

SELF-SERVICE MINISTRIES FOR ANGLICAN CHURCH IN OUTBACK QUEENSLAND



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The Anglican Church is set to radically change how it ministers to its flock in outback Queensland.

Because of the vast distances involved in servicing the central-west, the Anglican Church says it is physically impossible for one ordained person to minister to the whole region.

'It will take time to work through the issues because it's quite different to what has been done before. I think people will need to be prepared to be kind to one another, to be generous in spirit, because it's going to be a learning curve for everybody,' said David Robinson, Rockhampton Diocesan Bishop.

The church says it can also be difficult to attract people to serve in more isolated locations.

As a result a different approach is being trialled, with Reverend Graeme Liersch and his wife Susan travelling west to train locals how to minister to themselves.

The training sessions will initially happen in Longreach and Barcaldine but could be expanded further to the Barcoo and Winton Shires.

Rockhampton Diocesan Bishop David Robinson said it was important for the church to change with the times.

"It's growing out of the recognition that ministry in the more isolated regions of Australia is getting increasingly difficult, both to attract people to work in those regions and also because of the decline in rural economies," he said.

"There just aren't the population centres to support a full-time paid clergy so out of that comes a desire to restructure the ministry in that region."

He said it was already common for locals in remote areas to take on additional roles in the church.

"The people in those regions have done a tremendous job of keeping parishes going ... often with very little in the way of resources and support", he said.

"We hope to be able to address that by having someone on the ground who will provide training."

Future of the parish priest

Bishop Robinson said it was too early to say how the new self-service model of preaching would impact the role of local parish priests.

"I think the role of the priest may change and we may see more of what I call 'worker priests' where somebody would live and work within the region but be ordained to carry out a priestly ministry within a particular town in that region," he said.

"We're still a fair way away from that ... there's a lot of conversation that's got to occur first so that people in the region and the diocese are comfortable with the way forward."

He said the self-service model had been successful in remote parts of Canada, but had not been extensively trialled in Australia.

"It will take time to work through the issues because it's quite different to what has been done before," he said.

"I think people will need to be prepared to be kind to one another, to be generous in spirit, because it's going to be a learning curve for everybody."