

Anglicare Australia Conference Fremantle 2011- John Roffey Lecture

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I acknowledge the Noongar people, the traditional custodians of this land and honour their elders past and present. I thank them for their welcome to country and commit myself to walking alongside them in the journey of reconciliation.

Thank you for inviting me to be part of your conference today and to give the John Roffey Memorial Lecture.

I first met John in the 1980's in the Diocese of Melbourne. Many of us remember the fear regarding HIV/AIDS that was abroad in the community during those early years after its discovery. Friends, family members, colleagues and neighbours were being met by a new wave of suspicion, or falling ill, or grieving. Mosquitoes and drinking from the same cup were two of the concerns that ran along a broad spectrum. One politician spoke of 'mosquito free' zones and many Christians began to wonder what the danger was to them of sharing the common cup at Holy Communion. At the time, a friend of mine was running the community Centre at St Mark's, Fitzroy. She tells the story of John coming to teach staff and volunteers about the virus and safe practice and to debunk some of the unhelpful and discriminatory attitudes so prevalent then. John had a clear theological perspective on the Eucharistic practice of the community gathered by and around Christ, sharing in bread and wine, spoke strongly about sharing the common cup. John had a clear and very down to earth message in the phrase 'a bucket of spit'. In the mid 1980's this kind of teaching was also a kind of standing alongside, and a kind of advocacy.

Soon after I came to Perth, John went to Adelaide and our paths crossed mostly in General Synod meetings every three or so years. In that arena, John was also clear as he contributed to debates regarding the Church, the wider society and social justice. He was a passionate and compassionate believer in the church's call to be a prophetic voice, and of its responsibility to reach out to the community in loving service through local parish congregations, in Diocesan programs, General Synod networks and Commissions and in the work of agencies such as Anglicare and the more than 40 other agencies now members of the Anglicare Australia network.

Another long and ongoing Synod debate during those years, was the one concerning women's ministry, particularly women bishops. John had a clear theological perspective on that matter, which I found personally strengthening and empowering. In the face of my own propensity for apologizing and appeasing, I remember his voice still as we

came out from a difficult synod session. The words aren't verbatim but the message is the same; 'We should not be compromising in the face of a theology which believes the church should not raise up women for ordination into Episcopal ministry.' John was a passionate and compassionate believer in God's ability to call women and men to ordained ministry and service in the Church at all levels of its life. In the 1990's, this was also a standing alongside, and a kind of advocacy. John's faith was the springboard of his will and ability to connect with a wide range of people and communities.

When Christian faith is formed in an environment shaped by scripture, sacrament, prayer and the courage to allow hard questions and theological investigation to meet, it is possible to find ourselves walking together with unlikely people in unlikely ways. It could be likened to midwives partnering with God's grace to bring to birth, a new moment, a fresh understanding, a transformed relationship, a renewed mind, a different way of living in community, a community determined for justice, a reconciliation, a different way of being described, a foundational narrative reshaped.

One English theologian describes this aspect of Anglican identity as having "a keen sense of responsibility for our neighbours." Others describe it as 'a community embedded tradition of Christian faith which has grown in English soil over more than fourteen hundred years...'ii It was that keen sense of responsibility and the will to act that led to the founding of many of the Anglicare Agencies across Australia. One of the three goals of Anglicare Australia network's current strategic plan is, "to recognize and celebrate the faith base of our work within the Anglican Church."iii This is the stuff of heritage, but also I think the stuff of inspiration; the inspiration calling us to be part of building stronger communities of hope, healing and transformation. I hope that this celebration will lead to bringing forward new and stronger partnerships in this new day.

Thank God for those who laid foundations for those agencies, for those women and men whose faith led them to want to reach into their wider communities. Women like Sister Kate and the Community of the Sisters of the Church, and the small group of orphaned children who arrived in Perth in 1902 with the intention of establishing a school for girls and an orphanage. Today we know one of those as Parkerville Children and Youth Care. Or men like Fr Tucker, founder of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, first as a community of men, lay and ordained, committed to serving the poor and now one of Victoria's largest agencies. In Western Australia, Anglicare came into being in the 1970's (originally as Anglican Health and Welfare Services) through the leadership of the then Archbishop Geoffrey Sambell, a one-time director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence in Melbourne. In an address to the church's synod in Perth in 1971, he said, "I am not interested in serving the world in order to commend ourselves to the

world. I want us as a Church to serve without ceasing...”^{iv} The desire to reach and serve every community is part of the wider Anglican community experience also.

The worldwide Anglican Communion’s The Five Marks of Mission,^v were developed to give expression to the things Anglicans hold in common.

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptize, and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

The third and fourth of these ‘marks of mission’, ‘To respond to human need by loving service’ and ‘To seek to transform unjust structures of society,’ reveal and remind us again of the narrative of faith in action which has shaped Anglican identity for hundreds of years. Anglicans live out of the well spring of faith by serving others in community. Caring about our neighbours is part of our spiritual DNA. As the theme of this conference has it, ‘Reaching every Community.’

In a 2008 essay on the five marks of global mission, an essay on that fourth mark of mission, To seek to Transform Unjust Structures of society, says under the heading, ‘To Love God is to love the neighbour’,

It may startle some to know the greatest commandment, according to Jesus, is not the ‘Great Commission’ but the mandate to ‘Love God and Neighbour’ (Matthew 22:34-40). Many of our enterprises as communities of evangelical faith are centered on evangelism, narrowly understood as proclaiming salvation for the hereafter and getting people to come to our side and believe what we believe. Yet Jesus’ understanding of what it means to truly obey God has little to do with getting people to assent to our creeds or such other propositions. To follow God is to love him with passion, and, similarly, to love our neighbour with the same care and total attention we shower on ourselves.

In chapter 22 of Matthew’s gospel we find an encounter between Jesus and a lawyer. Let me read it to you. The Greatest Commandment

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.’

This was Jesus’ reply to the lawyer who wanted to ‘test’ him, representing a gang of Pharisees conspiring to entrap him in his talk. The question had for its context the rabbinical understanding of the Law. There were 613 distinct commandments in the Law, of which 248 were positive precepts and 365 were prohibitions. They were classified as either ‘light’ or ‘heavy’, according to the seriousness of the subject. So the question, “which of these is the greatest commandment?”

The new thing about Jesus’ answer was that he puts weight on Deuteronomy 6:5 in the same breath as Leviticus 19:18 and gives them equal weight.”Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength’ forms the second part of the *Shema*, the Jewish profession of faith, which begins with ‘Hear, O, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.’

Quite unusually, Jesus then proceeds to say that ‘the second is like it. “love your neighbour as yourself.” All the Law and the prophets hang on these two commandments, says Jesus. The light is put on the same level making is equally ‘heavy’. The two commandments says Jesus, are like pegs on which all the teachings of the Law and the Prophets hang. They sum up what the Lord requires. ^{vi}

Before I go to speak about the relationship between theology and social policy in practice, and in my experience, let me say a few words about the current relationship between theology and social policy. We should remember that the social sciences which inform social policy development, are an intellectual project designed to account for human society without any reference to God. For more than a hundred years, there was no real place for theological insight in the social sciences and therefore it could find no place in social policy. In recent years however, the situation has changed. A number of social sciences, psychology, anthropology, economics for example, are returning to both the study of religious phenomena and to religious practice and in particular, the community dimension of religious practice, for insight.

If we focus for a moment on one of the social sciences, Psychology, for example, we're aware that in recent years it has seen a major reorientation in the emergence of 'Positive Psychology'. That may not be the starting point for many of your staff and the people with whom they work, but its influence is growing in popular awareness, which takes its cues from healthy, flourishing people and seeks to understand what they do differently that we can learn from. In this pursuit of understanding, what makes for healthy individuals, families and communities, religious practice has been an important dimension. The practices of mindfulness - prayer, meditation – and all the many aspects of religious communities which promote belonging - parish activity, volunteering, focusing on the needs of others, are all now understood, and in fact, scientifically shown to be very important contributors to wellbeing and health (Seligman). Science has confirmed that people who have a religious dimension to their lives handle stress better, find life more meaningful, are more motivated, have a heightened sense of belonging and far wider networks of support when tough times come. Cultivating a life focused more on the wellbeing of others "loving your neighbour" turns out to be a health and wellbeing positive. So what religious people knew all along, is now returning to centre frame in the social sciences and in social policy.

A wave of policy inspired by the understanding of the importance of belonging, engagement at the community level, expanding our sense of neighbour and enriched community is being seen across the world. In the UK, it has occurred under the heading "The Big Society", in Australia, tagged as Social Inclusion, in Canada and the US, Social Innovation and community centred development.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Willams has written about the Big Society and also the relationship between being a citizen, rather than merely a consumer. In a recent essay he has says...." If the Church is in the business of building character and empathetic maturity, it will be building the character of citizens- that is, of people who have the power to vote and thus in some measure to shape public policy. There may be an attempt to delegate public responsibility for 'welfare' to those who may be expected to feel the responsibility more acutely than others. But if the Church is actually nourishing empathy, mutual recognition, then it is nourishing people who will continue to ask difficult questions in the wider public sphere, questions about how the priorities are identified when cuts in public spending are discussed, about the supposed absolute imperative of continuous economic growth, or about levels of reward unconnected with competence in areas of the financial world."^{vii}

Some personal reflection

I never dreamed that I would be a member of the Board of Anglicare Western Australia. Of course I knew about Anglicare as a good citizen school chaplain and parish priest. It was good to be able to invite speakers from one of the Network Agencies in time for my community to respond to a Christmas hamper appeal, or to challenge people to consider themselves as foster carers, or ask for simple things like towels and socks for homeless people finding a welcome at St Bart's. It was important to teach that Anglican agencies are a first priority. The stories of these Agencies and their work inspired but also had the capacity to be uncomfortable. Stories of disadvantage, of circumstances which mean that just surviving is the daily norm are often confrontational to our faith, our life, our sense of how we live in community and how we help give shape to it. Powerful stories, those that reverberate in us are the ones that seem to hold a mirror in front of us either daring or inviting us to look into it. They challenge the practices of comfortable religion, and from where I stand invite the church to look again at how its living out God's mission to love and to serve in community.

So far, apart from the incredibly long list of abbreviations and acronyms for the myriad services, I've learnt a lot from this experience. I've learnt about the importance of supporting those advocates whose voice is heard. I've learnt that giving allows people to have a deeper sense of belonging. I've learnt that there are lots of allies for the making of social policy that isn't comfortable or easy to seek or implement. I've learnt that agencies are often imaginative and flexible enough to be leaders of change. I've learnt that I feel a bit proud about that. I've learnt that busy people want to give of themselves and their expertise to help change policies, laws, lives, attitudes. To do things that are meaningful. I've learnt that the church which is used to being present in community but is no longer professionally equipped for the work of the Agencies also needs to be imaginative about ways to take up its mission to care and serve.

I've learnt that people still want, as Hugh Mackay and positive psychology say, to belong, to be useful, to have something to believe in, to have somewhere that is home for them, to love and be loved. I have learnt that the language and images and sacraments that I hold dear live- but they're not always easy to recognize from the distance of the board room. Some might call that place a centre, yet every centre is its own kind of edge. This poem by David Lander helps me get things in perspective:

My House

The human beings gathered in God's backyard.

He sat beneath his apricot tree and began,

"my house..."

Shouting, they left, built

Angkor Wat, the Vatican, Chartres, Coventry

and a few others besides.

One madman painted the roof

of a large Italian chapel.

Others settled for rocks in Wiltshire and Australia.

Some, theatrically minded, staged Calvary, and other playlets.

"My house is your body", sighed God,

And began sending invitations all over again.^{viii}

'God's compassionate love is essentially not a doctrine to be set out in abstract terms, but a story to be told; wherever compassion is shown there is the church.' Jesus lived this compassionate love in meetings with people on the very edges of community, people estranged and pushed to the edges for many reasons.

At the coal face of the story of reaching every community are people who I think of as courageous in their willingness to hang in there to empower.

In Perth, The Step One Youth program's workers, and the young men and women, boys and girls who find in their commitment a reliable and consistent presence of proper support and encouragement. No doubt your town or city streets are home to young people too. Jesus often met people on the streets of towns and villages talking, listening, acting toward them for good. Affordable housing in boom times is a really tricky issue. A strong voice and partners are needed for all those for whom the boom is more likely to mean doom.

Bishop Chris Jones has written, “Action for social justice reflects the fact that we worship a God who is just and a Saviour who proclaimed, ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled’ (Matt 5:6). It involves addressing the causes of disadvantage at a more systemic level. It is about confronting the root of problems faced by the marginalized and working for change in our society.”^{ix}

In Kalgoorlie, Jules runs an Aboriginal Early Years Program. She and another member of Anglicare worked together to develop a simple booklet for parents to use to help them. She works where possible with others in Kalgoorlie and the community at Ninga Mia Village Aboriginal corporation to help parents with few skills gain confidence in themselves. It’s hard to find staff in this part of the State. This is a part of the Diocese I visit from time to time and I’m learning more of what it means to be welcomed to yarn.

Theologian Karl Barth when writing about St Paul’s letter to the church in Rome called the ethical demands of the gospel ‘the Great Disturbance.’ When people long for coin gas meters to heat water for washing and cooking the long, long road toward change that works seems unending. Local parishes have often been partners for emergency relief in such situations, and those who have a strong sense of their local community, can be strong voices for action at the local level.

There are about 25 churches or chaplaincies in Perth that partner with Anglicare for the provision of emergency relief to people in crisis, and immediate need of the most basic necessities like food and blankets. Many more parishes and schools across the state are part of the ‘back room’ provision of emergency relief through regularly giving food and other items to stock these centers. These partnerships are reinvigorating local communities who for a while now have been at arm’s length from the work that was once almost entirely within the province of the local church community. The spiritual teachings and practices of love in action have seeped into our Anglican bones forming part of the nature of the body of Christians who gather in community around the Word and Sacrament. Working together in vital and energetic partnership between church and agency has the potential to build capacity- not for pew fodder, or for volunteers because we’re desperate, but for people who understand themselves as partners with Christ in the work of reconciliation seeking for all people to thrive- or as John’s Gospel puts it to have life in its abundance. The experience of truth and mercy have meeting together.

Reaching every community is and will always be at heart of the mission of God, those defined by geography, those defined by human relationship and that one which Jesus established and in which old parameters are redefined.

In a recent article in The Anglican Messenger I wrote, “Anglicare is a tale of hundreds of compassionate acts - advocating for change, standing courageously for the well being of all members of the community, welcome and inclusion, and a deep desire to see people move from surviving or just coping to real thriving. This is gospel, this is Good News reaching beyond clients and staff to volunteers and local communities, to those able from their abundance to support this work, to decision-makers able to influence social policies and procedures.

So, the dance in which the Anglicare network engages on a daily basis of hopes and dreams and fears and griefs, the current language of innovation and enterprise, of reforms and the promised Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, of Social Return on Investment and Results Based Accountability, seems to be swirling through the sector with an incredibly creative energy.

^xFlame-dancing Spirit, come
sweep us off our feet and
dance us through our days.
surprise us with your rhythms,
dare us to try new steps, explore
new patterns and new partnerships,
release us from old routines
to swing in abandoned joy and
fearful adventure. And
in the intervals,
rest us
in your still centre
Amen.

From the Hilda Community book of prayers.

ⁱ Giles, Richard *How to be an Anglican* Canterbury Press 2003, page 115

ⁱⁱ Kaye, Bruce *Reinventing Anglicanism, a vision of confidence, community and engagement in Anglican Christianity* Open Book Publishers 2003 page 133

ⁱⁱⁱ www.anglicareaustralia.asn.au Strategic Plan 2009

^{iv} Challen, Michael B *Sambell A Man of The Word* Melbourne University Press 2008, page 163

^v The Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion, www.anglicancommunion.org *The Five Marks of Mission Developed between 1984-1990 by the Anglican Consultative Council*

^{vi} Wallis, Andrew and Ross, Cathy editors, *Mission in the 21st Century, exploring the five marks of global mission* Darton, Longman and Todd 2008 pages 46-47

^{vii} Williams, Rowan 'Character, Civic Virtue and the Big Society' *The Archbishop of Canterbury's essay from Changing the debate: The New Ideas Redefining Britain*"

^{viii} Lander, David *Heaven's Backyard* Dove Communications 'My House' page 40

^{ix} Hale, Stephen & Curnow, Andrew editors, Jones, Chris *Facing The Future, Bishops Imagine A Different Church. 'A New Compassion for the Marginalized'* page 228

^x The St Hilda Community, *The New Women Included -A Book of Services and Payers*, SPCK first published 1991, revised ed 1996, page