in reduced living standards relates to recent Federal budget cuts." A key finding in the report was that over the next ten years "allowance and single parent pension families will experience a serious reduction in living standards ... the main drivers are relatively lower payments due to changes in the most recent two Federal Budgets and policies in place that see payments such as family payments and allowances only increase with the CPI."

I encourage parishes to be alert to the needs of people on allowances and receiving parenting support in their communities. I would very much like to see Samaritans and parishes identify more opportunities for partnerships in responding to local need.

I am hoping that changes in our Federal Government will lead to more thoughtful and compassionate attention to those who are most in need in our community.



## OUR NEIGHBOUR – THE REFUGEE

It would not have been possible, in recent years, to reflect on the biblical narrative without being conscious of the plight of Asylum Seekers and Refugees.

The Hebrew Scriptures are clear "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 22:21) as are the teachings of Christ, "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me," (Matthew 25:34).

The Christian tradition is clear "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2). The biblical concept of hospitality is to love the stranger and so it is difficult to understand how so many Australians, who identify as Christians, can support the human rights abuses being perpetrated upon Asylum Seekers by current policies that continue to enjoy bipartisan political support. The most vulnerable people in the world are being used as a political wedge.

The difficulties that Christians have in engaging this issue was evident during the ecumenical "Give us a Sign" campaign, where churches were encouraged to use their street signs to raise awareness of this humanitarian crisis. The disappointing lack of participation in this campaign was indicative of this struggle.

The number of forcibly displaced people worldwide is now approaching 60 million. Australia has a current annual intake of just 13,750 increasing moderately over the next few years. In coming months there will be a one off intake of 12,000 refugees from Syria.

Surely we can do better. If the majority of Australian Christians were to find their voice and demand more humane treatment of Asylum Seekers the policies would change within a matter of days.

In the mean time we now abandon over 600 Refugees, men, woman and children to the failing State of Nauru. The Nauruan people do not want the "newcomers", women are raped, children abused and the rule of law is notional at best. Nauru cannot offer any hope of employment, adequate housing or medical services. The United Nations has confirmed that Manus Island is a place of human rights abuses and brutality and yet inspectors are not given unfettered access to staff.

The current government policy is based on deterrence by deprivation. It is inhumane and should be unacceptable to civilised people. The rhetoric that this is necessary to stop people drowning is not supported by experts in the field or the UNHCR.

As the Syrian Refugees begin to move into our communities Diocesan Agencies and parishes will be encouraged to seek partnerships with other community groups to welcome and support these most vulnerable people.

It can only be hoped that personal contact with refugees and the opportunity to hear their stories will inspire our community to rise up and demand more humane treatment of the world's most vulnerable. ►





## OUR NEIGHBOUR – AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

Dr Keith Joseph, the Dean of Darwin recounts that from his office window he can see an old and beautiful frangipani tree. He tells of leaving his office and experiencing the exotic fragrance wafting across the lawns, and its delicate white flowers are a tropical snow on the grass. However, as the seasons rotate, the tree changes. At the end of the Dry Season it is quite stressed, and loses its leaves and flowers. But equally, it is also stressed at the height of the wet season. Too much water, too much heat and it also starts to die. To survive and to flourish it needs to be in the right soil, with the right amount of sunshine and water.

That which applies to the frangipani tree, also applies to the Pacific Islands. Take, for example, the coral atoll of Ontong Java in the north of the Solomon Islands. This peaceful and beautiful place is home to a rich Polynesian culture, which has flourished on this outlying atoll for over a thousand years. But now, like the frangipani tree, it is stressed. The fresh water does not come like it used to; the climate is changing, the rain is no longer consistent. And the salt water is rising, the sea surges across the atoll in storms at high tide, destroying homes and food gardens. The atoll is starting to die.

So, where do the people go? There is some land set aside for them on the Melanesian island of Malaita. But this is no easy solution. Malaita is already overpopulated; and land issues were at the heart of the civil war in the Solomon Islands from 1998 to 2003. But the people of Malaita, who are quite different in culture from the Polynesians, see the people of Ontong Java as their neighbours, their brothers and sisters in Christ. They offer the land not because it is easy, but because it is something they can do for those who are threatened. It is an act of Christian love and sacrifice.

But even suppose the people of Ontong Java do move to Malaita, and can they peaceably acquire land. What next?

Their leaders and clergy ponder bigger question: how do his people maintain their culture in a foreign land? How do his people even continue to exist when in exile? Like the frangipani tree, they need to be in the right soil, with the right water and sunshine. But because of climate change, this cannot be so. It is not just their homes that are threatened: it is their culture and their existence as a people. We might be able to save the individuals – but how do we prevent the cultural genocide that seems inevitable?

If the people of Malaita see themselves as the neighbours of the people of Ontong Java, giving to them what is most precious – their land – then who are we in Australia? The Solomon Islanders are our geographical neighbours, to be sure. But they are also our brothers and sisters who share the same ocean, and who did not cause the problems that they are now facing. We caused those problems. But what has been the Australian response? Some miniscule foreign aid? Have we made any real attempt to cut our pollution and CO2 emissions? Our response has been laughable. We dare not make any real sacrifices; the economy is sacrosanct. "No Australian jobs must be lost, the market must be allowed to be free". But of course, there is no economy without the environment. If you are living on a wet dot in the ocean it does not matter how much money you have. But it is even worse than that. We have the money; and our neighbours in the Pacific have the salt water up to their ankles. If the people of Malaita can sacrifice their land for the people of Ontong Java, what are we willing to sacrifice for the people of the Pacific? Are we, their neighbours, prepared to make any real sacrifice at all? Or should we just be honest and concede that we are driven by greed and mammon? If we truly worship God, then let us make the sacrifices needed to help our brothers and sisters in the South Pacific. For they surely are our neighbours. ►

## LOVING OUR NEIGHBOUR – MISSION ACTION

One of the most converting aspects of the New Testament and especially the Gospels is the record of Jesus' concern for those marginalised by the religious and civil leadership of Israel at the time. The Gospel places before us Jesus' concern for widows, children, prisoners, sinners, the injured and the ill. God revealed in Christ is a missional God who calls the church to share with and engage in His mission.

Last year I asked every parish to develop mission action plans. By now, every parish should nearly have completed this work but I recognise in a number of communities this has moved more than slowly than we hoped.

As part of these plans, every one of our faith communities should be looking at the community in which it is set as well as further afield. All of our mission action plans should be identifying a way in which local people in need receive our care and support. All of our mission action plans should incorporate clear intentions to support the work of an Anglican mission agency committed to the relief of distress in another part of the globe. These features of a parish's work should not be novelties but a recurring commitment to the love of neighbour.

Our communities should also be looking at Fresh Expressions of church life. The Diocese embraced such a call in 2009 and it remains true for us now. In September, the UK Fresh Expressions leader and author Mike Moynagh visited our Diocese, to engage with us in conversation about mission and Fresh Expressions of church. This visit proved to be a valuable opportunity for us to re-engage with the underlying principles that have influenced our work in this Diocese.

At the heart of Fresh Expressions are the principles of mission, community and faith.

Fresh expressions are about community – bringing people together in community, around a shared interest or theme. The local community is best placed to identify what might be possible and local initiatives develop so much better than those which come from the top down.

Fresh expressions are about faith – ultimately about gathering as a community of faith, which is an essential element of their life. Often when we have explored a new mission or ministry we have been very good at loving and serving the people in our communities and gathering them together. But we have left the matter of what happens next to chance.

I want to encourage you again in the work of listening well to your communities – and then keeping going, intentionally, past the formation of community to faith formation.

Here is how Mike Moynagh depicts it.



I encourage every parish in the Diocese, as part of their Mission Action Plan, to be working on a project that engages with the local community in a way that brings the gospel of the love of God in Jesus Christ into that community.

Where the gospel forms part of the engagement with the community there will be two possibilities:

1. That some of those touched by the gospel may be encouraged to come and join us in existing expressions of worship.
2. But equally that some of those touched by the gospel may be encouraged to establish new worshipping communities in their own right – Fresh Expressions of Church.

I am encouraged by those who have already expressed interest in continuing this conversation. ►

## LOVING OUR NEIGHBOUR – BEING CLEAR WHO WE ARE

Finally, I want to present to you some work of the Diocese of Brisbane. That Diocese set itself the task of cultivating and celebrating its Anglican identity. With a vast network of parishes, schools and community services it is seen and sees itself as an integral part of society, working to care for and improve the life of the community. They looked for a way in which they could with one, consistent and considered design, ensure clear understanding and give a sense of belonging to all engaged with our Church.

*I would like to play a video showing their work.*

The Diocese of Brisbane is very happy to grant us permission to use this logo and have provided support to help us make it our own. A logo does not replace the Diocesan coat of arms. They are still used on the formal documents and formal occasions. A logo helps people quickly identify who we are. The staff of the Diocese of Brisbane have helped make a version of the logo that reflects our Diocese incorporating the red and the gold from the Diocesan coat of arms.



In this increasingly pluralistic age, we need simple means for people to identify who we are and where we are. Many of you will have noticed that the Catholic Diocese of Maitland and Newcastle have done something similar.

In the 1970s, parishes adopted the Diocesan coat of arms in many ways such as on notice boards and the like. I hope that the Synod might welcome this resource and that over the coming years we will see its use across the Diocese as a means of proclaiming our presence in the communities we love and serve.

## FINAL WORDS

This will be the last Synod that Mr Cec Shevels attends as Chief Executive of Samaritans. There will be occasions early next year when the Samaritans and Diocesan communities are able to acknowledge his outstanding leadership in justice and welfare ministries. I want to place on record my affirmation of the work that he has done and the spirituality with which he has demonstrated the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Last year the Synod met without the input of Archdeacon Stephen Pullin who was quite unwell. His health has now improved but the medical advice was that stresses and travel associated with the demanding role of Archdeacon of Newcastle might cause his health to deteriorate. There was a fitting farewell in the Parish of Mayfield in September.

I place on record my appreciation to all of the Diocesan Office staff. Our Diocesan Business Manager, Mr John Cleary together with Mrs Linda Wilson, Parish Services Manager and their teams who serve the Diocese well. I want to particularly thank Alison Dalmazzone and Danielle Rodway for the support they provide.

Thank you to Bishop Peter Stuart for his leadership and wisdom and for Archdeacons Roulston and Copeman for their support to the Diocese.

And now let us continue our work with the command of Christ before us. Let us love *the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all of our strength. Let us love our neighbour as ourself.* Let us do this first by hearing from two survivors. ■