Anglican Church Newcastle

# THIRD Session of the Fifty-Fourth SYNOD 2025

Saturday 28 June 2025

# Address from the President

## Rt Rev Dr Peter Stuart

14th Bishop of Newcastle

Newcastle

**ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA – DIOCESE OF NEWCASTLE**

**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE SYNOD**

**"A Church Becoming: Growing with Love and Courage"**

## Our world

Just over three weeks ago, the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem released a statement following the bombing of their hospital, the Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza City. They wrote,

> *We bid Christians and others of goodwill around the world to join us in their continued prayers and efforts to bring this conflict to a speedy end, leading to the release of all captives, the more comprehensive treatment of the wounded, the feeding of the desperately hungry, and the rebuilding of tens of thousands of homes and hundreds of public facilities that have been destroyed. Only in this way, we believe, can healing begin, and the pathway towards a just and lasting peace open for all of those living in our beloved Holy Land. (Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem 5 June 2025)*

My first impulse is to be a pacifist. I would prefer people to resolve their conflict by non-violent means. The cycle of violence is never productive overall. Violence begets violence.

Rightly, people respond, "what are we to do when basic human rights are being denied?", "how should we respond when the innocent are held captive and tortured?", and "how do we confront the evils of greed, degradation, and injustice?"

I have overwhelming concern for this emerging situation. Right now, there seems that a fragile cease fire may be in effect. We have seen events shift almost daily.

I want us to focus on the impact of these events on ordinary people. With frightening speed, the use of violence as a means of social control has reemerged. Just a few years ago, there was growing confidence in promoting dignity and inclusion as accepted human rights. That now seems more fragile.

My heart is deeply grieved by this situation. I pray that God will knock on the hearts of all who can make a positive difference in Sudan and Southern Sudan, Kashmir, Myanmar, Ukraine, Gaza and Israel, Afghanistan, and Iran. I pray that God will inspire people to use their wisdom, intelligence, skill, and ingenuity to make for lasting peace. A peace where all people are shown dignity and given the opportunity to use their God given gifts for good and to the full.

The just war theological tradition may still help governments approve the use of violence. But our witness as Christians must take a new shape. We follow a Christ who bore violence without retaliation – revealing that true peace and justice come not through domination, but through costly, uncontrolling love.

If our Church wants people to flourish because of our presence, our message must speak to life as people are living it. We live in a world of fast choices and fractured connections. People want love and peace. They want meaning. And they want to be seen and dignified.

We believe the Spirit of God is already present in the world — not waiting inside our buildings, but walking ahead of us, in the streets, in homes, in hearts full of longing and uncertainty. The Spirit of God is leading into all truth and into all peace. We are called to be interpreters of grace. Bearers of hope. And this call sits at the heart of everything we do.

I believe that some of what we stand for as a Diocese - especially our embrace of the leadership and ministry of both women and men and the full inclusion of all people - are essential to the future of community life. Our community is safer, better, and more vibrant when the distinctives of all people are celebrated to the full. Our vision should be inspired by the work of the Spirit and the call to see the beautiful diversity of God's creation.

And what we have discovered is this: *Flourishing does not come through control. It comes through loving companionship*. It comes through trust. Through humility. Through courage. Through acceptance. Through hearing stories that don't fit our inherited categories and still knowing they are sacred. This is how we honour the Gospel amidst the complexity of real human lives.

We are trying to become the kind of Church where difference is not a threat, and where the grace of God is not rationed out by those with power. That's the kind of faith that makes sense in the real world — where love is complicated, where lives are marked by pain, and where the Spirit does not wait for us to catch up.

I have focussed on the world because our hearts and minds are there given the circumstances of the last week. I want now to reflect on our local ministry and mission.

**Our Aspirations: First Choice and Expanded Presence**

As a Diocese, we have set two clear aspirations:

1. That people would choose us — our parishes, our schools, our services — because they trust us.
2. That we would grow our impact — to be present in more places where hope is needed.

To grow our footprint is about making a difference in Christ's name. We seek to be bearers of grace by showing up in the messy, beautiful, aching corners of our regions.

Let me tell you what that looked like this year.

- **Hope25** called us to proclaim "hope in an uncertain world." Parishes responded with creativity. Later we will hear some of the stories of what parishes have done. It has been exciting and moving to know that people have been sharing their faith intentionally.

- **Anglican Care has** significantly changed the face of its care. At the beginning of the year it adopted a new approach of preparing and serving its meals which has already been well accepted. It has partnered with a community group to convert a closed facility into housing for older women at risk of homelessness — the fastest growing group in our national housing crisis.
- **Samaritans** marked 40 years of compassionate service. Since 2009 alone, over 113,000 people have received emergency relief. That's 113,000 stories, not numbers. 113,000 moments when kindness and care stood between a person and despair. Samaritans continues its significant work in supporting young people whose mental health is struggling, engaging in early intervention with families in crisis, and supporting children who cannot live in their families of origin.
- Our schools — **MVAC, Scone Grammar, Lakes Grammar**, and **Bishop Tyrrell** — have thrived through a shared offering of faith-based inclusive education focussed on academic success and individual wellbeing.
- Our **Shared Service Team** has continued to develop their capacity to effectively serve a large and complex set of organisations serving a significant geographic area.

Newcastle Anglican is a community that people turn to because we are real. We are people who will stay in conversations when others may walk away.

**Strategic Direction One: Proclaiming the Gospel of Christ**

Our first strategic direction is the proclamation of the Good News of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ.

We don't proclaim by shouting louder. We proclaim by walking closer. We are committed to being companions on the road, as Jesus was the companion to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

Proclamation is not a marketing strategy. It is a way of life rooted in credibility, character, and clarity. In 2024–25:

- **People explored their vocation and new clergy were welcomed.**
- **Parishes embraced Hope25** in fresh, open- hearted ways. People were invited not to programs but to relationship. Some parishes experienced renewal and some parishes saw new people. We learnt something about our call.
- **Our clergy and our huge number of volunteers** offered worship, prayer, companionship and hope. They made real difference in people's lives.
- **Our Communications** team helped us find innovative ways of telling our story. At the end of this year, we know each other better and have a richer sense of how we live our faith.

We are proclaiming the Good news of God as people who believe Christ is present among us. We celebrate that Christ calls us and leads us.

**Strategic Direction Two: Ensuring Viability**

Viability is not about preservation. It is about capability and capacity. It is about becoming a Church that knows that it must bear the weight of the Gospel without collapse.

A recent publication by the National Church Life Survey suggests that the Anglican Church of Australia represents a smaller number of Australians than ever before. We are having to think differently about the way we work.

This trajectory is not new to us. We have seen it coming and have been preparing for it. Viability means we are resourced to do the work that matters. We have to be commercially wise in some areas – without margin there will be no mission. We have to embrace not challenge the expectations put on us by regulators and insurers. We operate with a social licence which, if it ever vanishes, will be hard to recover.

Our work of responding to grave sins of the past through the payment of redress continues. It takes time to complete the journey beginning when a person feels confident enough to put their concerns to a lawyer through to settlement. We currently have 35 open matters. Our minimum estimated shortfall on overall redress funding is $3.8million requiring property sales in the order of $10million.

The parish system is financially fragile. For decades, many have relied on reserves, cut staffing and deferred maintenance. Alongside this, there is an acute shortage of clergy across the Western parts of the Anglican Communion. The Diocesan Council has joined with me in looking at options for the future.

**Strategic Direction Three: Creating Safe Communities**

The third strategic direction is foundational: safety.

Not safety as bureaucracy. Safety as trust. Everyone coming into our orbit as worker person served has a legitimate expectation of returning home safely. Safety is a Gospel imperative.

People will not stay where they do not feel safe. And if we are not safe, we are not faithful.

In 2024–25:

- Every **parish completed safeguarding reviews** — there is a growing culture accepting this work as an expression of Christ's love.
- Reports were taken seriously. Incidents were addressed. Systems were tested and refined.
- Regularly I hear of people saying, "I realise why our screening and training is important." Some of the stories of this are deeply moving.

**Governance and Council Leadership**

We have continued to live into our governance model over the past year.

**Diocesan Council** has exercised the role of witnessing to the hopes and aspirations of the Anglican family as the structures of Newcastle Anglican become more settled. The **NAC Board** continues to bring a skills based approach to our life and work.

During the year both joined with me in authorising an updated **Service Philosophy** — moving us from a "person- centred" to "person- led" focus. This reflects not only a service model but a theology: people are not projects. They are participants who are the best story tellers of their lives. We embraced the concept of what has been named the Platinum Rule – do unto others as they want done unto them.

Both bodies **finalised a Strategic Risk Framework** — giving us shared language to assess where we need to be watchful and where opportunity is emerging. Our approach to risk has improved safety and wellbeing as well as contributing to lower insurance premiums.

Their work is not flashy work. It is the hidden architecture that enables ministry and mission to thrive. It is significant work that is built spreadsheet by row, line by line, policy by policy, relationship by relationship.

**Reconciliation and Justice**

Our Diocesan work of **truth- telling and reconciliation** is deepening.

- Under the leadership of the Reverend Canon **Aunty Di Langham**, we have seen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wisdom brought into the centre of our Diocese.
- Our **Reconciliation Action Plan** is a living document. Story telling and truth sharing continue to happen even when it is uncomfortable to hear.
- We are in early conversation about a **Diocesan Truth and Reconciliation Commission**; a local expression of honesty and healing.

We are seeking to be reconciled to people, and to God, in and by truth.

I was delighted that the Australian community counterbalanced the outcome of the Voice Referendum by outwardly affirming, at the recent election, the cultural necessity of welcoming people to country. There is something life changing for all Australians when we recognise the oldest living culture is part of us and we are part of it.

**Environmental Witness – Becoming Worthy of the Earth**

In 2025, there was a gentle but continued focus on environmental stewardship — not as an optional extra, but as core to what it means to proclaim the Gospel in this time.

- Parishes installed **solar panels**.
- Community gardens were planted.
- Trees were blessed.
- Children were taught the sacred rhythms of land and season.

We are honouring the world God made. It is not just our habitat. We are part of creation that groans in travail waiting for the fulfillment of all that Christ has begun. Creation praises beside us. It teaches us humility and hope. The fifth Mark of Mission — "to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth" — is not an add-on. It is part of who we are.

In many ways current regulations make environmental action a priority as we administer our land and buildings. The Newcastle Anglican Infrastructure Team is continuing to be shaped so that it can serve our significant asset base. A key feature of this is a commitment to the environmental strategy which forms part of our *Environment, Social and Governance Policy*. Sadly, it has taken more time for this transformation than was initially envisaged.

**Mental Health and Human Fragility**

Let me be very open with you — as a Bishop, as a Christian, and as a human being.

There have been times, especially in recent years, when my own mental health has been tested. Where weariness ran deeper than fatigue. Where spiritual pressure and public weight intersected with personal vulnerability. The work of governing the Church is demanding. This is particularly true in our Diocese as we continue to navigate the post-Royal Commission recovery and embrace approaches to governance and work which will sustain us for decades ahead.

It has been a very complex and demanding time. I have been taken to places I didn't expect. I have experienced the wonder of relationships and been surprised by their ability to fracture. In time, I have also seen the emergence of the glue that heals and something new emerges.

I often share with new leaders the fact that leadership can be lonely. In this role, I have known that loneliness more acutely. There are seasons when the weight of responsibility creates distance — not because we withdraw, but because the role itself requires standing slightly apart.

This is most focussed when you are required to name expectations and brace for the inevitable pushback. The hardest part of that distance is not the solitude itself, but what it withholds: the affirmation, intimacy, and shared understanding that others may receive more freely. You see the impact of your leadership on others, but you rarely hear how your presence has mattered — not because it hasn't, but because the role invites projection rather than reciprocity.

In hierarchical organisations codependency is common inhibiting adult to adult conversations. The result is people step back from candour and slow the processes which create reconciliation, healing, effectiveness, and impact. We are healthier than we were but with courage, wisdom, and faith, we could achieve more.

I've needed the support of my supervisor, my GP, independent advisors, and family. I've been overwhelmed by God's grace.

If we are to be a Church that speaks to the world as it is, we must speak generously into people's anxiety, depression, grief, and uncertainty shaped by the Spirit's healing presence.

In the Christian Scriptures we see many examples of people moved to the depths of their souls. Disciples who look like Christ - who knew agony and vulnerability without shame, and who was raised not in triumphalism, but bearing the scars into new life.

In **Newcastle Anglican**, we are choosing the road of Christ-shaped companionship.

We prize individuality. We honour how people show up. We do our work in trauma- informed ways, aware that many carry ghosts from the past and wounds from the present.

We believe God's creation is gloriously diverse — in sexuality, ability, personality, culture, and call. We take seriously that people may be walking through mental health crises, invisible disability, spiritual fatigue, or questions they cannot name aloud.

And we do not ask them to have it together. We invite them to be here.

Because we believe the Gospel is not about arriving perfect. It is about walking together knowing that Christ will visit with us and enable our hearts to burn with us as we discover his grace.

**A Church Becoming**

We are not the Diocese we once were. And nor should we be.

We have changed. We have been shamed. We have grown. We have learned that flourishing comes not through control, but through trust.

We have seen that it is possible to hold tension without collapsing, to disagree without withdrawing, to walk together even when the road ahead looks steep and bumpy.

We are becoming the kind of Church that sits with the confused, welcomes the wounded, learns from the different, and refuses to abandon the complex.

We are becoming the kind of Church that allows the Spirit to move ahead of us — and then joins in the work that is already underway. We are not finished. But we are being formed.

**Let Us Be That Church**

Let us be the Church that people choose — because we are real, because we are grounded, because we are kind.

Let us be the Church that grows — not in noise, but in depth. Not in ego, but in love.

Let us be the Church that knows when to speak, and when to listen. When to lead, and when to accompany.

Let us remember:

The Spirit of God is already with the person walking home alone. Already with the child visiting their parent in care. Already with the teacher holding space for wonder. Already with the person whose life looks nothing like ours — and yet, who carries the image of God.

Let us meet people there.

**Final Word – Together**

We do this work not alone, but together.

You - as clergy, teachers, agency staff, chaplains, volunteers, Synod members, lay leaders, manager - are doing more than you realise.

You are shaping Christ's movement. You are building the Church. You are holding space for the Spirit to work.

I could spend a long time listing the people and groups who have helped shaped me this year.

I am richer for my conversations with the LGBT community. I am humbled by the devoted service of front -line staff. I am struck by the prayerfulness and commitment of clergy and laity. I am grateful for the CEO - John Barriga, Bishop Charlie, Bishop Sonia, Alison Dalmazzone, and the Senior Leadership Team including ELT.

I won't keep naming people individually for the risk of forgetting someone accidentally who has added the texture of the year.

Jesus said, "I call you friends." We are companions on a journey. We are the Body of Christ.

Let us walk on — together — becoming the Church the world needs, and the Church Christ longs us to be.

Amen. And thank you.

**Visitors to the Diocese**

The Reverend Mandy Wheatley visited the Diocese on 2 to 4 August 2024.

Ms Margaret Mowczko visited the Diocese on 13 to 15 August 2024.

Dr Christy Capper visited the Diocese on 13 to 15 August 2024.

Anglican Care Conference Attendees – September 2024.

National Bishop's Meeting Attendees – October 2024.

Bishop Mark Wroe visited the Diocese from 9 to 11 November 2024.

Bishop Stephen Pickard visited the Diocese on 19 February 2025.

The Reverend Dr Michael Paterson visited the Diocese from 15 to 16 May 2025.

Bishop Mark Calder visited the Diocese from 26 to 29 May 2025.

**The Anglican Church of Australia**

The Venerable Vanessa Bennett was Consecrated Bishop of Goulburn on 24 August 2024.

The Venerable Sophie Relf-Christopher was consecrated Assistant Bishop of Adelaide on 15 August 2024.

Bishop Keith Rayner died on 12 January 2025.

The Most Reverend Philip Freier, Archbishop of Melbourne retired on 9 February 2025.

**Diocesan Appointments and Moves**

The Reverend Tom Henderson-Brooks was appointed Rector of the Parish of Lakes Anglican on 20 August 2024.

The Reverend Elizabeth Falckh was appointed Priest in Charge of the Parish of Cardiff and Boolaroo on 29 January 2025.

The Reverend Anthony Divinagracia has been appointed Rector of the Parish of Kotara South. Anthony will be commissioned in the second half of 2025.

The Reverend Kimbalee Hodges has been appointed Rector of the parish of Singleton. Kimbalee will be commissioned on 26 August 2025.

The Reverend Dr Christy Capper has been appointed to the role of Canon for Discipleship and will commence in January 2026.

**Voluntary Relinquishment of Holy Orders**

Ms Jacqueline Weston

Ms Sharon Dyson

Mr Zebulan McKrell

**Ordinations**

Elizabeth Falckh was ordained a Deacon on 3 July 2024.

The Reverend Elizabeth Falckh was ordained a Priest on 29 January 2025.

Amanda Wharton was ordained Deacon on 27 June 2025.

Debra Gilbert was ordained Deacon on 27 June 2025.

Stephen McKinnon was ordained Deaon on 27 June 2025.

**Retirement**

The Reverend David Hesketh retired from his role as Community Chaplain – Newcastle Home for Good on 14 May 2025.

The Reverend Gary Atherton retired from his role as Associate Priest Christ Church Cathedral on 8 June 2025.

The Reverend David Davies will retire from his role as Rector of the Parish of Williamtown Medowie Mallabula on 17 July 2025.

**Resignations / Departures from the Diocese**

Mr Paul Humble resigned as Principal of Bishop Tyrrell Anglican College on 29 October 2024.

Mr Darren Parkes resigned as Principal of Manning Valley Anglican College at the end of Term 4 - 2024.

The Reverend Rosie Wynter concluded her Locum role at the Parish of Denman 28 February 2025.

The Reverend Scott Dulley resigned as Rector of the Parish of East Maitland. His last Sunday in the parish will be 27 July 2025.

**Deconsecration**

Wallsend Aged Care Chapel was deconsecrated on 9 September 2024.

St James Church Jerry's Plains was deconsecrated on 12 May 2025.

**In Memoriam**

Among the faithful departed, we make special mention of:

The Reverend Pat Kirkby died on 16 December 2024.