

BISHOP GREG VENABLES IS NEW PRIMATE OF SOUTH AMERICA



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Photo Credit: Diocese of Argentina

The Most Revd Greg Venables, Bishop of Argentina, has been elected to serve again as the Primate of South America.

[ACNS, by Gavin Drake] The Bishop of Argentina, Greg Venables, has been re-elected as the new Primate of the Anglican Church of South America. He succeeds Bishop Tito Muñoz of Chile who came to the end of his second three-year term – the maximum permitted under the province's canons. Bishop Greg was the House of Bishops' unanimous choice to be the new Presiding Bishop – or *Obispo Presidente* – of South America when they met at the weekend. His appointment was confirmed at the provincial Synod this week, and he took office on Wednesday (9 November) at a combined service of installation and welcome.



The British-born cleric first went to Latin America in January 1978 with the South America Missionary Society (SAMS). He was supposed to be there for three years but has remained in the country ever since. His three adult children have settled in South America and married local spouses. He and his wife now have seven Latin American grandchildren.

His first post was chaplain of a church in Paraguay and head teacher of St Andrew's College. After 12 years, he was made Bishop of Peru and Bolivia, before moving to Argentina in 2000; becoming Primate for the first time the following year, when the Province was known as the Southern Cone. He held that post until 2010 when new canons were introduced.

The Anglican Church of South America stretches from northern Peru to the southern tip of Chile. It includes the jungle area of Paraguay and the Pampa area of Argentina and high mountainous areas – including what is thought to be the highest Anglican church in the world - *Cristo el Redentor* (Christ the Redeemer), which stands at an elevation around 13,500 ft at *Nuestra Señora de La Paz* (Our Lady of Peace), commonly known as La Paz, in Bolivia.

Bishop Greg described South America as an “incredibly diverse” province that “loves to be Anglican.”

He said: “It isn’t imposed from the outside. It is an Anglicanism that came and has developed within the local cultures. Today, most of the Anglicans in the province are indigenous Christians. And the Church celebrates its unity amongst the diversity, Bishop Greg told ACNS this afternoon.

“We are united in the essential and in a Synod you can have a communion service one day in which somebody brings a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine; and then the next morning full vestments and everything in a very much more Catholic-style and everybody just feels very comfortable with that.



Within the region, Roman Catholics are the largest Church and Pentecostal denominations are also strong. The Anglican Church, which is much smaller, maintains strong ecumenical links with its partners and Bishop Greg had a strong working relationship with the then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, before he became Pope Francis.

He said that this was down to the “respect and appreciation” that the Anglican Church in the area is held. “I think they love the way we are able to co-exist with people who don’t agree with us.”

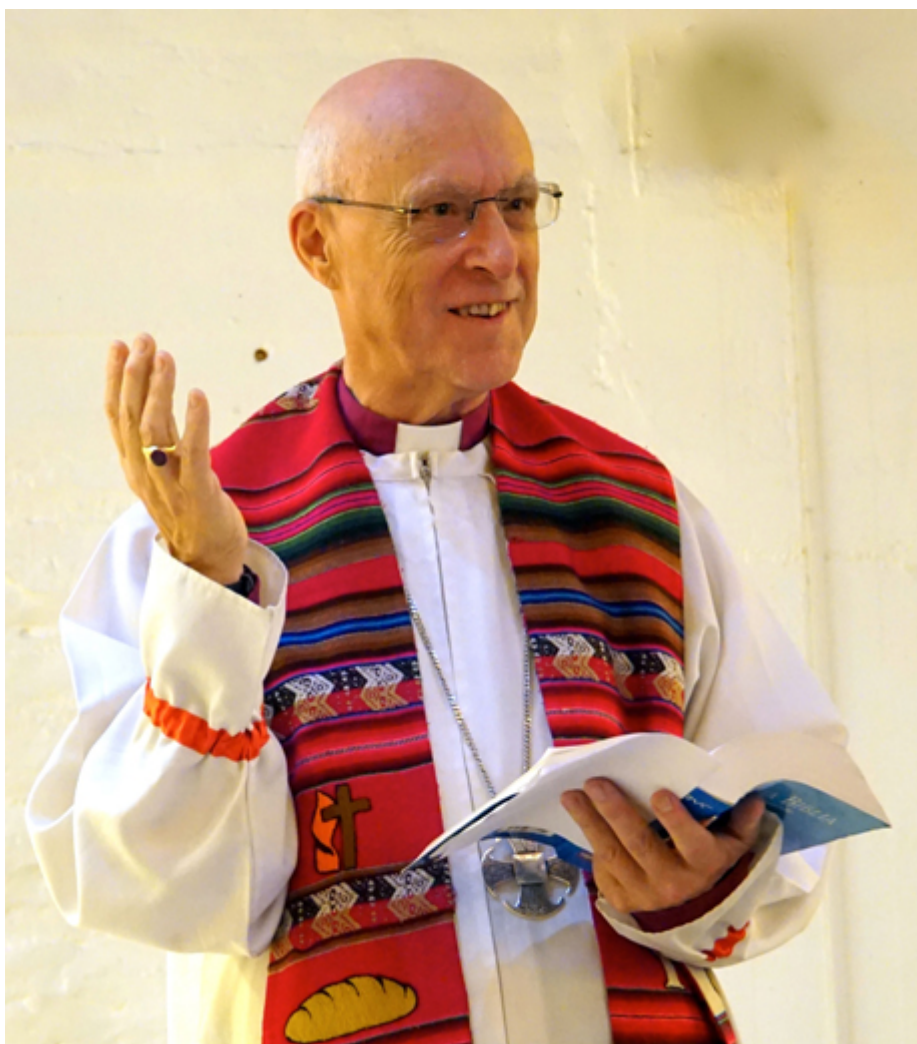
In the coming years, the province is looking to move towards what it calls “missiological regionalisation”. The diocese of Peru has already made steps towards becoming a province in its own right; but is now seeking to consolidate its position for a couple of years. Bishop Greg said that it may become an internal ecclesiastical province within the wider South America Province; as might Chile; with Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay forming another.

But he said that this was not something that the province wanted to rush. “We are not hurrying because we want to share strength of resources and unity to make sure we are using all the strengths and resources we have.

“And we enjoy so much the fellowship – that is not just a sentimental thing. It is reality. We appreciate listening to diverse voices in a sense of correction and affirmation. We find that very helpful.”

And he says that this would be done against a backdrop of intentional discipleship. “In other words, don’t leave it to chance,” he said. “Don’t just call people to come to Christ and have them find everything in the Church that they were looking for [but] intentionally help people to grow.

“Have a balance of one-to-one, or one-to-12, or form groups – use all the methodology so that people are becoming strong together and yet not losing what we call inter-dependence.”



He is also keen to see the Province move towards financial independence. “How can we have clergy and leaders who can live and cover their basic costs without being a major burden on the community and needing money to do things which should be used elsewhere.”

The Province is also “working hard” to explore “how we can be faithful to biblical truth and yet be coherent and adapting to the local culture,” Bishop Greg said. “‘New Times, New Challenges’ was the title of this Synod we have just had and the idea is . . . how can we relate to that realistically, how can we tell the truth and dream dreams without becoming slaves either to the dreams or the harsh truth. How can we work through those things together.”



There are seven dioceses in the province: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Northern Argentina, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. The provincial synod has 21 members: a bishop, cleric and lay representative for each of the dioceses.

Bishop Tito, who took office as presiding bishop in 2010, was the first indigenous Latin American Primate in South America. He will continue as Bishop of Chile and will also serve as vice-presiding bishop and a member of the provincial council. “He is not just highly respected, he has managed to lead the Church in difficult circumstances and maintain unity within diversity,” Bishop Greg said. “We are very grateful to him for doing that and very grateful to God that God through him has done that for us, and with good humour, which is a very important thing here.”

This article first appeared on the [Anglican Church News Service](#).

Photos: Diocese of Argentina