



The Anglican Diocese of Gippsland

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Bishop of Gippsland

A Pastoral Letter from +Richard

To be read please in all parishes and ministry centres of the Diocese at services on Sunday 21 August

My dear brothers and sisters,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! I am glad to be home in Gippsland after the recent Lambeth Conference, and to be with our clergy and people again as we proclaim the Gospel in word and deed.

After such an experience of unity and common ground at the Conference, it has been distressing to return to reports of a ‘split’ in the Anglican Church of Australia, with the launch of the Diocese of the Southern Cross during the GAFCON Conference in Canberra this week.

Please be assured that the Anglican Church of Australia has not split. The Diocese of the Southern Cross is a new and self-described ‘separate and parallel’ entity that makes no claim to be part of the Anglican Church of Australia* which is comprised of 23 geographical dioceses in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is one of four ‘Instruments of Communion’.

Widespread media coverage of a ‘breakaway’ movement may be upsetting and confusing for many of us. Others may welcome such an alternative dispensation for those who feel they cannot in good conscience remain in fellowship with their bishop.

The move has been prompted by what GAFCON Australia sees as an ‘emergency’ with respect to the authority of the Bible in relation to the removal of obstacles for the blessing of same-sex civil unions by the November 2020 Appellate Tribunal decision and outcomes of this year’s General Synod. If you would be helped by a summary of these developments I refer you to my Presidential Address to our Synod in June, which can be viewed on the diocesan website, along with the text of this letter.

As your bishop, I take the authority of Scripture absolutely seriously. As an Anglican, I also take seriously the authority of the church – the no less inspired community that receives and reads the Scriptures faithfully and afresh in each time and place, aided by God-given reason and guided by the experience of tradition.

If Gippsland Anglicans – lay or ordained – have concerns about my own position on these matters, or the implications of any of this for you, I would encourage you to speak with me directly. I have said consistently since coming to the Diocese that we are an inclusive community in which all are welcome and valued, all voices are heard, and our diversity is celebrated as a gift that strengthens our share in God’s mission to the world.

The world God loves certainly faces several emergencies: climate change, a global food crisis, geopolitical conflict, economic uncertainty, racial- and gender-based violence, and post-colonial trauma, to name but a few. At the Lambeth Conference hundreds of Anglican bishops – though, sadly, not all – came together from around the Communion to focus attention outwards on these and other spaces into which we are called to live and speak Good News. May we not allow this clear missional focus and intention to be overshadowed by internal disputes that leave many in our churches and wider communities bewildered or disillusioned.

If one member of the body suffers, all suffer with it (1 Cor 12:26), and we are diminished by this separateness. Let us trust that in God’s good and generous economy the Diocese of the Southern Cross will be a blessing to many, and that the pain and shame of our public brokenness may lead us all to self-examination and true repentance, lest our Lord’s prayer for our unity be forgotten, and our witness to his reconciling love be muted.

You are much in my prayers, and I am – as always – grateful for, and reliant upon, yours.

Grace and peace,

* see <https://scd.org.au/faqs/>

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