

Thu 3 July 2014



The Synod reconvened with the wobbliest rendition of *How Great is our God* I've ever heard.

After morning prayer, attention turned to motions of the day.

Discussion resumed concerning Leadership at the G20. Yesterday Bishop Stephen Pickard (Canberra & Goulburn) brought to the synod's attention that Australia will be leading the G20 in 2014. Such a role gives it an opportunity to shape the agenda. Dr Pickard argued that the focus on growth and resilience needed to be inclusive and done in such a way to narrow the gap globally between the wealthy and poor. These sentiments were echoed by Bishop Peter Stuart (Newcastle) who argued that Australia has an important role to play in setting the global agenda and encouraging change.

After a huddle last night, funding arrangements for the royal commission working group were sorted and the motion passed easily this morning.

Dr Beth Hyde (Canberra & Goulburn) addressed the synod concerning the problem about climate change and its urgency. The impact of climate change are already being experienced with significant events occurring already, coastal flooding, and changing ocean habitats. Climate hazards exacerbate those already living in stressed environments. Australia faces major decisions, with one of the largest footprints and a growing appetite for fossil fuel extraction. Leadership is needed now. Many politicians reluctant to act in the absence of signs that people want it. The church can play a role by expressing these views and standing up publically. We need to rethink how we use energy in order to reduce emissions sharply. We need more than 5% by 2020. Issues of equity and justice are significant as our children, those in poverty and creatures who will bear the cost of our inaction.

The Revd Peter Sandeman (Adelaide) spoke about the work of IPCC as being initiated by a dedicated Christian, Sir John Halton. We need to acknowledge how active Christians are in creation care and to rediscover our responsibilities towards creation. It is our responsibility to act well and live lives in accordance with that knowledge and add our voice to those advocating to ameliorate the damage done to our world.

The treasurer spoke about the investment portfolio indicating that it is an ethical fund that excludes among many things coal-seam gas.

This motion was followed by another focussed on environment. Bishop Tom Wilmot (Perth) spoke about the importance of the environment as core business for Jesus followers as climate change affects the poor and the planet as a whole. It called for the government to 'stop telling lies' and respect and report fully the findings of scientific experts. Beth Hyde

(Canberra & Goulburn) observed the challenges associated with growing tension between competing business and environmental interests, especially as key government appointments are those who deny the basic science, effective and well negotiated agreements are torn up, effective agencies dismantled and scientific monitoring of mining projects being ignored.

Dean Peter Catt (Brisbane) considered the issue and importance of dialogue, especially as a way of dealing with complex issues and unresolved hurts, looking for a better way for the church to make decisions. Ancient techniques of listening give us a basis for addressing complex issues in mission and ministry. Peter shared a story about using talking circles and open-space groups in western areas of the diocese about coal-seam gas. The process allowed communities and opponents to listen to each other, to see how people perceive problems in different ways. The diocese is using open-source technology as a way of talking through and dealing with issues at various levels in the life of the diocese. Bishop Stephen Pickard (Canberra & Goulburn) observed how we need debate, discussion and dialogue where the final element is often comes off poorly but is perhaps the most important dimension when addressing complex issues. Perhaps the Gospel is calling us into another way, where dialogue precedes discussion and debate. It is a pathway that requires vulnerability and openness.

Sandy Grant (Sydney) spoke about the problem of gambling in Australia. 'We need airbags and seatbelts on poker machines'. Poker machines are not harmless diversions but often concentrated in areas of social disadvantage that affects families, workplaces and neighbourhoods. The most common cause of fraud is gambling. The industry is about maximising profit rather than minimising harm. As a lifelong fan of Parramatta, Sandy said he can't support them any longer because of the prominence of gambling sponsors in an area of great social vulnerability.

Andrew McGowan (Melbourne) drew attention to the ongoing discussion about the marriage eligibility of non-baptised people in the church, especially in a cultural context where fewer people are baptised. The suggestion is that this topic of discussion become an area of further reflection by the Liturgy and Doctrine commission. He noted that the issue is not to explore same-sex relationships but the theological core of marriage itself with reference to baptised and non-baptised people. The motion was supported by Bishop Philip Huggins (Melbourne) who thought it would helpfully move the discussion along as he finds himself engaged with many young couples, often with no church background, who desire a creative church wedding.

By Reverend **Wayne Brighton**