

Bishop Keith Synod Address 2022

The readings that we have had for our Synod Service today have one overarching theme, God is doing a new thing. Of course, on Sunday is the feast of Pentecost, where God did indeed do a new thing as He empowered and transformed the disciples of Jesus from a frightened bunch of men and women into a group of people empowered by the Holy Spirit willing to take risks and even risk their own lives to further the Good News of Jesus.

I believe that God is continuing doing a new thing in our world, and in our Diocese. We have recently had a change of government and in that change, drastic changes have been inflicted on one of the main parties by the so called Teal candidates. One of the reasons the previous government lost office seems to be its inability to listen to the changes going on in society, especially in respect of the need to address environmental concerns, treatment of women, treatment of the vulnerable in our society. The Pandemic has, of course inflicted much change on our world, our society, our country, our state and in our churches. We simply cannot go back to the way it was in our churches, lest we perish.

Ever since I have arrived I have tried hard to listen. There seems to be a number of consistent themes. Listening to the parishes, Governance, pastoral care, Ordination of Women have been the main ones that stick in my mind.

Which brings me to our readings for today.

The Gospel and the Old Testament sets out the missional plan of God that is carried out through the person of Jesus. The Acts of the Apostles reading sets out the shift in direction that the people of God needed to take to embrace the new reality that Jesus had ushered in through his incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension.

The mission and ministry of Jesus demonstrated a shift from the finite thinking of the Jewish people of the day, to the infinite thinking of Jesus.

Many of you will have heard me talk about Simon Sinek and his book start with Why, which is really about purpose, why are we here? This is where we get our purpose of Making Disciples. The other book he wrote is called Infinite Game. In game theory there are two types of games. Finite and Infinite Games. A finite game is described as having known players, known rules and at an agreed outcome after an agreed time you have a winner and a loser. Football is a finite game. There are known players, known rules and when the game finishes it is the game that ends, but the rules and the players remain. In an infinite game the players are known and unknown, the rules are changeable and the game continues it is the players that drop out when they either run out of the will to continue or the resources to continue.

What we do as the Diocese in worshipping God and being a part of the mission of God is an infinite game. The players known and unknown are either parishes or parishioners. Within the wider church it is the Diocese. There are Dioceses that no longer exist, this Diocese did not exist before 1970, so in 1870 our Diocese was an unknown player. There are parishes that no longer exist, and parishes that will exist in the future. The rules are changeable, more on that later. God continues to be a reality

in the world. God will continue his mission and ministry with or without us. God is infinite.

So how do we operate in an infinite Game?

We need five conditions

1. Just Cause. This has to be so just that people are willing to sacrifice for it. However, it must not be self serving and it must have a sense of never ever being able to be completed. So for me, loving as Jesus loves, is a good just cause. It is not self serving, and in reality it will never be achieved, and people can make of it what they will.
2. Worthy Rival. These are not competitors. They are not people who we need to defeat. They are most likely people who will help us understand our shortcomings so we can do better. They are there to be an encourager. If they can do it, so can we.
3. Trusting Teams. This is where we fall down in our faith communities and our Diocese. We have to build trust, but that takes time, I continue to do my bit, the faith communities and the clergy and leaders in the faith communities need to do theirs. This is where compassion, empathy love and kindness will help enormously.
4. Existential Flexibility. This is critical, and is germane to our readings. This is about the willingness and ability to change direction, to move in a new way, with new purpose to be flexible to the changing environment, to stay in the game.
5. Courage to Lead. This simply requires courage to do all the above, because everything from 1-4 is extremely difficult to do.

In our readings today we are in effect reading about Jesus and the Apostles doing number 4 on the Sinek list of conditions to stay in the Infinite Game, an Existential Flex.

For Jesus, he is simply doing what God has always had in mind, right back to the time of Isaiah. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. The people of Jesus' time expected God to operate in a certain way. So when Jesus goes into the Synagogue after being in the wilderness he declares his Why, his purpose. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has sent me to proclaim good news to the poor etc. Jesus is declaring that God is turning on its head everything that everyone understood about God.

For the people of the First Council of Jerusalem they were also turning things on its head. If you were a proselyte, that is a convert to Judaism then you had to be circumcised if you were a male. This was the time-honoured core belief of the Jewish nation. For Paul, this was an issue that needed to be reversed. He argued that the sign of the covenant which you were under the law, was not able to be upheld, even for the Jews, so why would they insist on something for Gentiles? This is a huge Existential Flex both for Jesus and for Paul, and ultimately the people of God in that time. It was not without controversy.

We in this Diocese need to make an Existential Flex as well if we are to stay in the Infinite Game that we are in whether we recognise it or not.

For me our Why is that we need to make Jesus the centre of our lives so that we can help others make Jesus the centre of their lives, and thereby give us and them new hope and new life and bring about the KOG here on earth as it is in heaven. In short sentence terms make disciples.

Our Just Cause is for us to love as Jesus loves thereby giving people we encounter the opportunity to encounter God, to understand they have value and worth for who they are, and help them feel safe and secure in God's love. To show kindness empathy, love, compassion, for our churches to be a place of sanctuary, of refuge and inclusion for people from the vicissitudes of the world. In short form, love as Jesus loves.

Since my arrival in the Diocese, despite seeing opportunities for growth and renewal, it was obvious to me that there was a lot of preparatory work that needed to be done, before we could reap the rewards of what I detected was possible. To put it in house building terms, I sensed the need to pour a lot of concrete into foundations that when we started building we wouldn't see but were critical to success and the strength of what we were to build together.

The areas that needed to be addressed included the Parochial Administration Ordinance, a new Clergy Services Ordinance, Governance, Work Health and Safety, Leadership, Lay Ministry

One of the primary tasks of the Diocese is to assist all in the Diocese make our Parishes safe Places for everyone to come and be a part of. For if people do not perceive that we are a safe inclusive place, then they won't come no matter how compelling our evangelistic efforts are. Making our Diocese, our parishes, our faith communities places of safety inclusion and sanctuary is a missional imperative. There is much to be done in this space. We will not be successful in mission and ministry if we are not perceived by the wider community and those we encounter as being a place of safety for them.

Parochial Administration Ordinance

So, the first task was to bring the Parochial Administration Ordinance into the 21st Century. This necessitated the creation of the Clergy Services Ordinance. We now have two documents that allow us to deal with how we care for clergy and how we can care for parishes, separately.

The PAO is there to give parishes flexibility in operating as parishes in a world not even imagined in 1970. This includes, as well as traditional understanding of church other understandings. On line church, house church, gatherings outside of church buildings, being flexible in recognising what a parish is, and what it is not. I am positioning the church for the future, not just for the here and now, and certainly not for the past. It also helps them navigate and understand their responsibility in the modern world of Governance, The new PAO also recognises the need for good governance in our parishes, and the need for team ministry. It is simply no longer possible with all the other imposts on parishes for one clergy person to do governance and all the ministry required for the new mission paradigm.

The new PAO helps place front and centre before parishes the reality that faith communities, parishes, are where disciples of Jesus reside and our main purpose as faith communities and parishes is not just holding services, card days, Op-Shops etc.

These are important for maintaining our faith communities, but we are in the business of making disciples of the Lord Jesus and we need to exhibit his characteristics of kindness, love, compassion and empathy as we introduce people to Jesus. Therefore, we need to have ministry that focuses on pastoral care, evangelism, education and stewardship to allow us to achieve this purpose of making disciples. I understand some parishes can't do this now. We will work the issues out together. No one needs to panic about what is not being done but concentrate on what can be done. By concentrating on developing these ministries we will develop new leaders for the future development of our diocese and that is a critical task we need to attend to. We need a leadership pipeline in this diocese, as we need to become self-sufficient in raising up new ministry leadership for the future.

Clergy Services Ordinance

In the Clergy Services Ordinance we now have the means to support clergy for the difficult role that they have in this modern world. The new CSO is all about helping clergy be as fruitful as possible and be supported to the fullest as they embark on the difficult challenge of ministry in the 21st Century. The Royal Commission has identified a number of deficiencies in our care of clergy. I believe that the vast majority of clergy come into ministry with nothing else other than a desire to serve God and to exhibit the characteristics of love, kindness empathy and compassion towards the people of God. However, in the whirlwind of ministry people can get overwhelmed and lose that pastoral empathetic edge. If we want to be a diocese that is a safe place of inclusion, a sanctuary for people, who want to make disciples and love as Jesus loves, which is what I want us to be, then we have to assist clergy be exemplars of exhibiting that Jesus shaped life of love, kindness, compassion and empathy. They can only do this when they are operating at their best, and that requires our taking care of them and helping them take care of themselves.

The National Church has taken that challenge up and produced the excellent document you have been provided with those details how we can care for clergy for the long term. Ministry is a marathon; it is not a sprint. However, that responsibility for clergy care is not just a Diocesan responsibility or even a clergy persons responsibility. It is also a parish responsibility. The impact of ministry on the clergy person is felt at the parish level at its keenest. It requires input from the Diocese, parish and clergy to help maintain their health and longevity. The diocese is doing its bit through the Clergy Services Ordinance and facilitating the introduction of the Supervision, Professional Development and Ministry Review protocols, the parish has to do its bit in allowing the clergy person time for Professional Development, Supervision and Ministry Reviews, and for it to be done in a helpful way, and the clergyperson has to do their bit by participating meaningfully and helpfully in the process mindful that the whole purpose is to support and encourage them for longevity in ministry.

Lay Ministry

In the PAO there is a new emphasis on leadership and the inclusion of lay leadership to assist clergy in the mission and ministry in the parishes. To assist this we have, under the leadership of Fr. Cliff Greaves, established a connection with Bp Tim Harris from St. Matthews Church, Kensington in Adelaide and the lay training programme he has developed which includes such topics as "How to Handle the Bible, What on earth is God doing and Christian Worship." In addition, we are now a registered Local College under the umbrella of Alpha Crucis University. These give us two different

opportunities to train lay people for different roles at different levels of complexity and cost. Further, Fr. Chris Talbot at South Coast has had his team develop a Pastoral Care Training Package and Homiletic resources. I am delighted that these are taking shape. In time we will develop and mature them. With Fr Andrew Forder's guidance we are rolling out the Bp Harris material across the Diocese and he will give our Synod an update on that. The Alpha Crucis registration process is now live and on our web site.

Leadership

With these lay training initiatives, plus the resources available at St. Barnabas, we have new opportunities to develop a leadership pipeline, where over time we can develop new leaders in our diocese. We are effectively starting from the beginning, and so it will take time to develop future leaders but develop them we must for the future mission and ministry in the Diocese.

Governance

With respect to Governance, I tasked Ms Jenetta Russell OAM to put together a suitable document. This is a living document that will serve us into the future as it will be flexible and malleable to our requirements but still satisfy the regulatory environment that will inevitably change as governments get so called bright ideas into their heads and increase the regulatory burden on us. On Wednesday I was informed by her that the document is ready for distribution and comment. It will be given to the members of DC for its consideration.

WHS and Child Protection

We are moving more slowly than I would like to being compliant with Working With Children, and Safe Ministry registry requirements that allow us to keep abreast of who is up to date and who is not so we are a safer place for children. However, we are making progress. We are also making progress with Work Health and Safety. Dr. Ted Sandercock is heading up a small group to allow the simple roll out of WHS across the Diocese. Currently it is paper based, but we are looking at other alternatives to make it easier to manage and audit. All this is important work and is part of the concrete pour into our diocesan foundations which will help us build a strong safe diocese where the Kingdom of God might flourish anew.

Green Shoots

So much has been happening behind the scenes. However, that is not all. The parishes are still doing amazing things. Mt. Gambier in their ecumenical outreach and trying new styles of services to incorporate new people, as well as ac.care, Mt Barker / Strath are feeding people on Fridays as well as outreach in the community in various guises, Kingston / Robe are hosting bbqs at the rectory and inviting non parishioners to come and meet Bp Michael, Southern Suburbs, despite a storm and fire at Christies Beach and other sadnesses in the parish, are continuing to reach out to their communities and inviting people to be involved. Amazingly, the site of the fire at St. Francis, which is just a slab now has people coming to the services in the old rectory and I understand they are at capacity. Western Fleurieu continue their good work in a very challenging environment, Naracoorte continue their mission and ministry within the community and are reaching out through Social Media, Riverland with Food Bank and ac.care, South Coast and their Pantry co-op, Penola / Millicent, Murraylands, Onkaparinga, all doing great work in their own ways, bible studies both local and

ZOOM, Op-Shop ministries, Food Bank ministry, liaising with ac.care. Everyone is working hard, and I recognise it is difficult especially in the COVID environment but I want to acknowledge you all and your efforts. It is exciting to see these green shoots in the diocese, to give us all hope and encouragement. It is my intention to put as much support capacity into the diocese so we can continue to do all those things and other ministry as well. This is because it is in the parishes where the ministry occurs, not in the diocese, in the parishes. The diocese is only as strong as the parishes.

Conflict

One of the gaps in the parishes capacity for growth and resilience has been the issue of conflict. Frankly, conflict has just about destroyed this diocese, by destroying trust, creating division and a party spirit. This has resulted in a feeling of lack of safety in the parishes. I am determined that together we turn that around. In the past conflict has escalated dramatically and it has been pushed up the line to the bishop more quickly than it should. Earlier this year I invited Peace Wise to run two training days in the Diocese. This was held a Southern Suburbs O'Halloran Hill. There we started to learn the biblical principles of making peace rather than escalating conflict. The principle behind Peace Wise is that the people in conflict use Christ centred principles to make peace with one another. The two days saw over 50 people engage in the training. We are awaiting further training resources. I have appointed Mr. Richard Williamson from Mt. Barker Strathalbyn to be the Peace Director for the Diocese. We are in the process of working out the programme for rolling out the Peace Wise programme across the Diocese so that there will be training, equipping and resources for faith communities to learn how to deal with conflict at the local level minimising escalation.

All of us, Bishop, Clergy and lay people must seek to defuse or de-escalate conflict. This is an imperative if our churches are to be places of sanctuary and safety. This will, in time, allow us to build trust in parishes and assist in people feeling safe and secure, where they have not for a long time. It will help us to build capacity for love, kindness, empathy and compassion, in our faith communities, all characteristics of Jesus and therefore of God. If we claim to be ambassadors for Jesus and God, then we must exhibit these from the top down, and the bottom up.

I noted that we needed to do an Existential Flex. That is a change of direction that will assist us in staying in the Infinite Game of being the people of God.

I have discovered that about ten years ago when Fr. Richard Seabrook was the Administrator of the Diocese a Synod in that time passed a motion requesting that the next Bishop when elected would allow discussion on the Ordination of Women. That was not honoured, and so I feel that it is important to honour that request of that Synod. Therefore, today I am announcing that I am opening a discussion on the Ordination of Women in this Diocese. During the next twelve months this diocese will have an opportunity to discuss this issue at length. The clergy will have the opportunity amongst themselves at a clergy school. I have asked two significant clergypersons to come and speak. Each person will present a case that some will not agree with. It is important that the clergy hear from a perspective they will not necessarily agree. This is important for even if one is not persuaded to change their mind on this issue, it is still important we all hear the differing opinions so we can make sure our position is from a position of informed knowledge rather than a caricature. I will also distribute amongst the Diocesan Synod Reps, clergy and lay various papers putting both opinions so that discussions in parishes can be had if necessary. To further facilitate a good

listening discussion in the next twelve months I will call the Synod together, not to be Synod, but to come together and discuss the issue in a combined workshop day. Ample time will be given to allow maximum involvement. If parishes wish to facilitate discussions I will be supportive and if you need help in that space please let me know.

I will then allow appropriate legislation to come forward to the next Synod to permit the adoption of the General Synod Canon which enables women to be priested in the Diocese, and we will have a full debate at the next Synod on that, and I will allow a vote. The Synod will have the opportunity to debate it, and to vote on it at that Synod. Whatever the decision of Synod I will support that decision. If it passes, I will not block it.

I have taken this decision for a number of reasons. While I have in the past been not in favour of the OOW it has not been because I don't think that women can't or shouldn't be ordained. I simply felt that it was an ecumenical decision that needed to be made. However, it would appear that such a decision is not possible given the ecumenical climate. This understanding has been helpfully reinforced for me by Professor Stephen Pickard, former Assistant Bishop in Adelaide and the Canon Theologian of our Diocese. In a recent paper I asked him to prepare for me on this issue, he noted that my position is really a variation on the so-called Branch Church Theory which was prominent in the 17th and 18th Centuries. His searing critique of this theory is that such a position cannot help us now as it no longer gives us a true picture or an accurate account of the body of Christ in its modern diversity and division, nor does it provide a basis for a new mission for a new time.

He also helpfully exposes the incongruence of those who claim that because Jesus in his earthly life was male, therefore only males can be representatives of Christ. He achieves this critique by reminding me that Jesus is raised from the dead and is the second person of the Trinity. His resurrected body is representative of all humanity, male and female, not just male, and so the one who stands at the altar should represent all humanity and cannot therefore be gender specific. He makes other observations which are most helpful. I will be placing his paper plus all other papers made available to me on our website so that everyone in the Diocese will have access to the information being discussed.

Furthermore, influenced by the understandings I have gained by doing my leadership courses and being mentored by the likes of the late Bp David McCall and my reading it is clear to me that as a Bishop my responsibilities are different to when I was a parish priest. A fact I had not appreciated until I became a bishop. I have a responsibility to lead this diocese of many parishes, not just one parish into the future and to position it for future development and growth despite my own personal views, because we are in an infinite game. If we want the diocese to stay the way it has always been then we are operating in a finite manner, and when you play an infinite game in a finite manner two things happen, you get bogged down in detail and irrelevancy and you either run out of the will to continue or you run out of resources or both. This Diocese has gotten bogged down in all sorts of issues it should never have gotten bogged down in, because the leadership was conducting a finite game in trying to win, when we are in an infinite game and we need to not win but stay in the game.

The OOW is no longer a liberal / conservative issue. Some of the most conservative people I know ordain women. The head of GAFCON which is about as conservative as you can get in Australia outside of Sydney ordains women, the son of a former Bishop

of a Diocese which still does not ordain women, ordains women in the Diocese he now leads. On top of that there is hardly any serious catholic theologian who does not support the ordination of women.

All this and more will be some of the ground we will need to cover in the next twelve months as we move towards the next Synod.

A second existential flex we have to make is about becoming intentionally more welcoming and inclusive to the people which Jesus identified in his sermon in the Synagogue in Nazareth, the poor, the stranger, the single person, the broken-hearted, the downtrodden, those who feel excluded by society and by us as the church. At the recent General Synod, we had a number of debates on the issue of LGBTQIA+ people.

We need to be welcoming to our LGBTQIA+ brothers and sisters in Christ for they along with all the other people Jesus mentions in his sermon, are made in the image and likeness of God and therefore they have value and worth in the eyes of God and therefore we must look on them in no less a way. We cannot simply have a note on our sign board or our web site saying all welcome if we do not truly welcome all into our faith communities. I understand that this will be a huge challenge for some of our people, but we must do this for we need to be loving and caring and kind and compassionate to those who come through our doors to seek the solace and comfort of our loving God.

The reality in our society is that the people in our communities are living lives of quiet desperation. This reality is demonstrated in the rise of mental health issues, breakdown of relationships, homelessness, poverty, and the like. We need our parishes to be places of inclusion, genuine welcome for the stranger, for those who are different, who don't fit our mould. All this is ultimately due to the reality that the world in which we live in, is quite frankly in an holistic mess. Thankfully we have an holistic gospel as good news for every part of life in our world affected by sin, and that good news is centred on the cross of Christ.

As mentioned I have recently been to General Synod where there has been a big debate on Gay Marriage. In preparation for that I read a number of books and watched a number of debates about this issue. The issue of Gay Marriage is important, but it seems to me that there is a much bigger issue before we get to Gay Marriage, and that is the reality that this topic is not an issue, it is about real people, who have real struggles, and are genuinely believers in Jesus.

I am not sure what the statistics are here in Australia, but in America, over 80% of LGBTQ people were raised in the church. Over 50% of that 80% left the church by the time they were 18, and of that 80% who left, 97% left not because of the church's teaching on marriage, but because they did not feel loved, or welcomed, but demonised and considered evil for even being same sex attracted, EVEN IF THEY DID NOT ACT ON THOSE IMPULSES. They did not feel like they belonged in the presence of God. In short, they did not experience what Pauls talks about in Romans 2:4, the kindness of God.

The title of one of the books I read on this issue is entitled "People to be Loved." The LGBTQ community has been anything but loved by the church in the past and we need to repent of that, and seek God's forgiveness and theirs. The General Synod addressed this issue in a specific motion of apology to the LBGTQ community.

So, to follow the example of General Synod, I also wish to apologise to the LGBTQIA+ community and to their families and their friends, many of whom have left our churches, but many have remained. I am sorry for our Diocese and church's role in ostracising, demonising and refusing to recognise you all as loved and precious children of God who have been made in His image and likeness, and have value and worth in that createdness

While I cannot undo what has happened in the past, and I cannot promise I or the Diocese will get our restoring of relationship with you right straight away I can promise you we will try. I also recognise that you will, with justification be somewhat sceptical and wish to see real change. I get that. I also get that me saying this is one thing, where the real change will need to occur is at the grass roots of the Diocese, and that is in the parishes. Clergy and lay people together will need to have a commitment to this change. I am committed to starting the journey, and encouraging it in the parishes. I acknowledge it will take time, and there will be fits and starts and there will be frustration on both sides.

I remain committed to doing my part in listening and seeing as best I am able our LGBTQIA+ sisters and brothers in Christ. I think that it is in the listening and coming to understand you is where we need to be. One of my favourite authors on this topic is Preston Sprinkle. He makes the important comment that people will not listen to any truth we might have in the gospel if they do not first experience our grace. This applies not just to the LGBTQIA+ community, but to all in our communities that we have disenfranchised through our neglect, arrogance and indifference.

So my apology needs to be not just in words, but in deeds as well, from me all the way down to the parishes as we seek to show the kindness of God to the LGBTQ community, but also to others as well. The homeless, those suffering mental illness, the poor, those who have experienced relationship distress and breakdown, those who hate us. We need to reach out to those who have been abused in the church by leaders, especially, but not limited to, clergy.

We need to apologise for the cover ups, the moving on of clergy known to have offended, and in seeking to protect the good name of the church have further traumatised victims. I have heard that for some victims the trauma of abuse will take a lifetime to recover from, but the treatment, even abuse, by the church of them to their claims they will never recover from. Woe betide us when we stand before the Lord on the day of Judgment for that.

There is much to be done. I get that it seems overwhelming, and where do we start? I think on my Leadership mentors advice, how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. We can not fix everything, and we cannot fix everyone. However, what we can do is be like Jesus.

Here is what I think we need to do as a diocese, as a bishop, as clergy and as parishioners.

We must be deliberate and obvious disciples of Jesus. It is as simple and as complex as that.

This means that we have to be committed to the mission and ministry of Jesus. Isaiah is often seen as the fifth Gospel and Stephen Mason on his essay on Holistic mission says that Jesus' Gospel is essentially Isaiah's Gospel, and if that is true then maybe

we had better pay attention to what Isaiah has to say, especially in this context. The passage of Isaiah 61 outlines what is expected of Israel, and thus we can read today, the people of God, and therefore read us in the Diocese of The Murray.

Isaiah 61 is a proforma for what we are to be about if we claim to be the people of God. Mason's conclusion is that the mission described in Isaiah 61 is not just a mission for Jesus, but a mission for the church as well, with its reach outside of itself to the nations, which means for us here in the Diocese of The Murray we need to reach out to our corner of South Australia. Mason notes that the gist of the poem is that a restored Israel will have an impact on the nations. For us, that means a restored Diocese will have an impact on the part of South Australia we are called to proclaim the Good News of God in Christ Jesus.

We can only be a restored Diocese by truly being imitators of Jesus the Christ. Exhibiting love, compassion, kindness, empathy to those who are careworn. We need to be parishes and a Diocese that is able to say to the people we encounter, Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light, and you will find rest for your souls. In this we will be a church that is a sanctuary and a refuge, a place where inclusion, kindness, empathy, love and compassion are to the fore, and our missionary activity will be effective because people will see in us the person of Jesus who first spoke these words.

May the God of Grace fill your hearts with love, kindness compassion and mercy.
Amen