

What makes for an effective diocese in the 21st century?

Good morning!

Thank you to the NCS executive for the kind invitation to speak at this Synod breakfast. Some years ago when I last spoke to this breakfast it was to present the findings of some research I did into the history of evangelicalism in the Diocese of Melbourne.

Those findings were eventually published in the ACT's monograph series under the title, 'Foundations of Anglican Evangelicalism in Victoria'. Still readily and economically available in all the usual ebook formats; or if you, like our dear friend Rhys Bezzant, regard ebooks as against your religion, you can get an actual paper copy.

Well the point of mentioning that work is to boost sales and readership (obviously) but also to say that this address is really an update of that story. I've been asked to give an update on where I think we are in terms of the health of the four contributors to evangelical continuity identified in that study.

Foundations of Anglican Evangelicalism asked the question, 'What makes for long-term evangelical continuity in a denominational setting, namely the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne?' It identified four key contributors, familiar to many of you but worth recapitulating briefly now: PSCB

1. Healthy evangelistically-effective **parishes**. Local churches that are actually helping people hear and receive the good news of salvation full and free found in Jesus Christ alone. From such parishes, the most evangelistically-energised find their way to the second contributor:
2. Evangelical **societies**. Parachurch organisations; especially those that focus on younger people, like AFES or Scripture Union or CMS through our kids and youth ministries. In societies, young enthusiasts get experience. Leadership and ministry skills - especially evangelistic skills and a heart for missions - are carefully cultivated. From societies, those called and committed to vocational ministry move on to our third contributor:
3. A robust theological **college**. A strong finishing school for ministers that will equip them with the necessary skills and tools for ministry. And not just the tools for today, but the biblical and theological foundations for tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. A depth of confidence in the Scriptures and evangelical theology that enables them to contextualise from one generation to the next. From college on to the fourth contributor:
4. A diocesan **bishop** willing to licence and appoint graduates back into parishes. Even newly planted parishes and congregations. For it's the diocesan bishop who sits at the top of any diocese's leadership tree. That person dictates the vision, purpose and strategy.

Get all four in place in strength working together well, and you arguably have an effective diocese. Simple, right? Well.. maybe not. Foundations for Anglican Evangelicalism seeks to answer the question, 'What makes for evangelical continuity?'

This morning we're asking a different question, namely: 'What makes for an effective diocese in the 21st century?' It's a related question, but wider. So let me bounce off the four contributors, and propose an answer in three parts. What makes for an effective diocese?

FIRST, an effective diocese in the 21st century - Knows its purpose

What makes for an *effective* diocese...?

Effective: means 'successful in producing a desired or intended result.'

Effectiveness is measured against desired results... or purpose. Without a clear purpose, you can't measure effectiveness. You need to know what success looks like.

..what you're measuring your stewardship of \$200M on your balance sheet against.

..what you're measuring the expense of 7500 hours of time against - that, by the way is 500 synod members multiplied by the 15 hours of synod meeting time spent this week. That's 937.5 eight hour working days, or 156 working weeks (187 if we clergy get a five-day week).

I wonder if any of you loyal Anglicans have the 39 Articles on you at the moment. Maybe tattooed down both arms in 3pt font? Well.. you can check, but I'm pretty sure they are silent on the question of purpose of the Church or diocese. They are silent, but fortunately for us the Bible is not! Here are just two passages to consider when thinking about the question of 'the purpose of a diocese':

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, so that / for the purpose that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Speaking to the believers in the Diaspora, Peter says, you have been chosen by God. Made into a royal priesthood to serve before God. Called out of the world to be a holy set apart nation - God's own special private kingly treasure, for a reason:

It is so that we may declare the praises of of him who has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. We've been saved for a purpose. To declare his praise. To proclaim his saving work. To - wait for it - go on mission with CMS. That's what v10 says, right?

We know the end of the story don't we? Revelation 7 tells us. We are moving inexorably towards the day when Rev 7:9 we will stand with, 'a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.' That's the end of the story. That's the destiny of the Church of Jesus Christ in this phase of history before the eternity to come. That's the hope of every diocese that holds true to the testimony of the Lamb who was slain for the sins of the world. By whose blood every robe in that diocese has been washed whiter than snow.

According to the Scriptures, the purpose of the Church or diocese, is to usher in that day. To move in faith to declare the glorious saving power of Christ, to every nation, tribe, people and language - near and far, in our geographically, or non-geographically bound parishes, to the ends of the earth. As another Ridley graduate is fond of saying, 'From the tips of our toes, to the ends of the earth'.

First, an effective diocese is clear about its purpose.

Second: an effective diocese knows itself and leads itself towards that purpose

What is a diocese?

Diocese: the di-oikos or di-oikesis: not a household but a whole district under the government or administration or pastoral care of a bishop in the Christian Church. Where a bishop is, there is a diocese.

And what is our diocese? or our particular district under the government, administration or pastoral care of our diocesan bishop?

It must be said that it is principally a collection of local parish churches. That's the bulk of the thing. But there are various other components aren't there? We have a cathedral that we'll meet in soon enough. We've got schools, chaplaincies, theological colleges, and parachurch organisations galore. Just look at the list of who gets to report to Synod and have representation at Synod. That's the whole sum of our diocese.

This is where there is a point of difference to the four contributors of Foundations of Anglican Evangelicalism. An effective diocese isn't just evangelical parishes and evangelical societies. What about the full range of our schools, chaplaincies, agencies? Any and every bit with the label 'Anglican' is part of the - let's get back to the definition - 'district under the government, administration or care of a bishop.' What does it mean for our totally independent, but identifiably Anglican schools, to be under the pastoral care of the bishop? And to somehow - if possible - share in our common purpose?

An effective diocese knows itself - acknowledges all of its component parts. Knows where each part is on the continuum of all their various purposes and ends. An effective diocese finds a way to leads every component part of itself towards an agreed collective purpose. Clearly, that would be a daunting challenge in a diocese as large and as diverse as Melbourne. But we are asking the question aren't we, 'What is a truly effective diocese?'

Many of us who trained at the same time at Ridley had to read Jim Collins' 2001 book, Good To Great - that organisational leadership manual. It describes the features of successful corporations and distills leadership wisdom from their experience: Level 5 leadership etc..

Super stuff. Except that a few years later, Jim and his team noticed that some of their poster corporations had failed and fallen from greatness. Hence the follow up volume, How the Mighty Fall, 2009. Not as many leaders have read this second volume, but it is super sobering and salutary. If you're a glass half empty kind of person, it will tick all your boxes like the best Shakespearean tragedies will. In it, the team observed that great companies often fall in five stages: 1) Hubris Born of Success, 2) Undisciplined Pursuit of More, 3) Denial of Risk and Peril, 4) Grasping for Salvation, and 5) Capitulation to Irrelevance or Death.

An effective diocese knows itself - knows if and where its component parts might be on each of those five stages. We will live to see some Australian dioceses head all the way down the line to

irrelevance and death. Right now a great deal of work is being done by General Synod on the financial viability of some of our dioceses and what might be done to help. Ineffective dioceses will decline and die. It's happened before, and it will keep happening.

It's one thing for evangelicals to get their house in order, share resources and work in deep partnership with one another - as we do, for example, every time a group of churches and individuals partner with CMS to send out a long-term missionary unit. We know what we're on about, we have an agreed purpose, and we lead our people to pursue it with prayers and finances and systems of pastoral care and management. Tick.

But it's quite another thing to generate, to lead that sort of dedicated intent and sacrificial partnership on a diocesan level, across the varying styles of Anglican, across all our component agencies and bodies, towards an agreed common purpose. Yet, to be a truly effective diocese, it has to be done. How else would we collectively account to the Lord for our stewardship of all the resources entrusted to our collective care?

So I hope we are imagining the possibility of every component part of our diocese, pulling together, each in their own space, towards the vision of 1 Peter 2 and Rev 7. Now, that would be something to behold.

An effective diocese knows itself and leads itself towards its agreed collective purpose.

Third, an effective diocese in the 21st century - knows its context

Contextualisation is the is one of the key concepts that we teach our missionaries as they come through St Andrew's Hall. And up to relatively recently it was considered anathema in some conservative evangelical circles. But missionaries have been doing it from day one. Remember Paul in the Areopagus, Acts 17. What a contrast to Paul speaking to his fellow Jews just two chapters earlier.

An effective diocese, has to know its context. It has to contextualise for its actual moment in history and geography and culture and society. And the people who have to do this work are its leaders. Hear again these words from Paul to Timothy:

2 Tim 4

4 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

Why? Why so much patience and care in executing on Article XIX of the 39: 'the preaching of the pure word of God'? Answer, in the next verse:

3 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

That's the Scripture's assessment of people outside the Lordship of Christ. No wonder it will take patience and care. That's the beginning of contextualisation and cultural analysis. What do

the itching ears of Melbourne want to hear today? What myths are our neighbours turning aside to? How will this diocese collectively enact the next instruction from Paul to Timothy?

5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

We can safely say that 'keep your head' does not mean, 'be careful not to get it chopped off by the Romans'. Rather, it's 'be sober-minded'. Know your context. It will involve hardship. But evangelise anyway. Fulfill all your duties, slave of God.

There's so much we can say about our context! But here are two big picture ideas that we have been pondering at CMS:

1. Our meta-context is a world in which the centre of global Christianity has already shifted to the Global South or Majority World. This is the reverse of what happened around 1000AD/CE when the centre of global Christianity shifted from the Middle East and North Africa to Northern Europe – due to the rise of militant Islam. What would it have meant for the world's major missionary societies, Bible colleges or churches in Jerusalem or Carthage to have been faithful in that context? They could see their end coming at the tip of Islam's scimitar. What does it mean for us today?

One thing is must mean is that we must persist in resource transfer to and encouragement of and standing beside our sisters and brothers in Christ where the Lord is actually growing and blessing his church. We have much riches to transfer across. We have much to learn from our Majority World brethren about suffering for the gospel and passion for evangelism. They have so much encouragement for us. We cannot afford to turn inward and focus on our survivability. Effectiveness surely looks like playing our part in seeing in the vision of Rev 7 - for which - even if our diocese shrinks and becomes marginal in our society - we will rejoice in eternity with the saints of the Global South.

2. Australia, and parts of Europe, are highly geared towards immigration – especially from the Majority World. Immigrant communities are in transition and are demonstrably more open to investigating Christianity and conversion. This presents CMS with opportunities to leverage our cross-cultural nous:- local cross-cultural evangelism, raising up second generation migrants to serve as missionaries, diaspora mission. We are focussing on expanding the cultural diversity of our missionary cohort. We are continuing to deepen partnerships with immigrant-heavy churches and congregations. We are seeking to work with those who want to grow in effectiveness in cross-cultural work here in Victoria. This is the part that CMS can play in an effective diocese - and much more could be done within the diocese and by its central organisation.

Well, three features of an effective diocese in the 21st century. Much more could be said about efficiency in compliance, streamlining decision-making, liquidating frozen assets for contemporary ministry, decreasing the burden of assessments, developing a greater risk appetite for evangelism, developing a proper strategy for raising up future ministers... but I've chosen to focus on...

An effective diocese in the 21st century... being one that..

... knows its purpose

... knows itself and leads itself towards that purpose
... and knows its context.

I trust that there's something there for each of us to pray and act on this synod and in our particular ministries. Only, brothers and sisters, declare the praises of him who has raised you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Jesus Christ, it's his diocese. In Christ is hidden all our hopes for this diocese.
Amen.

Questions?