

Bishop's Charge to Synod 2015.

Preamble – Greetings....

Once a month I meet with five of the younger clergy of the Diocese on a Thursday evening. I planned it originally as a mentoring group where I might share some of my experiences with a gathering of local clergy who are in their first parishes. It has morphed somewhat into a Peer Support Group in which I am invited to be a participant as much as a listener. And I suspect that I get more out of it than they do. They certainly excite me by their commitment, their vision and their honesty.

A few weeks ago I asked them what I should devote my Synod Charge to this year. Before I tell you their response to the question can I briefly jump back to last year's Synod.

You may remember that I invited about 15 younger adults to share with me their challenge to the Church, and I invited you to 'hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church' through these young adults.

Part of me was very tempted to repeat word-for-word my charge from last year - and then invite you to come up and share what has changed in your church as a result of hearing from these younger folk. I still think that what they said to us is of huge significance and we need to reflect on it within our local situation and look at how their dreams might be embraced. I hope that some of their thoughts will be reflected in this Charge.

So, back to the beginning, what did this gathering of younger clergy tell me to do?

Very simply: tell us what the church is going to look like in ten years' time!



I'd like to try.

But I'd also like to do it in three parts – and I will draw references from a book that is impacting me very deeply at the moment – a book called 'Deep Church Rising', by Andrew Walker and Robin Parry.

Firstly: the challenges that we face now and the challenges we might expect to face over the next ten years and the implication and impact of these changes upon the church in this Diocese.

Secondly: a vision of the Church that might emerge out of these challenges.

Thirdly (and very briefly): what we need to set in place now for the vision to be realised.

Part One: The Challenges

I have to say, as I begin to reflect on some of the challenges, I couldn't be more excited because I think they may wake the church up from its apathy, and challenge some of the institutional structures that do stifle our mission.

I want to also break down the challenges to three areas, financial, theological/doctrinal and social.

1. Financial

This is not news to any of you but there is a local body amendment act before Parliament right at the moment which, if it passes in its current form, paves the way for local bodies to levy rates on church properties. At the moment most churches are exempt although some local council's do levy targeted rates on water, sewerage and rubbish collection. But this opens the way for rates to the full value of the property. A church such as Nativity could find itself having to raise an extra \$10,000 a year (and that would be a conservative estimate).

Alongside this would be my prediction that the church will, sometime over the next 10 years lose charitable status. Although

those in the know think this is unlikely I feel there is a bit of 'head in the sand' mentality going on and the recent 'win' that the Inland Revenue sought to tax clergy housing at market rates was maybe not just an aberration.

As the State has progressively taken over many of the social services that were once primarily the realm of the churches (of all denominations) the amazing social work still done by the church is not as visible as it once was - leaving many in our increasingly secular society to ask why the church should have some sort of favoured status. The fact that this sort of comment is being voiced gives an indicator to where things might head.

I'm not trying to be pessimistic – just realistic. However one part of me wishes they'd just get on and do it so we no longer have to dance to the tune of the charities' commission – we can *be* the Church.

Practically this would mean that all giving could theoretically be subject to tax – taking away a third of our income. All Diocesan Trust income could potentially be taxed, diminishing the amount that the Diocese can use to subsidise its ministries and support local churches by way of grant.

Then there is the simple financial issue caused by the numerical decline of the Church and the demographics of those who attend – and who financially sustain the church through their giving. I don't want to dwell on this because attendance statistics can be interpreted in all sorts of ways and don't necessarily give an accurate picture of who attends or supports a local church.

I simply want to note that the older folk, who tend to be the most regular givers are a) declining numerically or b) entering retirement with more limited discretionary resources. And those younger folk who do give, are usually stretched financially and not necessarily well disciplined in respect to finances. It just means that parishes have to work harder and harder to sustain budgets and this, of course takes the focus away from mission.

I think that financial implications upon the church are pretty obvious

1. We won't be able to maintain the levels of stipendiary ministry or the model of ministry that we have today. It may survive with some rationalisation in urban areas, but will become unsustainable in rural areas. And we are essentially a rural Diocese.
2. It will force the church to look at the appropriateness of the numbers of parishes that are sustained by the Diocese and the maintenance of many of the buildings that we currently have. Will we find ourselves in the same place as Presbyterians who are currently selling of their churches?
3. What will the Bishop's ministry look like and how will the Diocesan ministries be shaped?

Which leads to an even more challenging question: are we going to make a decision on these issues as a consequence of our vision for the future or are we going to find ourselves making a pragmatic decision in response to the circumstances that confront us.

What do we want the church to look like in ten years' time?

2. Theological and Doctrinal

This particular challenge to our church sadly comes from within.

It's like looking at an apple that appears to be all shiny and healthy on the outside, but when you bite into it you find that the centre is just mush!

And that mush is a lack of confidence in the gospel and a lack of affirmation of the foundational doctrines of the faith.

The seeds of this were probably sown in the 16th century Protestant Reformation but germinated in the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries and then flowered within 18th century enlightenment.

Deep Church Rising reflects on the writing of the 17th century Catholic thinker 'Descartes who made knowledge the central issue in philosophy and raised the bar on knowledge to unheard of heights.'

*'Against the traditional stance of intellectual inquiry as 'faith seeking understanding' Descartes reversed things. He began with doubt, trying to doubt everything, and only granted the giddy status of knowledge to that which can be demonstrated **beyond doubt** (my highlight). This is a hermeneutic of suspicion rather than trust.... Traditional Christianity was intellectually rigorous but it located rationality within the bounds of faith – one first believes in order that one may understand, The Enlightenment sought to turn things the other way around.'*¹

I'm aware that I'm covering a huge topic very superficially. But fast forward to the end of the 20th, beginning of the 21st century we find that *'a significant number of ecclesiastical leaders, theologians and many ordinary men and women can no longer relate to the central tenets of Christianity as traditionally understood...'* A growing number of *'people want to remain Christian in some way, despite the fact that they can no longer assent to many doctrines of the creeds, believe in the Bible as a broadly historical record of historical narratives, or find credible the possibility of miracles in either the past (including the virgin birth and the resurrection of Jesus) or the present.'*²

I want to suggest that the historical critical method of theological education, growing, as it did, out of modernity's embrace of the enlightenment philosophies of people such Descartes and Kant, have left us with generations of leaders within the western church – and the church here in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia who question the foundations of our faith.

It has certainly provided a fertile foundation for the formation of contextual theology as an individualistic theology (my context is

¹ Page 26, *Deep Church Rising – Recovering the roots of Christian Orthodoxy*. Andrew G. Walker and Robin A. Parry. SPCK 2014

² *Ibid* – page 9

the ultimate truth) which sits very comfortably alongside, and feeds into today's pluralistic ideology.

So what impact will these theological and doctrinal challenges have upon us as a church over these next ten years - how will they shape us as a Church?

As a Diocese that strongly affirms orthodox doctrine and has a deep evangelical respect for the authority of scripture, we may find ourselves marching out of step with the rest of the Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, with many continuing to ask why we bother. It has certainly made it almost impossible to find a way through the major issues dividing us as a Church because we don't have any common foundation upon which to begin our dialogue. I certainly wonder whether, within 30 years, the biblical church might become an underground church because its values and views conflict so strongly with the emerging culture.

Leaving that aside, I think that there are two areas of consideration, where the decisions we make will affect the shape of the Church – and both have to do with our position theologically and doctrinally.

1. How much time and energy do we, as a church, want to spend defending our orthodoxy? I touched on this very superficially in the synod sermon. Let me rephrase the question because I would be surprised if this Synod didn't strongly affirm the Diocese's orthodox position theologically. The question is whether we want to spend our time and our vision and our resources *defending* that orthodoxy (because we believe that in defending orthodoxy we are defending Christ). Or whether we want to spend our time and resources *living* an orthodox faith. I don't think that they are mutually incompatible but I do think we have the tendency to stray into ghetto mentality when we find our faith in the unique and universal Christ challenged. How well can we get the balance sorted on this question? I think this will determine what our church looks like and acts like.

2. And secondly, do we understand the importance of tradition in maintaining the doctrinal foundations of the church?

I wish I could remember where I read it – but someone once wrote that those who have a soft (or mushy) centre compensate by having a firm circumference and correspondingly those who have a firm centre are quite happy to have flexibility out on the edges.

As I recall, it was written about the church and the church's theology.

I observe this Diocese being in the second of these two categories – a firm centre having an unapologetic confidence in the gospel. With that central confidence we have extolled the virtue of flexibility and have become almost congregational in some of our local expressions of church taking this independence almost as a badge of honour. We find churches that have ditched many of the traditional trappings, written their own (very simplified) variations of the communion liturgy, rebranded their parish signs and logos.

The danger is, of course, that some of these traditions – particularly the liturgical traditions guard the traditional doctrines of the Church. When these traditions were challenged in the Reformation every person was free to interpret scripture as they saw fit. But who was to say whose interpretation was correct. The Reformation became the Reformation *'ad nauseam'* and the Church in the West with almost daily schisms is the consequence. There is no unity.

I wonder whether the reclaiming of tradition is an essential component of our Christian faith and of our vision and any attempts to contextualise the faith in the modern West must resist the temptation to make it relevant by jettisoning the claims of the tradition.

But I'm ahead of myself here....

Let me move to the social challenges.

3. Social

The events of last week around the Dean's strong stance regarding the performance of 'the Armed Man' in the Cathedral highlights how much our Society has changed.

The new atheistic spirituality that seems to be embodied in the media embraces 'tolerance' as the supreme virtue, piggybacked, as it is, on the rights and freedom of the individual.

I'd like to briefly list a few of the very many societal shifts or developments that have had and will continue to have, a direct influence upon the church.

The pluralistic society created by urbanisation and the world-wide influx of new nationalities has created an even greater call for tolerance as new nationalities bring new expressions of faith.

- **Urbanisation**

*'The Church of the Middle Ages baptised and confirmed children, married young adults and buried the dead. Its calendar of services followed the seasons and celebrated and legitimised local life. In turn it drew the local community into its activities. Only 100 years ago the whole of the local village would still gather to celebrate the end of the harvest by bringing tokens of their produce into church. The church provided a religious interpretation of an event of vital significance to the entire community. But when the total, all-embracing community of like-minded people gave way to the dormitory town or suburb, there was little held in common to celebrate.'*³

This might have been written in the UK but the depopulation of rural New Zealand over the past 50 years continues unabated. Drive around the Diocese and you will still see churches sitting in the middle of nowhere – there was once a thriving community around it but they people have gone, the farms have been amalgamated and the church is a nostalgic reminder of what once

³ Adapted from *God is Dead* – Bruce (2002) – page 13

was and a spiritual link for many people back to grand-parents and great, grandparents who were married there and buried there. People have left but the church is expected to maintain their memories. Is this what we are called to do?

How do we best maintain and sustain faithful communities in the scattered rural areas of our Diocese? Over the past months many farmers have taken their own lives – the financial burden carried by so many has become just too great for some. Is there a better way of being the body of Christ in our rural settings than simply maintaining old buildings and occasional services?

- **The rise of consumerism**

Although the roots of consumerism are found in the technological developments of the Industrial Revolution the rise of consumerism must really be chartered from the end of the Second World War – an age built on the selling of lifestyle dreams with goods that were designed to become obsolete and to be replaced by a never-ending flow of new products. *‘Desires became needs in the advertiser’s crucible, a route to the happiness and fulfilment that we all deserve – because we’re worth it.’*

The consumer mind-set has come to dominate the way we approach many aspects of life – the consumer rules. Consumer loyalty is almost a thing of the past – we feel no obligation to continue a relationship unless we continue to benefit from it.

Everything, therefore is a matter of personal inclination: *‘I go to church (or another organisation) because I want to, maybe for a short period or maybe for longer, to fulfil a particular rather than a general need in my life and where I will continue my attachment so long as it provides what I want, but I have no obligation either to attend in the first place or continue if I don’t want to.’* This puts churches in the position of having to compete for customers and to keep them happy, or lose them.

There are some large churches that have contextualised Jesus’ promise of ‘life in all its fullness’ into a very nice package that goes right along with the values marketed by the consumer

culture. Research has shown that the percentage of people being converted to Christianity in these churches is exactly the same as those coming to conversion in traditional churches. Their growth is transfer growth. It's simply a reshuffling of the cards and Christianity continues to decline across the board.

- **The Privatisation of Religion**

The place of religion in the public sphere has varied throughout the West. But even here in New Zealand there are increasingly vocal ideological secularists who are pushing to enforce the complete expulsion of religion from the public realm - just listen to the forum on the national program at around 4.00 in the afternoon.

Which surprises me that the 'Blessing of the Fleet' still gets so much national coverage – it even had a 10 minute clip on national radio the following morning.

I wonder whether, after the debate over 'the Armed Man,' we will still have the freedom to make this event unashamedly Christian.

Christendom no longer exists (If it ever actually has). We cannot expect that our voice should be heard nor assume that it will be listened to. Any right to be represented in the public square, must be earned. I was strongly challenged in this regard back in 2012 when I was invited to preach the sermon at the Anzac service in Westminster Abbey. It was a couple of weeks after Easter so my first draft made references to Jesus who has been described in the Bible as the 'Prince of Peace' and who gave his life so that the world might know true peace. This was politely edited out of the draft.

- **The centrality (and the rights) of the individual**

This has become more and more fundamental in the consumerist world of the modern West. The individual is at the centre. But there have been changes here too. With the growth of the consumer society there has been a growing shift toward the individual reconceived as the 'hedonistic' individual – she (or he) who has the right to maximise his or her own pleasures.

Yet *‘with the increasing mobility of the population and the consequent impermanence of local communities individuals find themselves more and more alone. The phenomenal growth of online communities and social networks serve as a superficial substitute for community... but it has led to a generation that longs for deep community....’*⁴

Did you hear what the Spirit was saying through the young adults last year with regard to this? How committed are we to discovering and developing this deep community?

Christendom has gone forever and there is no point in wishing it would come back.

The society that created this model no longer exists and will not do so again.

A couple of years ago Randall Prior told the Presbyterian General Assembly the *‘the form of the church which evolved in the era of Christendom and which served us well in that period is no longer sustainable. It is dying. It will die.’*

What is the structure that we must create to express our Christian faith most effectively in community within the world? The answer to this must be entrusted to the emerging generation and we must simply be their mentors – something we don’t do very well and certainly don’t do strategically.

However as I move into my picture of the Church in ten years’ time can I just reflect on another cultural shift that is happening as we move into what is being called ‘post-modernity.’ The emerging generation seems to be rejecting the rationalistic mind-set that came out of the enlightenment and shaped modernity. In its place there is openness to truth beyond the scope of science and acceptance of the sacred; there is a general search for the transcendent; and there is an understanding of the mystery of faith and a respect for the ministry and teaching of Jesus but a rejection of anything institutional.

⁴ Ibid – page 40

But this emerging generation doesn't want to hear it (in isolation) – they want to experience it and see it.

The challenge is to create a fresh improvisation of the faith that is both deeply rooted in Scripture and tradition but also alive to the worlds we inhabit

Part Two: A vision: A picture of the Anglican church in the Diocese of Nelson in ten years' time.

I'm not sure this is exactly the question that they asked me. I think they asked me to tell them what the church would look like in ten years' time and that is dependent upon decisions that I can't predict.

I can share a picture that I would have of the Church that would guide me as Bishop.

I hope that you've noted that this is a picture of the 'Anglican' church because I think there is distinctiveness in being Anglican that will be extremely important in the years ahead. I'm not talking about the 'trappings' of Anglicanism, although some of these might prove, in some settings, to be incredibly valuable.

I'm talking about the core principles or doctrines of Christianity that are shaped within Anglicanism which is both a *biblical* church and a *sacramental* one. I am increasingly convinced that this balance is critical to the future of this church. It is not our constitution that makes us Anglican but the doctrinal formularies that have shaped that constitution and which have biblical and sacramental foundations. I believe that the Anglican Church – as a movement (rather than an institution) has a vibrant and very exciting future but it may be that we need to rebrand the church at the local level because of the connotations back to Anglicanism as an institution (which it very definitely is) while remaining faithful to the undergirding principles. This is something that the Parish of Tahunanui is seeking to do right at the moment as they seek to identify more clearly with their local community.

To try and answer the question put to me by those younger clergy I am going to simply share a few bullet points – I won't tease them out

in any depth. But the first few are more general – a picture of what the church must look like if it is to realise its calling. The last few bullet points are some rather more specific dreams that I'd love to see happen.

- The church will continue its faithfulness to its orthodox doctrines of the church but will have a greater understanding of how these give life to their mission.
- The church will have made discipleship the priority. This was Jesus' challenge to his disciples directly before his ascension – 'go out into all the world and make disciples'. In ten years this must be central to the life of the church but it is not something we can wait ten years to do. We must be strategic in our discipleship now.

But let me just make it very clear; discipleship is not an eight part program that we can sit and do together. It is a lifestyle lived out in deep community.

- Very closely linked to this is the church in ten years' time that has moved from maintenance to mission. A missional church is passionate about making disciples. A church of maintenance is focussed on caring for, and meeting the needs of its members. In ten years' time, caring will still happen because it is a consequence of authentic discipleship.

It has never worked the other way around.

- In ten years' time the parochial model inherited from the UK will be dead in the water. It belongs to a world that no longer exists – and never will again.

We have to begin now developing something new. And I think that means transforming the parochial structure into a network of indigenous local churches that are passionate about being the body of Christ within the community where they find themselves; churches that will find creative ways of expressing that faith within the gathered fellowship, while holding faithfully those distinctives that make us Anglican. They will be linked together by relationship into missional districts. The role of vicar as the pastor

will change to that of the priest as leader – but even that will be redefined (from institutional to missional).

- Within the next ten years decisions will be made with respect to existing church plant. Are they aiding or hindering our mission? In some places (such as the lovely old church we were in last evening here in Westport) the church building might be a very definite ‘sacred space’ within the local community – but it must never be shut during the week and open only on Sunday morning. These ‘sacred places’ must be open and redefined as a house of prayer 24/7. An existing church plant may, in other places, embrace more than one incarnational congregation reaching specific people groups such as families or youth - an existing church shares its facilities with a new expression of church. In other places plant may have to be sold.

This is essentially an urban vision and it may be that in more traditional rural areas the parochial model may re-form into a house church model meeting in the local church.

- In ten years’ time the clergy person as the solo professional will be a distant memory. It will give way to team ministries led by those who are obviously gifted (and equipped) to be both team leaders and team members because these teams must demonstrate ‘deep community’.

More personally.....

- I think that the church will still affirm the three-fold order of Bishop’s Priests and Deacons while at the same time encouraging and liberating the priesthood of all believers but I suggest that in ten years’ time they might function very specifically. They will not be hierarchical ministries but people identified with specific ministry gifting.
- The Bishop will continue to be the focal point of the church’s unity (nationally and locally) and will be ordained with canonical obedience to General Synod. But the Bishop may not function in day-to-day isolation from a local church. Should the ‘cathedra’

have more than just symbolic significance. The Bishop's ministry team may similarly operate from the context of a local church – but have a Diocesan responsibility.

- It may be that Priests and Deacons are liberated to serve the local Church in canonical obedience to the Bishop rather than General Synod: Priests will build the Eucharistic community – creating unity between two or three local churches and Fresh Expressions of Church. They will be ordained as leaders, men and women who have the ability to build teams and share vision. And the Diaconate (Deacons) will not simply be a stepping stone to the 'real' priestly ministry but will be people set apart to lead the church in its servant ministries. They may be in a missional diaconate, planting and building new communities of faith or in a pastoral ministry leading or assisting within a local church. They will be trained theologically and equipped missionally.
- Team ministries will develop that may transcend traditional parish boundaries and local churches will work in relationship, sharing their resources, while still retaining their identity.
- I would love to see churches reclaim (or retrieve) the ancient daily rhythms of prayer and give them fresh expression. I think this is going to become a sanctuary for a new generation seeking a deeper experience of worship.
- This next one has been on my heart for ages – that one particular church in the centre of the Diocese will have developed a gathering of young people who live in community based on the daily rhythms of prayer and who maintain the church as a local church but also as a place of retreat for those in ministry who need to experience a time of quietness and refreshing – within a wider team ministry.

In repentance and rest is our salvation

In quietness and trust is our hope. (Isaiah 30:15)

- Bishopdale Theological College will continue to emerge as the most important resource to the Diocese modelling discipleship as it equips a new generation of leaders – the Dean of the College

and the Bishop of the Diocese, together guiding the vision of the church.

- Synod will morph into an annual celebration of what God is doing across the Diocese rather than a three day business meeting. It will become more and more a time of inspiration – giving power to an Anglican movement rather than maintaining the institution.
- That Jesus will be at the centre of all we do, empowered by the Spirit to the glory of the Father.