

Final Pastoral Letter

Dear brothers and sisters,

At our recent Bishop-in-Council meeting in Dubbo, BiC asked that what I shared with them in my *Bishop's Matters* might be shared more widely across the Diocese.

As this was my final *Bishop's Matters*, I was a little more reflective than usual. I didn't attempt to rehearse the last seven years, nor offer a grand assessment of my time here. Rather, I wanted to note with thanksgiving something of what the Lord has done among us, acknowledge some areas where I have needed considerable help, and say something about what I hope the Diocese will continue to value and pursue in the next chapter.

So, with only a little adaptation for a wider audience, here is something of what I shared.

COVID and video ministry

I had only been Bishop for a few months when COVID arrived and suddenly, I could no longer travel around the Diocese or gather with our churches.

At the time, it seemed a disastrous way to begin my time as bishop. Yet in God's kindness, something quite unexpected happened.

The video services and sermons which began out of necessity became a very significant opportunity of these years. Instead of COVID preventing people from getting to know their new bishop, it accelerated the process. By the time restrictions lifted and I was able to travel freely again, people across the Diocese had already seen me week by week, heard me preach and pray, and had some sense of who I was and what mattered to me.

The videos continue to be used in a number of parishes and watched by individuals both within and beyond the Diocese. I remain enormously thankful for that opportunity and humbled by the feedback.

A number told me that they watched both the traditional and contemporary services in those early days. They loved the music in the contemporary services and, having seen the music clips we used, said that they "had no idea there were young people involved anywhere in the church." Suddenly they had been given a glimpse of church beyond their own experience.

Even more precious was the woman who, after hearing Jesus preached through those services, told me that she had been released from her hold on ritual and had come to understand that it was all about Jesus.

If nothing else had come from all those hours recording videos, that alone would have made them worthwhile.

COVID was difficult and costly in so many ways. But I look back on the video ministry as one of those surprising examples of God bringing an opportunity out of circumstances none of us would have chosen.

The gift of good people

Perhaps one of the most significant developments for the diocese, and certainly for me personally, was the appointment of Warwick Baines as Registrar.

It is difficult to overstate what Warwick has brought to the role. His capacity, wisdom, judgement, attention to detail and sheer willingness to take responsibility have been life-changing — certainly for this bishop — and have transformed the work of the Diocesan Office. I remain in awe of what he manages and of the contribution he has made to the Diocese.

There have certainly been areas of ministry as a bishop which have not played to my strengths. I have not always wrestled with our ordinances as I should have. Bob Cameron was something of a lifesaver in that respect, as was my Chancellor, Adrian Ahern.

Finance and the detailed work of the Anglican Property Trust have likewise been a challenge and again Warwick's competence and advice have been invaluable.

Safe Ministry has been difficult and demanding. There has been the deeply sad and sobering work associated with survivors, claims and redress, together with the continuing challenge of achieving proper Safe Ministry compliance across the Diocese. Here again, Warwick, together with Louise, has carried an extraordinary load and has been a tremendous support to me and to the Diocese.

Workers for the harvest

One of my great prayers on arriving was that the Lord would send workers into his harvest field.

During my time here I have had the enormous privilege of ordaining Wally Cox, Steven Klouth, Andrew Thornhill, Kevin Simington, Bec Choi, James Daymond, Ben Mackay, Roger Phelps, Sally Phelps, Jonny Lush, Tim Smith, James Boardman, Stuart Border, Josh Taylor, Luke Merriman, Robert Yemm, Xanthe Yemm, Justin Baker, Jim Kapetangiannis and Robbie Nichols — twenty people in all, whether as deacon, priest, or both.

I am also very thankful for experienced priests such as Ben Connelly in Cowra, Andy Martin in Orange, Tim St Quintin in Cudgegong Valley, Steve Wockner in Forbes, and now Steve Cimarosti, who came from outside the Diocese but chose to join us here.

And ministry is of course much bigger than ordained ministry: people such as Glenn and Wendy Murray, Philip and Deanne Gerber, James and Miriam White, and other lay workers who have served in places where ordained ministry has been difficult to sustain, have been wonderful gifts to us.

There is, however, an unfinished challenge here. Despite the new recruits and ordinations, attracting experienced clergy from elsewhere has not been easy. I hope and pray that in the years ahead the Lord will continue to send both new and experienced workers into this harvest field.

Finding our own identity

When I arrived, there was some suspicion in parts of the wider Anglican Church that my appointment might result in Bathurst simply becoming an extension or outpost of Sydney.

I hope that seven years later those concerns have been put to rest.

I remain profoundly grateful for the Diocese of Sydney's extraordinary generosity and partnership with us, and I share many theological convictions with friends there. Their support has made an enormous difference to the life and ministry of this Diocese.

But Bathurst is not Sydney, nor should it try to be.

We have our own history, context and character, and there are areas in which our Anglican life and practice are distinct.

I think that over these years the Diocese of Bathurst has become more confident about who we are and what God has called us to be, without needing either to define ourselves by Sydney or in opposition to Sydney.

Valuing our Anglican heritage

One aspect of ministry as bishop which I have particularly loved has been encouraging our clergy and parishes to value our Anglican liturgy and use it well.

I hope this will continue to be a priority.

There are parts of our wider Anglican Church where, in seeking to make worship more accessible and contemporary, much of our rich liturgical heritage has effectively been abandoned. I understand some of the reasons for that, but I think something precious can be lost in the process.

Good liturgy is not dead, dull or an obstacle to gospel ministry.

Used thoughtfully, warmly and intelligently, it is alive and engaging. It gives people words when they have none of their own; it embeds Scripture and the gospel deeply in our worship; it reminds us that worship is bigger than the personality of whoever happens to be leading; and it can lift our hearts into the presence and praise of God.

I hope that in parish visits, at the Cathedral, on retreats and at conferences I have been able to model something of how our Anglican heritage can be both genuinely Anglican and genuinely alive — and always centred on Jesus.

One heavy burden

My sadness is that the Diocese continues to face the enormous challenge of redress.

I wish very much that this burden were not part of what I hand on, and I pray that it will not overwhelm the new bishop or distract them from the work of the gospel.

That makes the work we have now begun on a redress funding strategy particularly important. We need wise and capable people who can help develop a sustainable way forward, while ensuring that we continue to respond rightly and compassionately to survivors of abuse.

The time is right

And now I know that the time is right to finish.

I am tired, and increasingly conscious that I am ready to hand the responsibility to somebody else.

And by that I do not mean Andrew!

During the vacancy, as Administrator, Archdeacon Andrew Thornhill will faithfully cover the bases and ensure that the essential work of the Diocese continues. But he also has a large and demanding parish to lead.

Please do not place unrealistic expectations upon him or treat the Administrator as though he were an interim diocesan bishop.

I have been telling people that I fully expect the next bishop to bring gifts I do not have — fresh vision and energy, and God willing, new recruiting and funding relationships.

And by God's grace the new bishop will inherit a Diocese which has changed considerably and which I believe is ready to enter a new chapter.

Thank you

Finally, thank you.

It has been a joy to serve among people who love the Lord Jesus, care about his church, and genuinely want to see the cause of the gospel advance across this vast Diocese.

There have been hard decisions. There are more hard decisions ahead.

Property, structures and finances matter, but only because they serve something infinitely more important.

Please keep ***Sharing Jesus for Life***.

Be willing to change things when they no longer serve the mission.

Keep praying for gospel workers and investing in them.

Be thankful for the partnerships God has given us.

And whatever lies ahead, keep trusting the Lord, even when the way is hard.

I leave deeply conscious that this is Christ's church, not mine, and that the Lord loves this Diocese far more than any of us do.

Susan and I will watch the next chapter unfold from afar with great interest, with prayer and with enormous affection.

We shall miss you all.

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 15:5–6

Every blessing,

Mark



The Rt Rev'd Mark Calder

Bishop

19 September 2026