



13 May 2022

Dear friends in Christ,

### **General Synod 2022**

I am writing to you as the 18<sup>th</sup> General Synod draws to a close. I have enjoyed the opportunity of being with each of the 4 clergy and 4 lay representatives from our Diocese as we have sat, deliberated, ate, and prayed together. Archdeacon Arthur Copeman, Dean Katherine Bowyer, and I have all been elected to the General Synod Standing Committee. Arthur, Katherine, and Ms Sue Williams have been active in the administration of the Synod. Several of us spoke in debates and joined in out-of-session conversations.

The rhythm of each day has been shaped by the Eucharist, Morning Prayer, Bible Study and Evening Prayer. Brother Christopher John SSF from Stroud and the Reverend Mandy Wheatley TSSF, formerly from the Diocese, were part of the Synod Chaplaincy Team. Dr Di Rayson, a first-time representative of our Diocese, wonderfully led, the Wednesday bible study.

With a common mind, the General Synod has continued to ensure the safety of all people in churches and addressed Climate Change, Family Violence, Aged and Disability Care, Gambling, Veteran Suicide, Euthanasia, Palliative Care, and the viability of regional dioceses. It offered an apology where it has treated LGBTI people with disrespect, abuse or bullying and expressed again its commitment that all churches and ministries are welcoming, safe, and respectful. It reflected on and prayed about the war in the Ukraine.

The General Synod is run with a parliamentary model. We have questions, petitions, bills, and motions. There are two dominant factions roughly represented by a 66:34 breakdown. There are around 250 members. The Diocese of Sydney comprises 28% of the Synod. The Diocese of Newcastle under 4%.

The Anglican Church of Australia is different to the Church of England, or the Church in New Zealand, where the decisions of the General Synod are binding on a Diocese. In Australia, no decision affecting the order and government of a Diocese comes into effect unless decided by that Diocese. When our Synod meets in September, there will be several Canons from General Synod to consider.

Last night, 40% of the Synod voted to affirm same-sex marriage as part of Christian life and witness, 60% voted against it. Our Diocesan Synod has never considered this question. It has only considered blessing a civil same-sex marriage.

Formally, the views of the House of Bishops have only been evident on three matters before the Synod – a statement on unchastity, a statement on marriage, and changes to the Canon concerning Services 1992. With both other houses, the House of Bishops affirmed the statement on unchastity and declined to change the Canon concerning Services. The House of Bishops did not support the statement on marriage. It was evident in the Synod that the statement did not find wide agreement. This weighed heavily on many Bishops.



We heard of same sex attracted Christians who live chaste and celibate lives who do not feel respected by a debate that presumes that all same sex attracted people wish to marry or engage in sexual activity. We heard of same sex attracted Christians who want to marry in Church. We heard contested reflections of the scriptures. We heard that 1/3 of worshipping Anglicans are single and we heard a call to affirm singleness as an honourable and blessed state. We heard that very few blessings of same sex civil marriages had occurred since any possible obstacle was removed in November 2019. We heard a plea to continue slowly, pastorally, and faithfully.

The fact of disagreement or continued questioning does not close but rather invites further deliberation. Significant theological, pastoral, and missional dialogue will continue. The first Christians and the early Church wrestled with many weighty matters as the Church has done through the ages. In every age, we seek the wisdom and guidance of God. We can be encouraged and edified by the ongoing conversations in our Diocese and those that will occur at our Diocesan Synod in September.

Our Diocese has a profound responsibility and opportunity to witness to the grace and love of God, from the Hawkesbury River to Lake Cathie, from the coast and beyond the Burning Mountain. We can contribute well to human flourishing through our work. We can change lives by witnessing to Jesus Christ, who continues to inspire us. Through our parishes, agencies and schools, we are making a significant difference in people's lives, expressing the mission of Christ, and playing our part in enabling God's will to be done on earth as in heaven.

May we continue to be renewed in our Godly communion with one another. Please be assured of my prayers for all that you are and in all that you do.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

**Dr Peter Stuart**  
**Bishop of Newcastle**