

Anglicare Australia Conference
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‘Putting people first – being true to our mission’
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I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak with you and I thank the organisers for the invitation. The Anglican Church is rather proud of Anglicare Australia and all it represents. Those who are well informed about the work done by the members of Anglicare Australia are virtually always impressed by its scope and diversity and geographical spread as well as by its quality. There’s a proper pride in Anglicare and a sense of gratitude and satisfaction that this work goes on in the community in the name of the Anglican Church.

At the same time I wonder just how many members of the church are well informed about the work of Anglicare. People are often surprised to discover the extent of what Anglicare member organisations actually do. Sometimes people are surprised when they discover that a particular organisation is actually Anglican or has its roots in the Anglican Church. This ignorance about Anglicare, on the part of church members, is one troubling aspect of the relationship.

The other side of the same coin is that within Anglicare organisations themselves there is sometimes little sense that the organisation is an expression of the Anglican Church, or that the work the organisation does is part of the church’s mission. Occasionally it might be helpful to wheel out a bishop to say something in front of a TV camera, but that’s about it. The sense that what the organisation does at every level is part and parcel of the church’s mission, doesn’t penetrate very far if at all. Now, the situation varies from organisation to organisation and diocese to diocese, of course. In some instances there was a close relationship historically which, for various reasons, has become weaker over time and now may be barely discernible. In other cases there might be residual links that don’t mean much anymore. At worst there can be antagonism and resentment at what is seen as interference by the church, on the one hand, or at organisations that are seen to pose a financial and legal risk to the church on the other.

There can be many reasons for growing separation between church and organisations. There are interpersonal factors, historical factors, financial and legal considerations, structural elements, pure pragmatism and, not to be underestimated, the fact that the two might simply drift apart because the relationship wasn’t properly nurtured and maintained by people who were simply too busy and preoccupied with other things.

So I’m glad to tackle this morning the theme ‘being true to our mission’ as part of the overall conference topic ‘putting people first’ because I think focusing on mission and its implications has the potential to strengthen and renew the relationship between the church and its caring organisations and to revitalise both.

The church as a whole has had mission well and truly in its sights for some years now. The General Synod of our Church in 2004 called for mission to be the top priority leading up to the next General Synod in 2007. So the Standing Committee has made mission its main focus. It has appointed a mission taskforce, with Bishop Andrew Curnow as chair, which has just published a book called 'Building the Mission-Shaped Church in Australia'. Standing Committee also appointed a National Mission Facilitator, the Rev'd Stuart Robinson, Rector of the parish of Chatswood in Sydney. Stuart has visited a number of dioceses and has been involved in a national series of conferences this year on 'unleashing the mission shaped church'. And I notice that bishops all around the country are tackling mission in their addresses to synods this year.

So there's no doubt that mission is front and centre of the church's mind at present. But does the church see what Anglicare does as part and parcel of its mission? And does Anglicare see what it does as part and parcel of the church's mission? I wonder, for example, how many of you participated in those conferences around the country a few months ago. Were you invited? Were you even aware they were on? There will be great value in developing, or it may be recapturing, a common understanding of mission for church and caring organisation alike. It will have to be a holistic understanding – and make no mistake that will stretch both church and Anglicare and will probably be resisted in both quarters. But owning and being true to such a sense of mission has the potential, in my view, to bridge any rift between the church and its caring organisations and to renew and enliven both.

Theological Framework for Mission

In April this year Bishop Tom Wright, the Bishop of Durham, gave a series of insightful and passionate lectures about mission: the mission of Jesus and the mission of the Church in a post-modern world. He sketched an overview which I think provides a helpful framework for thinking about mission.

Grand narratives are pretty much out of fashion in our post-modern world. But we can't avoid the fact that the basis of the Christian faith is just such an overarching story. And the Christian grand narrative goes something like this:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But from the beginning human beings got it wrong. They acted destructively and the consequences of sin spread throughout creation marring every aspect of it.

God called Abraham to deal with the consequences of sin – 'in you,' God said, 'all the families of the earth will be blessed,' (Gen. 12.3) not cursed as a result of sin, but blessed as a result of Abraham's and Israel's vocation. These two fundamental affirmations emerged in the story. The world is in a mess, but it is still loved by God. The dream of Israel was that God would act through Israel to put the whole world to rights. Israel is to be a light to the nations, a source of blessing.

But century after century Israel itself gets it wrong. They sell each other into slavery in Egypt. In the Exodus God rescues them from slavery, but on the way to the promised land all they do is complain about the food and drink God provides. When they arrive, they eventually get their way and, like the other nations around them, get a king. God resists their appointing a king but eventually relents provided that the king will rule after God's own heart. And then the king mucks it up. Israel builds a temple where God promises to dwell forever, but it becomes so corrupt that God sends the Babylonians to tear it down.

Israel knew it was called to be a light to the nations, but a long line of pagan nations, one after the other, crushed Israel: the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians – and last of all, by Jesus day, Rome.

So the story of Israel is the story of a people carrying the promises of God for the world, but sorely in need of those promises themselves. Israel clings to the dream that the creator God would act through them to deal with the great issues of the world. But Israel itself is in need of being put to rights.

One of the best known passages of the bible is called 'the sermon on the mount.' You find it in chapters 5-7 of Matthew's gospel. It contains things like the beatitudes – Blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers and so on. It also contains some hard sayings like 'if your right eye causes you to sin pluck it out and throw it away... and if your right hand causes you to sin cut it off. The Sermon on the Mount is often thought of as a set of impossibly difficult ethical standards that Christians are supposed to obey.

But the context of the Sermon on the Mount is this broader story about Israel's vocation to be a light to the nations. The sermon can also be understood as Jesus challenging Israel to be true to itself. Israel was supposed to be salt of the earth and a light to the nations but had lost its saltiness and instead of putting its light on a hill had hidden it under a basket.

So Jesus becomes **for Israel** what Israel was meant to be **for the world**. Jesus identifies himself with Israel's vocation. He digs deeply into what are called the suffering servant songs in Isaiah (52.13-53.12) and himself embraces Israel's vocation as the suffering servant.

The way through the problem of evil, the way God will set the world to rights, is not through military might but by letting evil do its worst and exhausting it. Suffering itself is redemptive because somehow suffering will exhaust evil.

Jesus embraces this identity as Israel's suffering servant messiah.

So Jesus touches the leper. He risks contracting leprosy himself, he risks being ostracized from the community himself, in order to restore the leper. Jesus risks contracting leprosy and the leper contracts Jesus' life and health.

Jesus touches the dead child, risking corpse impurity himself, and the dead child is raised to life.

Jesus takes on himself their impurity and they receive his life and wholeness.

Throughout his ministry, but especially as he moves towards the cross, Jesus takes on himself the evil and dis-ease of the world, finally dying with brigands and revolutionaries at the hands of Roman power, not to defeat Rome, but to defeat evil. On the cross all the evil you can imagine focuses down on Jesus, in a terrible kind of vortex, he takes it into himself and somehow overcomes it, exhausts it.

What you see in the life and death of Jesus is Jesus embodying the ancient vocation of Israel. He lives out the servant songs of Isaiah and Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. Israel was called to be a light on a hill, Jesus dies on the hill most visibly. The sermon says that if anyone forces you to go one mile, go an extra mile: Jesus carries his Roman cross all the way to Calvary. The sermon says if anyone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other also: Jesus embodies the sermon. He does it. He is the light of the world, the salt of the earth.

The ancient hope of Israel was that God would come back and rescue God's people, and spread justice and salvation over the whole earth. God would re-launch his Israel project. There was going to be an amazing rebirth of God's original vision of the people of God and the earth. There was going to be a new creation.

It comes in Jesus. When Jesus came and said 'The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand', he was saying the day has come. The great story of the people of God through the centuries, the whole of world history, is coming to its climax **now!** This is the moment. 'Repent and believe the good news' didn't mean say you're sorry for your own individual sins. It meant put aside your own agenda and get on board with Jesus' agenda. He is the one through whom and in whom the new creation is beginning now!

So, in the gospels, we find that everywhere Jesus goes, new creation happens. When Jesus calms the storm, order is brought out of the chaos of the waters covering the earth, just as it was in the Genesis creation story. Jesus cures the blind, makes the lame walk, sets the captive free. Wherever he goes creation is set right, healed, renewed. The final evil to be defeated is death itself and that victory is clinched in the resurrection. The new creation is definitively here.

It's not complete yet. That's true. We live between the launch of the new creation in Jesus and the time when it will be completed in what the New Testament calls a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21). But it has begun; there's no turning back.

In the meantime, we have a job to do. Jesus said 'As the Father sent me, so I send you' and he breathed the Holy Spirit into them (John 20.21-22). In a nutshell, that's the mission of the church. We are sent by Jesus, as he was sent by the Father, to spread the ramifications of the resurrection throughout the whole earth. The mission of the church is to implement the resurrection in the power of the Spirit thereby

anticipating the new heaven and the new earth. Mission is bringing the message of new creation to birth in the world now in anticipation of what God will complete in the end.

So mission is not simply about individual salvation, going to heaven when we die. No, the end envisaged in the New Testament is not us going up to heaven, but a new Jerusalem (a new earth) coming down from heaven to earth so that the dwelling of God is with humans and heaven and earth become one at last, in fulfilment of Jesus' prayer 'Your kingdom come on earth as in heaven'.

Mission is not about saving people from a nasty earth which is going over the edge of a cliff and whipping them away to a disembodied home in heaven. No, God is going to renew, heal, restore, immortalize the whole creation. The model is the resurrection of Jesus at Easter.

And mission is bringing to birth in the present, again and again and again, creation healed, restored, made whole, until God deals with the whole creation in the same way as he did with Jesus at Easter. That's why we are interested now in healing the planet, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless now, against the day when God finishes the job off.

Now this is a very broad-brush overview. But there's enough here to tell us who we are and what we are to do. It's a framework for thinking about mission.

The marks of mission

Let's try then to pin down a bit more specifically what mission looks like within this broad framework. It has been said that God's Church doesn't have a mission in the world. It's the other way around. God's mission has a church in the world.

This puts the emphasis where it should be.

God has a mission. God loves the world and all people and reaches out beyond himself to love and save the world. That's God's mission.

The heart of God's mission is Jesus' re-launching of the Israel project, ushering in a new era, the launching of new creation.

God's mission in sending the Son is to reconcile all people to each other and to God, to establish a new era, a new reign, a new kingdom of peace and justice. The values and principles that were revealed in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus reveal the shape and character of that kingdom.

So that's the first and most basic point. God is at work in the world with a particular purpose, with a particular end in mind. That end is the kingdom of God. That's why the Father sent Jesus and that's why Jesus said, 'As the Father sent me, so I send you.'

The Father sends Jesus and Jesus sends the church to make known the good news of the new creation, the kingdom of God.

That's the heading which sits over all mission. That's what mission is about. That's why it comes first as a heading in the marks of mission of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Now as soon as the church starts to make known the news about the kingdom, people want to come on board, because it's good news. In a world of conflict and violence news about a new era of peace and justice, of respect and reconciliation, of compassion and care, is good news and people want to get on board. So mission also involves initiating new believers into the church: getting people on board with Jesus' agenda.

That's what baptism is about. Baptism means being joined to Christ so that his life becomes our life, so that his mission becomes our mission. We become part of the body of Christ and Christ continues his mission in the world acting through us.

Baptism isn't magic, of course. Each baptised person is on a journey being transformed into the likeness of Christ. We grow up into Christ so that more and more Christ's character and life can be seen in us. Learning more about Christ through the scriptures, growing closer to Christ in prayer, being formed as the body of Christ in worship all of this is part of mission too. So the next mark is 'to teach, baptise and nurture new believers. This is about building up the church's impact for God's mission. It involves both growth faith and in numbers.

The church doesn't exist for itself. In fact, it was once said 'The Church is the only voluntary society which exists for the benefit of non-members.' It's not entirely true but there's enough truth in it to make it worth thinking about. It points back to the fundamental purpose of mission. God is acting to love and save the world. That includes everyone who belongs to the church. But it also includes everyone who is yet to hear the good news of the coming kingdom.

One of the ways God loved the world in Christ was to love and serve people in need. Wherever Jesus went he had compassion on the sick and the outcast. He cared for the crowds who were like sheep without a shepherd. He fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, befriended the lonely. He was known for his humility and for his willingness to serve others whom he regarded as friends. All this was dramatically captured and expressed on the night he was betrayed, when after supper he wrapped a towel around himself and washed the feet of those around the dinner table. This is a powerful image of Christ's mission and therefore of the Church's mission. We are called and sent by God to respond to human need by loving service. That's the next mark of mission.

Jesus went beyond simply serving and showing compassion to people in need. He had some hard things to say about the community and religious leaders who made and administered the rules. When he came across rules and regulations that made life hard or unfair for people he was sharp in his criticism. He famously overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple. He refused to kow-tow to those who criticised

him for healing on the Sabbath defending his actions on the grounds that the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. How's that for putting people first? Jesus confronted the powers of the day with the truth that they were more concerned about nit-picking like tithing herbs than they were with the substance of the law which was to ensure justice for people. This aspect of Jesus' character continues into the church's mission. With him, we are called and sent to transform unjust structures in society. It involves doing what we can to make sure that the systems and rules by which we live are fair to all, but particularly to look out for the interests of the weakest and those least able to look out for themselves. Transforming unjust structures is another mark of mission.

The early chapters of the bible, in the book of Genesis, describe in the form of timeless stories, the basic relationships according to God's creation. Human beings are depicted as the pinnacle of creation and yet not as entirely free agents. Human beings have wide-ranging authority over creation, portrayed in the naming of the animals. But human beings are still under God's authority. They are not completely autonomous. There is a command to human beings 'to rule and subdue the earth' but that shouldn't be understood as granting free reign either. Human beings are to rule under God, to be God's governors on earth as it were, to rule as God rules. This puts a new context around many of the environmental issues that the world faces today. God is concerned for the health and well-being of the whole creation, for the fruitfulness of the earth as well as for the thriving of human beings. The church shares in this responsibility and so the next mark of mission is 'to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.' On the basis of their faith, Christian people are actively concerned with the whole range of environmental issues that face us.

Anglicans know that worship is central to our life of faith but nowhere in the original marks of mission, developed over twenty years ago, is worship mentioned. But when you stop and think about it, worship isn't something additional to proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. The kingdom is proclaimed, in part, through worship. The very act of a community gathering to worship is itself a sign to the world of faith in God and of the good news. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor 11.26). Each time a community gathers to hear the word preached the kingdom is proclaimed. So worship, celebration and thanksgiving for God's grace is a crucial mark of mission.

All the marks I've listed so far are basically things we do that count as mission. They are the activities of mission, if you like. But the very way we live together as a church also communicates powerfully to the world around us. That's one reason why the threatened divisions within the communion at present are so serious, not just because they mean an unpleasant disruption to our life together, but because divisions will actually undermine our mission. Who we are and how we live together says something about what we believe. If we believe that God has reconciled all people to himself and to each other through Jesus Christ, then the life people see lived out in the church needs to say that. So a final mark of mission needs to take stock of the truth that the being of the church as well as its activities are integral to mission. Living as

one, holy, catholic and apostolic church is a mark of mission. That's what we are sent to do, too.

If you put all this together you come up with a memorable and practical, understanding of mission.

The mission of the Church is the Mission of Christ to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom

To teach, baptise and nurture new believers

To respond to human need by loving service

To seek to transform the unjust structures of society

To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

To worship and celebrate the grace of God

And to live as one, holy, catholic and apostolic church

This is good checklist for you to use in your parish or organisation to see how you are going in mission.

Embracing holistic mission

Clearly, the work we do in community services is one way in which the healing, reconciling, restoring work of new creation goes on. They are part and parcel of the church's mission to respond to human need by loving service and our efforts to transform unjust structures. That much is clear and there's plenty of room for development on those fronts.

But the temptation is for member organisations of Anglicare Australia to say well our bit of the mission is responding to human need by loving service and seeking to transform unjust structures. Care and justice are what we're on about and the rest we can forget.

Well, it's not as easy as that. Because the God's mission is one holistic enterprise concerned to reconcile the whole creation to himself and all people to each other in Christ. You can't separate one or other dimensions from the total mission. While there are several emphases that can be identified, several marks, they all belong together as one holistic endeavour.

But it would be as wrong for Anglican caring organisations to say well we do the care and justice bits but worship, teaching and nurturing believers isn't our responsibility: we leave that to the church, as it would be for the church to say well we don't have to worry about care and justice: Anglicare takes care of all that.

Reclaiming the totality of mission in both settings promises renewal both for the church and for its caring organisations.

It will mean caring organisations thinking about how they can incorporate dimensions of mission that they might usually not see as their direct concern. To think, for example, about how could our community services workplaces also be settings for Christian faith community.

It's a proposition that invites a number of debates. In one sense Anglicare organisations could be said to be faith communities, in that they are communities of a sort and are also related to the faith in some way. Debate arises, though, around whether they should aim to be like church congregations and seek to evoke and nurture confessing faith in every member of the organisation. Some would say yes, that should be our hope if not our expectation. Others would say no, we should be open and accepting of people of no faith and even other faiths in our organisations, maintaining an open stance to the wider community and encouraging dialogue and exploration.

Even if one takes this latter view, though, it begs the question of how our organisations could embrace more intentionally the other dimensions of mission. And it leaves open the possibility of developing intentional faith communities as part of the wider organisation – a kind of church cell within a caring organisation which is explicitly faith-based and intentionally evangelistic, though of course never coercive or manipulative. Such initiatives ought to benefit the organisation itself in practical ways. They should also strengthen the church's overall mission by making intentional use of the catchment that the organisation and its networks provide.

I'm not talking about manipulating vulnerable people or exploiting situations to take advantage of people and impose our faith. I am saying that part and parcel of the holistic mission we are called to is making known the good news of the kingdom that has dawned in Jesus Christ. And I'm suggesting that there are appropriate and sensitive ways for worship, proclamation, teaching and formation to take place in conjunction with delivering community services.

Organisations could consider possibilities like

- Inviting local clergy and lay church leaders to lead or share in staff devotions, reflections, prayer times and worship – both at times of change and crisis and on a regular basis
- Having a service-based group meet to do a study or reflection during Lent
- Looking at professional development opportunities for staff in the areas of theology, spirituality and ministry as well as in their particular professional disciplines. There are several good quality courses at appropriate levels available through our theological colleges and some available by distance education. They could be done by groups in a workplace. Nothing would help strengthen the soul of an organisation more than having key people well informed about basic Anglican theology, bible and spirituality.

What I'm suggesting is being intentional about making available to those who work or volunteer in our services, as well as to those we serve, the heart and soul of what we do and why we do it. There is a spiritual dimension to human life which is more and more being recognised by medical and allied health fields as well as in psychology and psychotherapy. If anyone in human services is well-placed to serve people by offering opportunities to explore that spiritual dimension as part of the journey to wholeness and healing and new creation, it is the church-based services. There is room for creative innovation in this area and properly developed on a sound basis it can be a point of uniqueness and, dare I say it, competitive advantage, in framing and tendering for services.

Recovering the holistic character of mission works in the direction of the church too. Because God is concerned with renewing the whole creation not just with order in the church or saving individuals for a disembodied heaven from a world that's going over the edge of a cliff into oblivion, the church finds itself in the public square in conversations that concern the general

public, the shape of our society and the character of our community. Very often people in your organisations are at the cutting edge of dealing with issues of justice and care in our community. One only has to think of the work we do with refugees, with unemployed people and with those living with HIV/AIDS. Better communication and interaction between those involved in this work and our parish and faith communities will enliven and strengthen both, I think.

Developing our organisations in these ways will require leadership of a high standard. I know that you pay attention to professional development needs in your organisations and to succession planning to some extent. But to a greater extent than has been the case I think our caring organisations need to take into account developing key leaders in terms of mission. We need leaders who have been formed in basic theology, spirituality and scripture so that those key ingredients are present and active in the mix alongside the various professional disciplines of human services, finance and management.

I think our caring organisations should be looking to our theological education institutions to deliver programmes in theology, scripture, spirituality and worship tailored to the needs of those involved in human service delivery. This will have pay offs in two directions. It will strengthen the understanding of mission of key leaders in our caring organisations and make more distinctive the Anglican character and uniqueness of those organisations. But secondly it will add to the vitality of our theological institutions and inspire others who may not have thought of a vocation in community services to consider serving in those areas.

Church and caring organisation can each be enriched and strengthened by the other so that parishes embrace the justice and care dimension of mission more fully and community services derive strength and purpose from worship, prayer and the explicit celebration and practice of faith.