

Presidential Address

*By Bishop Robert Forsyth, the Administrator of the Diocese of Sydney,
Monday 5 August 2013*

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have gathered for one of the most important tasks a diocesan synod can perform, the election of the bishop of that diocese, in our case, of the Archbishop of Sydney and Metropolitan of NSW. This is only the tenth time the Sydney synod has elected a diocesan bishop. The first two of the twelve bishops/archbishops of Sydney were appointed by the British government.

I wish to divide this Presidential Address into four sections. 1. The Office and Responsibilities of the Archbishop of Sydney, 2. The Qualities of the Person to be Archbishop of Sydney, 3. Pressing Issues Faced by an Incoming Archbishop of Sydney, and 4. The Workings of This Synod to Elect an Archbishop of Sydney.

1. The Office and Responsibilities of the Archbishop of Sydney

Part 2 of the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia, which in 1962 finally created an Australian Anglican Church independent of the Church of England, is entitled 'The Government of the Church' and begins like this:

CHAPTER III. - OF THE BISHOPS

7. A diocese shall in accordance with the historic custom of the One holy Catholic and Apostolic Church continue to be the unit of organisation of this Church and shall be the see of a bishop.

8. There shall be a bishop of each diocese who shall be elected as may be prescribed by or under the constitution of the diocese. . .

Indeed. I wonder if you have ever noticed what an interesting combination of the really new and the really old our Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney is. Although I have tried very hard to keep away from it all, even I couldn't but notice that this is the first election of an Archbishop of Sydney which has been preceded by extensive social media campaigns, endless video endorsements and even YouTube send-ups. And, more seriously, as we gather as the synod electing an archbishop, our minds are filled with questions about the challenges of the gospel in contemporary and fast-changing Australia today. It couldn't be more 'now.'

And yet the office we are all concerned about traces its evolution from the practice of the early Christian churches in the Roman Empire from at least the second century onwards. For somewhere around that time we find the emergence of the practice of a senior minister or bishop having the oversight of the church in a whole city, with other clergy under him. And then increasingly also exercising a Timothy or Titus role over other churches. Sometime later the concept of a 'diocese,' which was derived from the Roman imperial administrative reorganisation of the third century, was adopted as a unit of ecclesiastical order. It is a very ancient office that we meet together to fill in a very contemporary way.

That mix of the very historic and the very now is typical of Anglican Christianity. Anglicanism has always had a mix of diverse elements, which at times can appear in tension. After all, nobody as such invented Anglicanism. It is the product of almost two millennia of ups and downs, challenges, opportunities, disasters, reformations, setbacks, revivals and adaptations beginning from the founding of the Christian church among the Britons in the time of the Roman Empire through to today's Anglican Christianity as a worldwide phenomenon. So it will always contain mixed traces of its long varied history and contemporary situations.

And so in this diocese, following ancient practice, one senior minister in episcopal orders is given the particular task of the oversight of all our churches and ministries. As you know the word translated 'bishop' in the New Testament is ἐπίσκοπος *episcopos*, which literally means 'overseer' or 'superintendent.' Although the man so appointed among us does not have this weighty task of oversight by himself. It is shared, more immediately by other men in episcopal orders who serve as his assistants, and more widely by all the ministers of word and sacrament he licenses to ministry and oversight in the churches of the diocese and in other ministries. Furthermore his ministry is not only shared with others, it is exercised in a partnership with the clergy and laity of the Synod of the diocese in many ways as well.

It may surprise you to know there is no written job description or even statement of powers and responsibilities for the Archbishop of Sydney as such. In typically Anglican fashion you will find who and what he is to be and do in many different places, in the Ordinal of the *Book of Common Prayer*, in the constitutions and ordinances of our diocese, in

unwritten traditions and customs from the past, and in more recent evolving practices and expectations.

Perhaps the best place to start is the words said to anyone consecrated to episcopal ministry at that point in the service when he is handed the Bible. (I quote from the Ordinal of the *Book of Common Prayer*.)

Then the Archbishop shall deliver him the Bible, saying,
GIVE heed unto reading, exhortation, and doctrine. Think upon the things contained in this Book. Be diligent in them, that the increase coming thereby may be manifest unto all men; for by so doing thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee. Be to the flock of Christ a shepherd, not a wolf; feed them, devour them not. Hold up the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring again the outcasts, seek the lost. Be so merciful, that you be not too remiss; so minister discipline, that you forget not mercy; that when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you may receive the never-fading crown of glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

First and foremost then he is to be a minister of the word and sacraments of Christ. Not just *a minister* of the word and sacraments of Christ but a *chief minister* of the word and sacraments of Christ among us. And so one whose life adorns the gospel as well.

Secondly, the Archbishop of Sydney has the chief oversight of all our churches and ministries, as we have already noted. But what kind of oversight? The Archbishop, together with his fellow assistant bishops, cannot, and must not, try to lead or manage the parishes and ministries of the diocese. Rather he is responsible for providing the crucial framework of clarity of purpose, vision, responsibility, support and accountability which safely allows appropriate local leaders to empower and inspire the churches in the mission of the gospel - what you may call 'missional governance'¹ or maybe better 'gospel governance.' Some of this he does in his own right and some is done in partnership with the Synod of the Diocese and its Standing Committee, of which he is the president. This is the central part of his office from which other responsibilities arise. In all of this I believe that it is important that our archbishop maintains the appropriate distance from a lot that goes on because in our diocese his is, what you might call, 'the office of last resort.'

¹ Robert Forsyth "National and Diocesan Structures" in Stephen Hale and Andrew Curnow (eds) *Facing the Future: Bishops Imagine a Different Church* (Acorn Press, Brunswick East Victoria 2009) pp.53-63

Thirdly, this oversight is particularly expressed in the Archbishop of Sydney's direct responsibility for the ordaining and licensing, as well as exercising discipline, of the ministers. This is a most important responsibility with far-reaching implications for the future of the diocese, for good or ill.

Fourthly he exercises his oversight in his role as President of the Synod of the diocese, which he chairs, as well as its Standing Committee. The Archbishop also has a distinct partnership with those important governing bodies in his special power to assent or withhold assent to any ordinance they pass.

Fifthly, the Archbishop of Sydney exercises oversight in that he is also the president or visitor of the many organisations and schools of the diocese, some of which he may choose to chair.

Sixthly he has special responsibilities and role in the wider Anglican Church of Australia and beyond. He is the Metropolitan of the Province of New South Wales; that is, he has some responsibility for general oversight of the other dioceses in our state: Canberra-Goulburn, Newcastle, Bathurst, Armidale, Grafton and Riverina. It is because he is Metropolitan that the bishop of this diocese is styled 'Archbishop'. 'Metropolitan' is the more ancient term. As well he is an ex-officio member of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia and of its Standing Committee where he is expected to play a leading role. And, following more recent developments, as Archbishop of Sydney he is expected to lead this diocese in playing an increasing role in the wider affairs of the Anglican Communion and in special relations with provinces and dioceses around the world. And, if I may say, particularly in building relations with dioceses and fellow bishops in the growing and challenging non-Western parts of the Communion.

This is one reason we are so delighted to have as our Synod preacher, the Right Revd Rennis Ponniah, Bishop of Singapore. Bishop Rennis's presence with us at such a crucial moment in the life of this diocese expresses our fellowship with our brothers and sisters of his diocese with their exciting mission into South-East Asia, as well as giving us the opportunity of being encouraged in the Lord by a fine teacher and Christian leader. Singapore is quite a diocese. You want mission areas? How about trying the deaneries of the Diocese of Singapore: the Deanery of Cambodia, the Deanery of Indonesia, the Deanery of Laos, the Deanery

of Nepal, the Deanery of Thailand and the Deanery of Vietnam. It is a remarkable ministry spread throughout Southeast Asia. Now that's a diocese! Welcome Bishop Rennis.

Seventhly, by the nature of his office, the Archbishop of Sydney is the senior spokesman for the diocese in the media and in private representations. In a real sense he represents us to others and to ourselves as a diocese.

And eighthly, and lastly, the Archbishop of Sydney plays a role in the wider Christian world in Australia; historically he is federal president of such bodies as the Church Missionary Society and of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion, Australia; and he is looked to for leadership from other non-episcopal Protestant churches, especially in this city. His voice is one that is respected across many denominational boundaries.

That is quite a load. But let me say, however, that as important as this office is, we should not overplay it, nor come here today looking to elect a 'messiah Archbishop' who this time will solve all our problems. I have always been struck by a sentence that Timothy Dudley-Smith cites in the foreword of his *John Stott: The Early Years* (IVP 2009). It is a comment by Owen Chadwick about Archbishop Michael Ramsey. "He would remind himself that the real leaders of English religious thought and revival were never archbishops but were always the simple priests, like a Wesley or a Keble or a Maurice." I think that is true, whatever you may say about the particular examples cited. Dudley-Smith in quoting it obviously had Stott in mind. There are no doubt examples in our own diocese. (I think of the late John Chapman. And perhaps one or two others in the house this afternoon as well.) In any terms Michael Ramsey's insight is a helpful reminder that although in one sense we Anglicans are hierarchical, the hierarchy, as important as it may be, is not and never has been where the real action and leadership lie.

I have spoken about the ancient office and contemporary responsibilities of the oversight of the Archbishop of Sydney. Let me now touch on three other areas: the qualities of the person we should be looking for, what are some of the pressing issues he will have to face, and finally some wisdom about the process we are now embarking on.

2. The Qualities of the Person to be Archbishop of Sydney

What kind of person should we be looking at to take up this weighty office? A mature Christian man of significant depth is essential. I mean depth of both character and knowledge. He must be an example of Christian character at all times. In an archbishop Christian virtues and may I say, vices, both are amplified in people's perceptions. He needs also to be a man of clarity of Christian vision for the church and cities he serves. And because of the office, he must have a depth of biblical, theological, and historical knowledge of the Christian faith. And also, if I may use the word somewhat loosely, knowledge of the Christian church and of our own Anglican inheritance in its historic and worldwide significance. This is because an archbishop must provide leadership which sees much more than the narrow here and immediate now. He needs to assist the diocese to keep the main things the main thing in a world of constant change and shifting culture. That is why I say we need to look to elect a man with depth of both character and knowledge.

The Archbishop of Sydney also needs to be a man who will be widely respected. In preparation for this address I read the presidential address of every election synod since 1909. There are seven of them. I was struck by an insight from Bishop Paul Barnett back in 2001 which I would like to share with you again at this Synod. He wrote:

In most areas relating to vision, our archbishop's power is one of moral authority and persuasion based on respect for his person and office. It would be one thing to elect a visionary leader. But his vision will only become reality where he is respected. Given the vastness of the diocese and its complexity this is a tall order. I think every Archbishop since Mowll has wrestled with this problem. It would be easy enough for an Archbishop of Sydney to give up on being a visionary leader and fall back to fulfilling routine duties. There are many road blocks and barriers to frustrate the fulfilment of goals. Elect a man you will respect and who will be respected across the board.

This means that we will need a man who, while of strong convictions, will be transparent and trustworthy, principled, generous and fair-minded, avoiding any perception of bias or unfairness that would undermine his respect.

Furthermore, we need to elect a man of personal robustness and emotion maturity. That is, one who can handle the pressures and

expectations of the office without them going to his head on one hand, or overwhelming him on the other. He needs to be humble, dignified and comfortable in his own skin. And he needs to be the kind of person who can sleep at night and relax when needed. He will need to bear the responsibility of making lonely decisions that sometimes carry momentous weight and consequences. And I should add, not be too sensitive to criticism nor afraid of conflict when necessary. And yet also be gentle and a listener.

We also need to elect a man who is hospitable and able to relate well to people of all different kinds, from Prime Ministers and civic leaders to ordinary people and, at times, those hurting and angry at the church.

And because of the complexity and amount of the work and reading he has to be across, he will need to be a man who is intelligent, well organised and has lots of energy.

I know this is a quite a list, but the office does require a man as far as possible like this. (I have kept it away from both those nominated on this occasion, lest the Synod find it has no one willing to let their names go forward!)

3. Pressing Issues Faced by an Incoming Archbishop of Sydney

Let me now move briefly to the question of what are some of the immediate pressing issues the next Archbishop of Sydney will have to face as he takes office. Here are some that come to mind.

Other than dealing with the immediate aftermath of this election process and bringing the diocese back together as one, one of the first issues facing our Archbishop will be the question of whether and how to reconstitute episcopal ministry in the diocese with only four, not five, episcopal regions. Or at least that's how things seem to be turning out. As you may know, at his last Standing Committee Archbishop Peter Jensen announced that the ongoing cash flow situation of the Endowment of the See means that the next Archbishop will only be able to afford four regions going forward. He rightly left the final decision to his successor. New arrangements will need to be in place, as I understand it, before the end of this year. And yet perhaps with a fresh look the new man may, with the support of Synod, find a way not to have to pull back. Certainly the diocese will grow in population in the next twenty or so years. It is estimated that some 70% of such growth will be in existing 'brownfield' areas and 30% in

new 'greenfields'. Reduced episcopal presence and support will be unfortunate, but may be inevitable. This is indeed a pressing issue.

Here is another pressing issue. Over the next year or so the new archbishop will need to work out, or rather help us, the wider diocese work out, what to do next after the Diocesan Mission of 2002-2012. The Diocesan Mission has been important for us and has touched the diocese in many very positive ways. However, the results are a mixed bag, and not that dissimilar to the decade before. National Church Life Survey indications are that there has been steady growth of church attendees in line with the population, and that there has been an increase in the percentage of those who are male, of those who are the children (15 years and over) of attendees and, most importantly, an increase of those who were born in non-English-speaking countries. There has been a welcome increase also in the willingness of attendees to share the faith and be involved in evangelistic activities. But at the same time there has been a decline in the percentage of those in our churches who have come from a non-church background or returned after a considerable absence. The long-term implications of this particular trend, which we share with the other churches, are most serious for our future in this society. What next? Should we continue along present lines of the recent mission with some minor tweaking, or should we approach the great task of reaching our diocese for Christ in a very different way? Should we even have a diocesan mission as such at all? The Archbishop does not simply get to decide such things, but he will play a crucial role in shaping our future and also I trust in enabling the conversation to take place with a wide range of voices.

A third pressing issue facing our archbishop will be his possible involvement with the ongoing Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse as well as overseeing the care of victims of abuse and the discipline of clergy. These matters may be unwelcome, but as Peter Jensen often said, the proper handling of them is actually a gospel issue.

Another pressing area that will require his leadership, or at least significant involvement, is the necessary urgent capital fundraising projects for new church infrastructure around the diocese, like the present project at Oran Park. It is just the beginning of the strategic challenge for the diocese in a growing city.

As well I believe that the new Archbishop needs to make giving leadership to this diocese's relationship with the rest of the Anglican Church of Australia a priority. That relationship, especially at the General Synod level, has been difficult and needs attention. I believe that it can, and must be, improved as issues even bigger than those we have faced so far may be ahead of us as a national church. And as Metropolitan the Archbishop will need to give thought to the somewhat fragile situation many of the dioceses in the Province of New South Wales find themselves in.

And there are no doubt many other pressing issues as well: nurturing the relationship with Moore College and the ordinations system; maintaining and building, in so far as it depends on us, a positive public profile for Sydney Anglicans; involvement in the ongoing GAFCON and wider Anglican Communion scene: progressing Archbishop Jensen's work in Anglican Education issues, and the ongoing development of SRE in the new school environment, for a start.

I have spoken only about pressing issues, that is, those which will require early attention. However, I am sure there are also deeper and more significant long-term matters that will face us as we seek to be truly Christian, build the body of Christ in a vastly changing Australian society and keep contact with our evangelical and Anglican heritage together.

4. The Workings of This Synod to Elect an Archbishop of Sydney

Having taken you through the ancient office and contemporary responsibilities of the Archbishop of Sydney, the qualities of person we should be looking for and then what looks like some of the pressing issues he will have to face, let me now finally turn to our work together in the next few days. Our task is shaped by the Archbishop of Sydney Election Ordinance 1982, all 45 clauses of it, supplemented by the usual Conduct of the Business of Synod Ordinance 2000. You will have received a summary of the ordinance in a flow chart form from me to give an overview of the process. (I must confess I originally drew it up for myself to get my head around the complexities.)

Let me summarise where we are going together.

We move through a series of three stages, each requiring increasing support for the candidates until they are reduced to the one who is elected.

The first stage, which has already taken place, involves the nomination of candidates to be considered by the Synod. May I say, and I will come back to this in a moment, this is all a nomination means. To nominate someone is to say to the Synod this person is worthy of our consideration, and no more. If a nominator, after hearing the debate, reaches the conclusion that another candidate is after all to be preferred, they are free to vote for the other. They are not locked in. I believe that in past and present Election Synods some members have even nominated more than one name for consideration.

I mention this particularly because of the unusual circumstances this Election Synod finds itself in. We are presented with the smallest number of nominations ever made, and the largest list of nominators for each ever seen. The danger in this situation is that it may threaten one of the key principles of synodical government. That key principle is not 'whatever it takes'. It is that Synod members meeting together should genuinely take counsel together as they reach their common mind. And that therefore each of us must come, whatever our present convictions, still open to listen to and be persuaded by others. (By the way, when I mentioned this principle to a wise friend the other day he corrected me: "That is not just a Synod principle; it is a principle of any Christian community.")

Do not misunderstand me. There is absolutely nothing wrong at all with lobbying before the Synod meeting. The telephone calls, emails, video links, Facebook dialogues, meetings, rallies, long conversations over coffee, DVDs, coloured brochures and celebrity endorsements can be entirely appropriate and, I think, with a Synod of our size and the inevitable time restraints on our meeting, often prove a real help. But, as valuable as these activities may be, they must not be a substitute for the Synod itself. Nor should they be used as mechanisms to so commit people as if the decision had already been taken. That decision is yet to be made by us, here, in the room together. The great value of the secret ballots right throughout this election process, with one exception I will come to where it does not really matter, is that they give each synod member the freedom, having heard all that has been said outside the Synod meeting and within, to vote as she or he genuinely believes without fear or favour. And it gives each freedom either to change their mind or maintain the conviction that they may have come in with.

And so, with nominations over, now we come to have that real conversation here, in the room. A real conversation in which the genuine arguments for this candidate or that are rehearsed, albeit with brevity, listened to, evaluated and decided upon. Here is the place to speak the truth with each other. And here is the place to test claims to truth with each other. This is why our proceedings, other than this opening session, will be in camera without a public gallery. We need the freedom that privacy brings so we can be frank with each other. It is also why the press will not be present. It is also why for the first time for an election synod of the Diocese of Sydney we need also to agree to a protocol that forbids the use of any social media to divulge what is said here to outsiders, not just while we are meeting but until the matter is decided and the Synod is over. Don't go home and Twitter or Facebook what is said or done here today. And don't do it here either.

With the nomination stage over, we face the next two stages in the process. The first of these is to choose what nominated candidates, if any, we want to be moved to the Final List. This is a two-step process. Tonight we consider how many of the nominees we wish to move to the Select List, a kind of half way place. And then, presumably tomorrow night, we will consider how many of those on the Select List will be moved up to the Final List. At both times we do not have to choose between names, unless we want to. Synod members can vote for all, or only one, or none, if they so decide. This procedure seems to have been designed to whittle down a large list of nominations to only those names worth the most serious consideration. That may or may not be so relevant on this occasion. If on the vote no name is moved to the Final List then there is the recently added provision immediately to take the vote again, presumably to give us an opportunity to rethink, or instead to choose to stop this Election Synod and start the process of nomination again at a later date.

The last stage begins when there is finally one or more names on the Final List. At this point the Election Ordinance at last mandates the serious business of choosing between names, until hopefully, one is elected and invited to become Archbishop of Sydney. If there is only one name on the Final List the only exception to the general use of secret ballots occurs, where a simple show of hands is all that is needed for the motion he be invited to become Archbishop. Otherwise we keep using secret ballots in giving preference to one name over the other(s). Again, if

this final stage does not result in a successful election then there is provision to run the vote again, or else start the whole process again at a later date.

This Synod session is different from Synod regular meetings in that at every point of progressing the candidates' names the votes of the laity and the clergy are counted separately. For a motion that a name be put on the Select List to be carried, a majority in just one house is required. For all other stages a majority in both houses will be needed. In other words, the ordinance is built on the principle that the laity and clergy may have different interests and that neither group can compel the other to accept a certain candidate as Archbishop. It has the added value in that any man invited by the Synod to become Archbishop of Sydney knows he has the support of the laity and the clergy of the diocese. This principle has the implication that while clergy and laity may, and indeed should, talk together about names before and during Synod, each needs to respect the judgment of, and refrain from seeking unduly to pressure, the other.

The ordinance is written for the situation where there are many nominated candidates and not just two as we have this time. To that extent we are in slightly uncharted waters. Many of the elaborate processes of the Election Ordinance are irrelevant, although not always avoidable I am afraid. The unusually small number of nominees has other implications. I know that even in writing this address I was conscious of thinking, will this point be thought to lean to this candidate or this other point to that candidate? Let me assure you that I have prepared these remarks without any concern for who has been nominated but out of my own deep convictions and experience. Perhaps I am being too sensitive in even raising this, but we are in a highly politicised atmosphere.

There are two things I am especially praying for with this synod. The first is that this will indeed be a synod where truth and wisdom prevail and nothing will prevent that happening. Certainly not fear nor the desire to please man rather than God. Each of us must shoulder our responsibility this week with integrity and thoughtfulness in the presence of the one to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden. The second thing I am praying for I will come to in a moment.

Thank you for your patience and attention to these words which I hope will be of service to the Synod in its most important task. It only remains for me to thank those who have worked so hard to prepare for

this Synod, both in administration and in nominating and promoting candidates. Most of all, I wish to express the thanks of us all to those who have let their names go forward to be considered. It is no easy thing to allow yourself to be put in a position of undergoing the close scrutiny of your peers and face the judgment of the Synod. There is always the possibility of being roughly treated in the process or, perhaps even more scarily, actually being invited to become the Archbishop of Sydney. Thank you for giving us the choice. We love and honour you.

I conclude with some brief closing observations.

The phrase “speaking the truth in love” from Ephesians 4.15 means lovingly speaking the truth of Christ to each other rather than being tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of human doctrine. It does not mean ‘criticising someone nicely.’ As President of the Synod I will take a dim view of such a misuse of Scripture in debate.

Let me say that there will be much discussion in the next few days but I suspect that actually neither candidate is really going to be quite so bad, nor so good, as we may hear. That is OK. I believe we can trust the Synod of this diocese. If I may be permitted a personal opinion, in reviewing all the Election Synods I cannot find one where the Synod did not make what I believe was the right choice.

However, as you may know the style and title of the Archbishop of Sydney in the licences he grants is ‘*Name* by Divine Providence Archbishop of Sydney.’ I believe that is true. It is not simply ‘by the majority of Synod’ Archbishop of Sydney but rather by God at work through weak and ignorant people like us gathered in this room. As we now get to work let us pray that this will continue to be so, and by the way we speak and vote, show we are, by his grace, walking worthy of this great dignity and responsibility.

I know that some of you have invested a great deal of time and energy in commending this candidate or that. But by the end of the week there will be disappointment for at least one of the large groups so involved. I want to say two things to you. Firstly, you have well served us all in the diocese by your efforts, without which we could not have properly exercised our responsibility as an Election Synod. Thank you. And secondly, I will not hide from the Synod that I am a little anxious that the special features of this particular election process and the campaign that

has preceded it may leave us in the Diocese of Sydney with some longer term problems unless we actively work to overcome them. So once this Election Synod is over we must all put aside the differences and come together and embrace each other as one, without recrimination, without rancour and without party spirit. This is that second thing that I am praying for the Synod.

And so I need only add this. May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.