



Anglican Diocese of
BENDIGO

Second Session of the Forty-First Synod

Bishop's Charge

Synod 2022

The Rt Rev'd Dr Matt Brain

Acknowledgement of Country

The people belonging to the Djandak, meaning Country, that we are on, through bloodline and kinship, are known as the “Djaara” or people of the area.

Over time, many Djaara have come to identify as “Dja Dja Wurrung” the collective language group.

We recognise that the Dja Dja Wurrung People have a special relationship with their Djandak. I would like to acknowledge and extend my appreciation for the Dja Dja Wurrung People, the Traditional Owners of the land that I am on today. May I encourage you to find out and know what country you are on.

We recognise that the arrival of Europeans in Victoria caused a rupture in the spiritual, environmental, political and economic order of Dja Dja Wurrung People. Unrecorded numbers of Dja Dja Wurrung Ancestors had their lives taken in their fight for Djandak and Martinga Kulinga Murrup (Ancestral Spirits). Other Dja Dja Wurrung were forced from their traditional Country. Dja Dja Wurrung Ancestors struggled to maintain their way of life.

Today, we pay our respects to leaders and Elder’s past, present and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of all Dja Dja Wurrung People.

In a constructive step towards reconciliation, the State of Victoria and the Dja Dja Wurrung People came together in good faith to reach a Recognition and Settlement Agreement in 2013 and to recognise the Traditional Owner rights under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010, as a means of settlement of the Dja Dja Wurrung native title claims. It is a means by which Dja Dja Wurrung culture and traditional practices and the unique relationship of Djandak is recognised, strengthened, protected and promoted, for the benefit of all Victorians, now and into the future.

We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing and our hope that we may walk forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

Sorry Day

Stolen Generations

Let us pray that we will be joined together in working for reconciliation, and the healing of our ancient land and its peoples.

Forgive us for remaining silent and bound by fear.

Give us the courage to speak and act with justice.

Forgive us for our arrogance in closing our eyes to all peoples and cultures.

Enable us to know your redeeming power.

Forgive us for disfiguring this land and despoiling its bounty.

Come Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation.

Forgive us for despising the cultures of others, and taking away their self-respect.

Give us grace to bind one another's wounds.

Forgive us for not listening to the griefs of all who are oppressed in this land, especially its First Peoples.

Draw us together as one people.

Forgive us for our part in tearing apart families and profiting from the misery of others.

Strengthen us to live with respect and compassion for one another.

Lord God, bring us together as one,
reconciled with you and reconciled with each other.

You made us in your likeness,
you gave us your Son, Jesus Christ.

He has given us forgiveness from sin.

Lord God, bring us together as one,
different in culture, but given new life in Jesus Christ,
together as your body, your Church, your people.

Lord God, bring us together as one,
reconciled, healed, forgiven,
sharing you with others as you have called us to do.

In Jesus Christ, let us be together as one. **Amen.**

God is Enough

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

I wrote of my surprise in the introduction to the synod reports from the Registry - that this is my fifth synod with you. This is a marker point for me as it denotes the mid-way of my ordinary term as your bishop. Time does fly whether one is having fun, or navigating a pandemic, or simply seeking to act truly as Christ's church where planted.

This realisation has prompted several thoughts for me. Some are to do with family and the way that we change and develop. Some relate to my own growth as a minister and pastor. But a number concern the foundations and shape of our shared life as one part of God's Kingdom. Both the passage of time and the dictates of the pandemic amplify the need for a clear sense of where it is we gain our life, and to which we direct our activity.

It was no surprise then when it came time to settle on a title for a book I had been preparing this year that the phrase 'God is Enough' seemed to leap out. It has many implications: God is enough for me as I learn, grow, struggle and strive; God is enough for us as we plan, prepare, collaborate and even disagree; and God is enough for you as you follow Christ and lead those in your parishes who seek to do so as well. God is enough as it is in God we 'live and move and have our being'. God is also enough for it is to God which redemption and renewed life are bent, yearning for fulfilment. Outside of God there is nothing worth investing in; personally, in our parishes and congregations, as a diocese and for the whole world.

The early hymn quoted by Paul in Philippians chapter 2 sums up this conviction. But it does so in an unusual way.

Philippians 2:6-11

⁶ *(Christ Jesus) Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;*

⁷ *rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.*

⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself*

*by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

⁹ *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Did you notice that the focus in the hymn is Jesus? The extraordinary depths to which he descended, and the unsurpassed heights to which he was raised. The point that Paul was making is that Jesus' own experience was one in which satisfaction that God was enough carried him far from his rightful place. It made him endure suffering in-and-through all sorts of trials. Yet it did not end there but was made complete as Jesus was restored to an even greater position. He was taken back to the Godhead, but this time the new gift of the Father magnified Jesus' glory and God's sufficiency given his restoration to all he had let go.

I wonder if you remember also that the hymn Paul quotes is placed within an extended plea he makes to the Philippian church in which he hopes that a certain frame of mind – or disposition – is active among them. Each individual's desire, which is being played out as a contest among each other, is to be placed below their fellows. Whether it is in argument or in complaint the same dependence upon God's capacity to hold us and lift us, which Jesus showed, is to be theirs. Their common life, as quirky and mundane as it was, was to 'be like Christ Jesus' ' which at its core set aside its own right for a profound trust in God.

General Synod update

Knowing that this opportunity to address you would come, I have held off bringing news of General Synod. I wanted to have opportunity to think carefully about what to say and how to fairly represent what was not an altogether straightforward or easy meeting. I also wanted opportunity to frame what was done, and not done, within the wider and more important story of what God has done for us – hence my opening reflection. One of the failings of our age is that we allow the transitory stories of the media (traditional and social) to frame our response rather than the enduring work of God.

There has been significant publicity regarding a number of motions which all spoke to various aspects of marriage, relationships more generally, gender and sexuality. There has been a variety of reporting on these, much of which has focused on two motions inviting synod to make ‘Statements’ regarding marriage and chastity. Before moving to describe what happened with the most notable of these it is important to recognise that a ‘Statement’ in this context is what the constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia allows so that the General Synod can declare its mind on certain matters.

General Synod was asked to make a Statement which did three things. It affirmed the present doctrine of marriage as expressed in the Book of Common Prayer, said that the solemnisation of a marriage between a same-sex couple is contrary to the teaching of Christ and the practice of this Church, and then went on to say that a service purporting to bless a same-sex marriage is similarly not in accordance with the teaching of Christ and the practice of this Church.

There was lengthy debate and an amendment which was accepted by the movers noting that it is perfectly legal and in fact the present state for many to marry as a same-sex couple. The debate proceeded in generally good terms knowing that in trying to make a Statement General Synod took a deep matter of personal identity into an abstract and doctrinal position. The likelihood for hurt and conscientious difference was high. When it came time to vote the perfectly allowable call was made for the vote to occur in Houses. That is the Laity would vote first, and if the motion succeeded the Clergy would vote, and

finally, if the motion succeed there, the Bishops would vote. In General Synod the House of Bishops includes only Diocesan Bishops and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Bishops. It is a very small group. The motion passed each of the Laity and Clergy but was narrowly defeated in the Bishops. As I have said this process was perfectly permissible however it has had some sad consequences to which I will return shortly.

It is important for us to pause here and recognise what did not happen. Synod did not change the Anglican Church's understanding of marriage. Neither did it affirm the desirability of the use of a service to bless marriages between people of the same sex. I expect that this is not what some would like; whether they prefer a more permissive environment, or whether they looked forward to a clear statement aligning solemnisation with blessing. For all its faults nothing has changed in this space. Those who have been paying close attention to the Primate's statements following General Synod will note that he has continued to point out that moving to bless marriages between people of the same sex would weaken national unity.

One consequence of this process is that the range of other motions regarding relationships were then framed and debated in the light of this one. Again, we have neglected a positive affirmation of the whole scope of relationship and sunk our entire endeavour into this one part.

Motions surrounding sexuality and relationships were by no means the only business of General Synod. They consumed substantial attention, however there were other significant matters which were discussed and decided at synod. I would like to highlight three which have deep and abiding effect.

1. The Family Violence Working Group which was established following the previous General Synod delivered the final report of their work and a series of proposals to take it further. Their work over the last 5 years has shone a light on the prevalence of family violence among those who attend Anglican churches. There can be no mistake women, men and children who attend Anglican churches, but mostly women, suffer violence at the hands of those who should love and care for them most. Sometimes the perpetrators of this violence, mostly men, do not also come to church but often they do. This sobering reality begs the

question, 'what can we do about it?' Later in this synod you will hear how we as a diocese can take our part in being safe places for women. Significantly, General Synod passed several resolutions to establish and fund a Commission (the most serious 'shared' body of General Synod) to assist us all to be better.

2. One of the long-standing Commissions of General Synod – The Public Affairs Commission – brought a series of motions regarding climate change and its effect on our fellow Australians who live in the Torres Strait. Irrespective of what we feel here we must acknowledge that Australians, let alone others from some of the poorest parts of the world, are seeing their land and livelihood being eroded before their eyes. It was a privilege for the largely wealthy and white membership of Synod to listen for a long time to a Torres Strait elder (and member of Synod in her own right) speak of the effect of climate change on her community, and the need for the rest of us to act on their behalf. Along with Bishop Chris McLeod, who also spoke to a later motion regarding the iniquitous rate of incarceration of indigenous young people, Aunty Rose did us the honour of saying what she actually thought. I am glad that, on this occasion at least, we listened.
3. The Synod also passed a complex raft of legislation which continues the work to strengthen our codes of conduct and accountability mechanisms. They also laid the way for our church instruments to begin to harmonise with those of the State to aid clarity and reduce duplicated efforts. We will see this legislation at our own synod next year.

My final reflection on General Synod is that we never do well when we rely on legislation to achieve that which is better done in relationship. This is because wedge-politics will insinuate its way into the frame and poison the very life we seek to promote. It is much easier to dispose of questions in a vote, particularly when one thinks numbers are on their side, than to talk, listen, share and look for solutions which account for all even if they are not beloved by all. My sadness is that in disposing of issues easily we drive ourselves to the poles of a question and foreclose on solutions to vexing matters which may have otherwise emerged. My distress is that we treat each other as if we were out of the family rather than holding each other close because we belong together.

When consciences differ

Marriage, relationships and faith have proved a potent mix. This is certainly so for us in our present age. Christianity is intensely relational and the way we are with each other is both reflective of and a sign pointing toward the way we relate to God. It would be a mistake though to think that we are unique in having to navigate challenging days as Christians take different positions on what is a complex and demanding series of questions. In preparing to attend the Lambeth Conference I was struck that the reasons the very first Conference was called in 1867 were directly connected with marriage, relationships and faith.

When working to be the church we must never lose sight that we are working with fellow Christians. This seems to be one of those obvious statements that should not need to be said. However, like many other obvious things the less we say it, the more it is assumed, and the more we assume the greater the chance that we will forget. I have observed that this is particularly so when we must negotiate matters which lie close to the heart. The more passionately we hold a position the more likely it is that we will ascribe ill will or faithlessness to those of another view. This is true of me, and I suspect that it is also true of you. So, a conscious affirmation of our relational intent becomes an important starting point for our discussions let alone our decisions.

An analogy may help us here. Like it or not we have been placed by God to run a race together. To fail to begin this race acknowledging each other as those seeking to follow Jesus in good conscience means we are all placed at a handicap. When I was a competitive athlete I loved the 60m race, was fine with the 100m, coped with the 200m and faded badly over 400m. God forbid that I should be relegated to a position behind the starting line when the starters gun is fired, needing to run 400m when the race was set for 60m.

I will return at this point to my experience of General Synod. I noted earlier that there were several unintended but sad consequences in the way that the process relating to the first Statement the Synod was asked to make played out. One personal consequence was that I was immediately (and have since been persistently) asked how I voted. Throughout this whole process only one or two people have asked what I thought, far less sat long enough with me to

discuss why this was so. Each time I was pressed to disclose how I voted it was to decide whether I was for the side being presented or against. My deliberation and conscientious action was to be weaponised – either for or against me. Sadly, my experience is not unique. Your other Synod representatives have also faced this.

What I have said does not deny that we can and should seek out and know the mind of God on all sorts of matters, and that when in error seek to find the security of truth. I am saying that when Christians differ the manner with which we approach this process of clarification and correction (whichever way it goes) matters.

Unsurprisingly Paul addresses this in many ways throughout his letters. One particular path Paul follows towards the end of the Letter to the Romans concerns the role that freedom, and then conscience, plays in our relationship as the church. A key focus of the letter is the way that a church made up of both Jews and Gentiles can live together given the different freedoms each would feel or not feel. As Paul moves on from the famous 'Chapter 8' which assures us of God's persistent faithfulness to his people he addresses the way that non-Jews are grafted into the vine which God had already planted...the Jewish people. He then moves to talk about the nuts and bolts of navigating relationship given that God has made them one, and that they have both come from very different places into this new status. For Paul this relates to freedom.

The key passage for us is in Chapter 14 where Paul relates that for some eating meat sacrificed to idols was nothing (because idols were no gods at all) and therefore permissible. Yet for others the taint of idolatrous practice clung to the meat and made it bad. Rather than debating the issue and demanding a simple answer Paul affirmed the freedom some felt and then (radically) said that for the benefit of those whose conscience was less free those who saw no problem should constrain themselves for the benefit of their fellow Christians. Paul's priority was having all of those who the Roman church would encompass enjoy the benefit of coming under Christ together. It was a family affair and one which would be undermined where freedom was acted upon over the top of those who, in Paul's words, were weak.

This principle does not excuse laziness, ungodliness, the need to discuss God's mind on how we live, and the collective will to live it out. It does, however, call us to count each other in before we count each other out. Further it recognises that the absence of any one of us diminishes us all.

Earlier I reflected on the reality that working through matters of deep and confronting faith and identity are not new for us in the church. If we are to take Paul's teaching seriously we must handle this present experience with care. Care for each other, care for the faith we have been entrusted, and care for those who are yet to hear of, embrace and follow Jesus. To aid this I will remind you of two things. The first is that the view of the Anglican Church of Australia on marriage has not changed. This represents a conscientious position even if some feel more free. Yet I say again, from the beginning of my time with you I have said that I expect that every parish within our diocese conducts its ministry in such a way that allows all people to do business with God.

Wisdom for our next steps

As I begin to conclude this Synod Charge I will now turn to where I think we as a diocese must put our time, care and attention. You will have probably heard me say this before, indeed I hope you have. But I will say it once more. The key challenge for us, as we continue to work within the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and work with each other knowing that there is every potential for disagreement and discord, is to do the basics of our call well. We will continue to be tempted to be distracted by many things which in and of themselves are good but are a part and not the start of the faithful life. It is as a reminder to go back to the foundation of a Christian life that I return. For this I offer an acronym; we must be WISE. We must Worship, Intercede, Saturate and Engage.

Worship

We have been drawn together to declare the glory of the one who has 'called us out of darkness and into this glorious light'. This should be the heart and soul of our existence and the beginning and end of our purpose. You will remember that my dream for this diocese is that we should have 'a congregation worshipping God in every community.' This continues to hold true for our human purpose is best reflected as we feed on God, sing praises to God, bring our common prayers to God, and enjoy intimacy with God. The best way that we can live true to this call is to join in worship, and the best thing we can do for our communities is to give them the opportunity to see and to join in this worship where they live.

It is my prayer that we will be known as people whose first instinct is to praise and honour God.

Intercede

I encouraged you to take up the challenge to pray for three people as part of my first synod charge. I know that some have continued to do this over the years. I also know that God has answered these prayers in many ways – often by surprising us with unexpected generosity. Praying for our own needs, and the needs of others is one of the most intensely practical things we can do. Far from being an excuse for laziness, prayer is the beginning of godly endeavour

and action begun without prayer so easily falls into our own priorities not God's.

When so many forces will be promoting us to act and do, it is my hope that we will be known as people whose first words are, 'let's ask God about that.'

Saturate

It is no surprise that Jesus, God's greatest gift to us, is called the Word. He is God's explanation giving us insight into who God is, how God works, and what God likes. It a blessing like none other then for us to be able to stand in the same shoes of the Apostles and bear witness to what God has done through Jesus. So, it makes sense to me that the need to saturate ourselves in Scripture is high. To bathe in the words which God has given and enabled to be passed down which bear out the incarnate Word is a great privilege. When we are cut we should bleed Scripture, when we are perplexed we should yearn for example in Scripture, and when charting our course we should be doing so as those 'reading ourselves into' Scripture.

May we be people whose first inclination is to discuss God's word rather than another.

Engage

Lest we should think that worship, intercession and saturation mark an inward turn we must also be people who engage with the people, community and world around them. We are to be those whose first instinct is to worship, but this worship should bear witness to the world in which we are placed. The Dead Sea has an inlet and no outlet – and is dead to the life a lake should bear. Yet, upstream, the Sea of Galilee has both an inlet and an outlet and is teeming with life. We must open wide to the nourishment which God brings, but God has given this so that we might be agents of God's blessing to those around. Our words, our actions, and even our choices should be artefacts of the God who creates light out of darkness.

It is my dream that we be people whose first plan is to share God's gifts to those who have none.

My thanks

I would be remiss to finish before thanking people who serve us as a whole Diocese and share in my own ministry.

Our Registry team continue to attend to the needs of the Diocese with creativity and dedication. There have been so many demands thrown up by the last year and changes to accommodate within the team that it would be understandable if they were rigid or terse. But they are not! Katy, Zan, Deb, Jo, Jen, Mark and Karis distinguish themselves with their good humour and expertise. Thankyou team for not only working hard but being a winsome group.

The Senior Leadership Team, our Registrar Sarah, Dean Elizabeth, and Archdeacons Peter and George are no less enjoyable to work with. Thank you for sharing so much of what can be burdensome in episcopal ministry even if I hang on to the joys. Your wisdom and encouragement is a great gift of God to me. I would also like to acknowledge the now Rev Heather Marten who stepped down as Ministry Development Officer and a Canon at the end of 2021. Heather's work to identify, train, and mentor new ministers has meant that many of our ministries, new and old, continue to flourish.

As always my last word is reserved for Rachael and my children. Thank you for loving me and sharing this journey as a disciple of Jesus with me.

+Matt

26/5/2022



Synod 2022

