

ANGLICAN PRIMATE TO STEP DOWN EARLY

The Anglican Primate of Australia, Melbourne Archbishop Philip Freier, has announced that he will step down on March 31, 2020, before his term was due to expire, and will not seek re-election.



Archbishop Freier, who has served a six-term as head of the Anglican Church in Australia, will continue as the Archbishop of Melbourne, a role he has held since 2006.

Archbishop Freier today wrote to all Australian Anglican bishops to say he would not accept a further term, and that he would conclude on March 31 to allow his successor to prepare for the next national synod (parliament). This will take place in Maroochydore, Queensland, from May 31 to June 5 next year.

Archbishop Freier was due to chair the Synod.

"I am hopeful that my early advice to you will enable a smooth transition to be made," he wrote to the bishops. A telephone conference of the Board of Electors is scheduled for December 23, and the Board will meet on March 14.

News Release: 25 November 2019

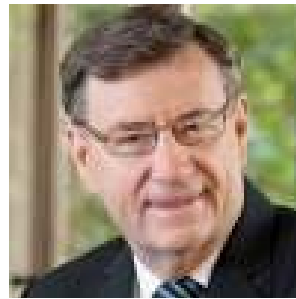
Barney Zwartz, Media Adviser, Anglican Primate of Australia

Philip Freier has been the 13th Archbishop of Melbourne since December 2006 and was elected Primate of Australia on 28 June, 2014, being installed by Justin Welby Archbishop of Canterbury on 13 August 2014.

Previously he had been Bishop of the Northern Territory. His first appointment after ordination in 1982 was curate at Kowanyama, an Aboriginal Community in North Queensland.

ARCHBISHOP GLENN DAVIES APPOINTS A NEW BISHOP FOR THE WESTERN REGION OF SYDNEY.

Archbishop Davies announced that he had appointed the Reverend Gary Siew Leong Koo to be the third Bishop of the Western Region.



Gary has a BD Hons from Moore College. He was born in 1968, the son of Malaysian immigrants and was raised an atheist. He decided to follow Jesus while studying medicine at Sydney University. He was made deacon in 2006 and

priest (presbyter) in 2013. Gary is currently the Rector of the Parish of Carlingford with North Rocks and was Acting Rector of Berala 2013-2015.

Archbishop Davies said: "Gary is a able minister of the word of God with a pastoral heart and a desire to see the gospel proclaimed clearly in the West".

Posted: Nov 19, 2019 <sydneyanglicans.net>

SYDNEY CHURCHES ANNIVERSARIES AND CENTENTENARIES

In the mid and later nineteenth centuries there was a growth and development of many churches within the growing city of Sydney and surrounds. So now many of these churches are celebrating significant anniversaries and centenaries.

St Paul's Church Kogarah was built and opened for worship in 186.

In September this year the parish celebrated its 150th Anniversary in a way that the founders could not have imagined. The celebratory Service was conducted in both English and Chinese (Mandarin) by the Rector the Reverend David Yung. The sermon was preached in English by Archbishop Glenn Davies, whilst being translated into Mandarin. The Regional Bishop Peter Lin also participated. The congregation included 'anglos', but was mostly Chinese.

A truly multi (bi)-cultural community, reflecting the residents of Kogarah and Sydney in 2019.

(See page 11 for South Hurstville's Centenary celebration)

A STATEMENT FROM ANGLICANS TOGETHER

“Unity in Diversity”

13 September 2019

Anglicans Together is an organisation that celebrates the depth and breadth of Anglicanism. As such, our membership reflects a diverse range of views and positions.

What we value most is our common faith, and the unity that comes through such faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We believe there is more that unifies us than separates us, and that we are better as Anglicans together!

We pray that such a desire to be one, as our Lord Jesus Christ prayed, might be also the prayer and desire of others across the Anglican Church of Australia, especially at this time.

In light of what has occurred in Wangaratta Diocese, and as we await the Appellate Tribunal determination, we support the Primate’s calls for our Bishops to meet together. We hope that in doing so they will have the opportunity to seek our Lord’s wisdom, have further dialogue with generous hearts, and pray together. We pray too, that any actions that might provoke further divisions at this time be avoided and restraint exercised until good conversations have occurred, and outcomes determined.

We call upon all our members, lay and ordained, to pray for our church at this time, especially holding all of our Bishops in our prayers as they seek to communicate with one another, and with hope, we pray that deeper unity might come, rather than discord. We acknowledge that this is never easy, hence we hold them especially before our Lord. For more information see www.anglicanstogether.org

Anglicans Together Executive Committee

The Reverend Dr Max Wood (President); Mrs Susan Hooke; Mr Wesley Fairhall; Ms Paula Turner; the Reverend Michael Armstrong; Ms Lyn Bannerman; Ms Steff Fenton.

Two of the aims of Anglicans Together is to confirm our common allegiance to the Anglican Communion as an integral part of the larger body of Christ’s Church, called to bear witness to the freedom and reconciliation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and secondly to maintain the comprehensiveness and respect the diversity of belief and practice as it has developed in conformity with the Fundamental Declarations. (Constitution of Anglicans Together)

As the Diocese of Wangaratta moved to bless those who have been married in a civil union, it seemed that civil war broke out, and the bonds that hold us together as the Anglican Church of Australia were being described as “hindered” and by some “broken”.

A “truce” that was in place as agreed actions to discuss the issue was broken, and now we await an Appellate Tribunal, Bishops’ Meeting and perhaps a General Synod meeting next year to determine where to from here for the Anglican Church of Australia.

In noting the aims of *Anglicans Together*, which I share and hold dearly, it has therefore been most difficult to watch some of the actions and reactions across our Anglican Communion, especially in recent months in Australia. I personally have felt deeply torn as I have witnessed brothers and sisters in Christ from various “ends” of our Church attacking one another in a manner that seems quite distant, if not entirely foreign, to the way our Lord calls us to respond to one another (including our “enemies”).

As a committee we shared our deep concerns and fears with one another, as well as the pain of those who feel hurt, unheard or been injured by harsh words, and prayed together about our Church. What we felt most strongly was that while there is difference, that it was our diversity and the many things we held in common, especially our love for Jesus, that was the greatest gift of our Church, and that finding a way to be in unity, despite these differences, was our heartfelt desire.

In our statement in September to our Church we concluded by calling “upon all our members, lay and ordained, to pray for our church at this time, especially holding all of our Bishops in our prayers as they seek to communicate with one another, and with hope, we pray that deeper unity might come, rather than discord. We acknowledge that this is never easy, hence why we hold them especially before our Lord.”

Please continue to pray, especially as the conversation continues.

Most Holy God, Jesus Christ, heal your church, and allow us to see your face in each person who calls you Lord, and to love them as you love us.

ANGLICANS TOGETHER ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING REPORT AND AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The 2019 Anglicans Together Inc. Annual General Meeting was held on Thursday 29 August at St James' Hall, Phillip Street, Sydney.

Over twenty members were in attendance at the meeting from a number of our Sydney Diocese Parishes and churches including: Christ Church St Laurence, St James' King Street, St Luke's Enmore, St Peter's Cremorne, St Luke's Mosman, St George's Paddington, St Edmund's Pagewood, Holy Trinity Dulwich Hill, St Paul's South Coogee; and, St Mark's and All Saints' Hunters Hill.

The President, the Reverend Andrew Sempell, delivered his final report. Fr Andrew reflected on the current disunity in the Australian Church and what might be the future outcome of this disunity. He reminded the meeting that *Anglicans Together* has a different point of view to that of the Sydney Diocese and it needs to express this view. His report also recounted activities



that had occurred over the past year.

A full text of Fr Andrew's report is available on our website

www.anglicanstogether.org. A sincere vote of thanks was later offered to the outgoing

President by the Reverend Philip Bradford and Ms Lyn Bannerman.

A vote of thanks was also offered to the Reverend Philip Bradford by Ms Mandy Tibbey for his service on the Executive Committee and as past President. Mrs Moya Holle gave a vote of thanks to outgoing Secretary, Ms Carolyn Lawes, who was also stepping down from the Executive Committee.

A new Executive Committee was elected:

- The Rev'd Dr Max Wood (President)
- Mrs Susan Hooke (Vice President)
- Mr Wesley Fairhall (Treasurer and Public Officer)
- Mrs Paula Turner (Secretary)
- Ms Lyn Bannerman (Committee Member)
- The Rev'd Michael Armstrong (Committee Member) and,
- Ms Steff Fenton (Committee Member).

At its first Meeting, the Executive Committee elected the following Committee Members:

- Mrs Moya Holle (Committee Member)
- Mr Christopher Waterhouse (Committee Member) and,
- Mr Callum Close (Committee Member).

As an introduction to our new Executive Committee, Ms Steff Fenton is asking members to respond to a series of relevant questions.

This first installment introduces our President, *the Reverend Dr Max Wood*, and our Vice President, *Mrs Susan Hooke*.



The Reverend Dr Max Wood, President:

1. Describe yourself in two sentences?
When I was once asked what "style" of weddings I conducted, I thought about it and answered - "relaxed formal". That answer probably and unsurprisingly also reflects the image I have of myself.

2. What do you do for fun/relaxation?
I enjoy watching sport in person and on TV, especially Rugby League, Cricket and Football (soccer). I also enjoy watching documentaries and series about things that I would NEVER EVER do myself: e.g. Alaskan Crab fishing, Gold Mining in the Yukon, Outback or Ice Road trucking.

3. What three things are you most passionate about?
My family, my ministry and St George, Illawarra.

4. Why are you involved in Anglican Together?
I believe that Anglicans Together has a very important contribution to make to the life of our Diocese and the wider Anglican Church of Australia. It firstly provides a forum for connection and fellowship between more liberal and progressive Sydney Anglicans. It can also function as a vehicle for an enhanced and productive engagement with other Sydney Anglicans who may not necessarily embrace all our views on issues of theology, liturgy and church order.

5. What do you hope for in Anglican Diocese of Sydney?

I hope that the Anglican Diocese of Sydney will truly be what its name suggests – a Diocese of the Anglican Church in Sydney. Our Diocese should be unashamedly proud of its evangelical history and character. However, as a Diocese of the Anglican Church, I would hope that it views diversity of Anglican expression beyond evangelicalism as something to be cherished and not extinguished.



Mrs Susan Hooke, Vice President:

1. Describe yourself in two sentences?

Reformer.

2. What do you do for fun/relaxation?

Grandchildren.

3. What three things are you most passionate about?

Achieving good outcomes for people.

4 and 5. Why are you involved in Anglicans Together? What do you hope for in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney?

I am a member of Anglicans Together to try to increase the inclusiveness of the Sydney Diocese.

**KEEP THIS DATE.....
ANGLICANS TOGETHER
WILL BE HOSTING LUNCH**

with

**ARCHBISHOP GLENN DAVIES
Saturday 23rd MAY, 2020**

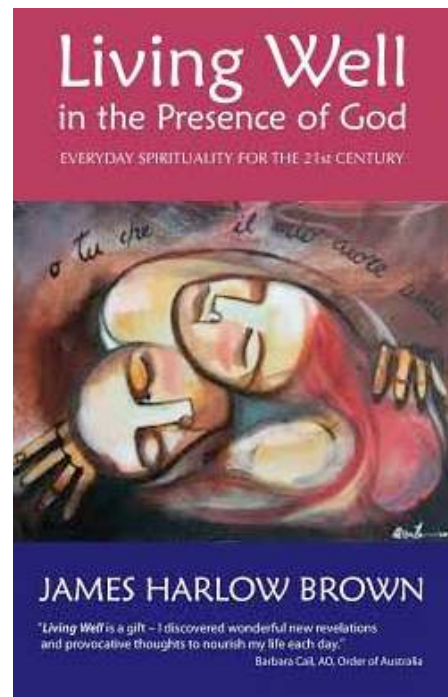
*CITY TATTERSAL CLUB,
194-204 Pitt Street, Sydney*

Preceded by a Eucharist in

St James Church, King St. Sydney

Further details will be announced in the New Year

A BOOK REVIEW



James Harlow Brown –

***Living Well in the Presence of God: Everyday Spirituality for the 21st Century* (2018)**

Reservoir: Morning Star Publishing.

In this book, *James H. Brown* addresses concerns which are well understood by all of us who are conscious of living in a post-Christendom society in which individuals, and Christians among them, frequently lose their ability to sense the ways through which God is involved in our world, and in our individual lives, today. Our way of seeing the world, he contends, is shaped by a profound reliance on the secular-scientific paradigm which permeates much of the society in which we live.

Brown asks us to consider just one question:

“Is God an involved, caring and loving presence to each of us at every moment of our life?”

If we are inclined to answer this question in the affirmative, the challenge becomes that of learning to sense God’s presence and involvement in everyday moments. This reality needs to be claimed by Christians and to be experienced by them. Doing so is not only their birthright as sons and daughters of God, it is also a tremendously satisfying and exhilarating process. Basing his book on very practical *Ignatian* insights, *James H. Brown* teaches us how to **“be there”**, how to spot the manifold ways in which God is moving in our lives, and how to delightfully let our lives simply fall in with God’s plan.

Dr Danielle Firholz
St Luke’s Mosman

A SYNOD REPORT 2019

by Lyn Bannerman

(The following is an edited extract of Lyn Bannerman's full report which can be found on our Anglicans Together website www.anglicanstogether.org)



In 2019, total Synod membership is 827, of which 500 are lay parish representatives, 257 are Rectors and the remainder are representatives (clergy or lay) from a range of Sydney Anglican institutions and other appointments.

Only 20% of all membership is female, heavily weighted by no female Rectors, but even amongst the laity, female representation is only 29%! The average maximum attendance at a Synod session over the last few years is just over 600. A total of 454 pages of papers were circulated before Synod this year and the daily business sheets were around 32 pages each. Being across the business of Synod, let alone making an intervention, is not for the fainthearted. Synod's Bible Studies (*Rev'd Matthew Yeo*) this year were on "**Humility**," drawing from a range of Old and New Testament texts.

The whole "Proceedings of Synod 2019" is at: https://www.sds.asn.au/sites/default/files/2019%20Synod%20Proceedings.full.pdf?doc_id=NDM4Njk=

A summary version for Parishes is at: https://www.sds.asn.au/sites/default/files/ParishCircular.Synod%20Summary%20and%20Resolutions.2019.pdf?doc_id=NDM4NzU=

All page references below are to pages in the full Proceedings.



SELECTION OF SYNOD 2019 TOPICS

1. THE DOCTRINE OF MARRIAGE AND THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO SYNOD

I will not cover the President's Report (page 4) as it has received sufficient commentary in the press nationally and internationally. Suffice to say, despite the assertion that

"please leave" was directed at Bishops/Dioceses who affirm same sex marriages, this does not stand up to a **literal** reading of the text – the paragraph clearly asked "people" to leave.

A ten point resolution on the **DOCTRINE OF MARRIAGE** (pages 62-63), in summary, reaffirmed male/female marriage as the doctrine of scripture and of the Anglican Church, and declared that blessings or affirmations of same-sex marriage are contrary to scripture and that Sydney is in a state of impaired fellowship with any diocese that, or bishop or other minister who, has allowed or participated in the blessing or solemnisation of a same sex marriage. The motion continued by seeking that that the Archbishop decline any request to exercise ministry in the Diocese of Sydney from any bishop or other minister who has unrepentantly allowed or participated in such blessings or marriages and asked the Standing Committee to consider not providing financial support, directly or indirectly, to any Anglican diocese or body which has acted, or has allowed others to act, contrary to the Church's doctrine of marriage".

2. MOTION TO DEFER GENERAL SYNOD ASSESSMENTS

The intention of this motion was to begin to starve (my words) General Synod by deferring payments of Sydney Diocese's levies, starting with any remaining dues for 2019, and all levies in 2020.

General Synod covers many expenses on behalf of Dioceses, including travel to and holding of meetings, and centralised payments on behalf of all (eg the redress scheme for victims of abuse). So, the idea is: let's withhold our dollars owing until the Australian Anglican Church agrees to Sydney's doctrine of marriage. The matter was put to secret ballot; the amended motion passed, with 80 percent in favour. (Next instalment, next year.)

3. HUMAN SEXUALITY PASTORAL GUIDELINES

Last year, Synod was presented with a report from the Doctrine Commission on Marriage, but we did not have time to consider its related Guidelines for Pastoral Care by churches. That Report was the basis for the wording of the resolution summarised in (1) above and placed strong emphasis on the sinfulness of any sex outside of the male/female marriage bond.

Synod agreed that the Guidelines, as amended, (p.211), should be provided to all staff and others involved in pastoral care in parishes but concern, expressed in debate, about insensitivities

in wording resulted with a request to Standing Committee to seek input from parishes to help with further refinement.

4. GENDER IDENTITY

The papers [on this matter] consisted of a **Doctrinal Statement on Gender Identity, and two Annexures, being Pastoral Guidelines for Churches, Schools and Organisations and a further one, being more specific Guidance for Parishes.** This is a very sensitive issue for our schools given the press caning some Anglican Heads of Schools had received late last year for a letter they wrote to parents, drafted for them by the Diocese, and drawn from principles in the earlier 2018 draft document.

The summary position in the papers is that we are all male and female, made in the likeness of God, and the paper's attempt to face up to gender confusion, dysphoria and intersex realities was clumsy in the extreme, and downright painful for those for whom this is reality. The papers blamed these "problems" on "the Fall". My contribution was to read out a letter that had been handed to me by a person who naturally wished to remain anonymous (and not someone from my parish); the letter was a heart rending account of life's experiences, concluding with a plea for greater love, compassion and understanding and begging that the Church not ask a person to "de-transition" (as the papers recommended).

We did not finish the debate. The last Annexure providing guidance to parishes remains incomplete and parishes have been invited to comment further. However, the Gender Identity Doctrine Statement as amended, and the first Annexure were passed. Further, it was resolved that the Doctrine Statement, representing our "doctrines, tenets, beliefs and teachings" with respect to gender identity, would be cross-referenced into our Property Use Policy, providing further clarification for restrictions on activities, being in turn useful in relation to the proposed Religious Discrimination legislation (see point 6 below).

This subject of understanding gender identity issues, along with the Doctrine of Marriage (point 1. above) on same sex relationships, are the heart of Sydney Diocese's (and GAFCON's) dispute with the Anglican Communion. Anyone attempting to throw new light and understandings in this century on these matters is dismissed as a revisionist, 'aka' liberal, which in turns means not Bible-based, non-evangelical and ultimately non-Anglican.

5. STATEMENT OF FAITH

A few years ago, Synod decided that, in order to ensure that individuals who are in significant positions of leadership (eg members of Boards such as ANGLICARE'S) are aligned in their beliefs to Sydney Anglicans, they would be required to sign a Statement of Faith. This was determined to be the Apostle's Creed plus three additional points being, in summary: the canonical Scriptures as the supreme authority on all matters of faith and conduct; reconciliation with God is through Christ's death and resurrection alone; and we are justified by faith alone. This requirement was incorporated into the Diocese's Governance Policy.

This year, Synod reinforced this faith statement by adding in the main thrust in the Doctrine of Marriage. The following additional words, new 4th point, were approved for inclusion in the Governance Policy's statement:

"that this faith produces obedience in accordance with God's word, including sexual faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman, and abstinence in all other circumstances."

This amended statement of faith was then also incorporated into the Diocese's Property Use Policy as part of defining what activities may or may not take place in our church property.

There was also a serious attempt to incorporate the full amended statement of faith into the Synod Membership Ordinance, requiring that all lay representatives sign this statement to be eligible to be a Synod member. That move was defeated.

6. DRAFT RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION BILL

The significance of the strengthening of the Statement of Faith in both the Property and the Governance Policies is the clear intention to shore up Sydney Anglican Diocese's position not only in any debates about the future of the Anglican Communion (who is in and who is out) but also for the battle ahead around the drafting of the **Religious Discrimination Bill**, and any actions we might face when the legislation is finally enacted. Clear "faith statements" in appropriate Diocesan documents may provide their defence against, say, discrimination claims relating to same sex marriage issues. The Diocese is critical of the Commonwealth's Exposure Draft of the Bill, emphasising three points of concern as part of a broader resolution (14/19, p.55):



- i) the exclusion of bodies such as Anglicare Sydney and Anglican Youthworks from the definition of 'religious bodies' because of fees charged for goods and services
- ii) the requirement that schools and other religious bodies would have to employ only Christian staff, and not be allowed to merely preference the employment of Christian staff,

- iii) the undefined term “vilify” undercuts the protection that the Bill gives to statements of belief.

THE CHURCH OF CONFESSING ANGLICANS AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND.

Synod passed a resolution giving thanks for the formation of the “biblically faithful” Church of Confessing Anglicans Aotearoa / New Zealand, formed by 12 parishes leaving the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia because of their General Synod’s resolution that authorises bishops to allow clergy in New Zealand to bless same-sex relationships. The Bishop-elect *Jay Behan*, Christchurch, NZ was present in Synod.

7. MINISTRY OF WOMEN

My motion, encouraging Rectors to consider having suitably qualified female clergy (ie Deacons if Sydney locals) preach to mixed congregations, despite being the second motion received by the Secretariat when the first call went out in late August, was not debated due to lack of time. **There are currently three practices in Sydney that I am aware of: women preach to mixed congregations; women may be interviewed by their male Rector who is controlling the flow of “conversation”; or women preach to women and children only.**

We did welcome a motion (9/19 p.54), passed without debate, that celebrated the 30th anniversary of women being ordained as Deacons in Sydney and celebrating their many and various contributions to the Diocese in that role.

8. DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Last year we succeeded with a resolution which sought the Archbishop’s approval that people divorced on the grounds of domestic abuse could be remarried in our churches . After 9 months, the Archbishop wrote out endorsing this matter with some degree of equivocation, essentially providing for those regional Bishops with objections to follow their consciences on the matter. While not ideal, it does not prevent people in the situation approaching a different Bishop, through a clergyman. Our motion this year, simply welcoming the Archbishop’s letter, passed without debate.

9. OTHER MATTERS OF INTEREST

Last year an excellent motion was brought to Synod recommending **greater representation of women on boards and committees**, but we warned the promoters we would speak against their supporting paper, while agreeing with the outcome. The Paper managed to be deeply insulting (women are good at “discussion hubs”) while also being downright dangerous (failing to note the legal responsibilities of Board members and skill levels needed, which of course many women have). The Paper was quietly dropped from the agenda and this year’s much improved revised paper, with the same recommendations, was accepted by Synod, without debate.

Synod’s attention was drawn to the **decline in ordinations** to priesthood (presbyters) in Sydney, which is accompanied by decline in Moore College enrolments, - and for those enrolled, a decline in continuation right through to ordination. The decline in enrolments has been continuous since a high point in 2006.

The prize for the most innovative resolution this year went to 52.19 (p. 68) which called on all parishes to pray ‘once a quarter for our clergy’

CONCLUSION

Synod ended with a farewell to our Archbishop, who, while in office until sometime next year, was chairing his last Synod. Like others, I felt deeply conflicted at this time. He is an excellent, fair chairperson; I have personally found him unfailingly gracious and supportive in my contacts with him both in and outside Synod. How tragic is the current turn of events which will probably forever mark out this Synod in Anglican Church history.

The Anglicans Together support network is a wonderful group to have there in Synod – praying for each other; having dinner together. We respectfully acknowledge that there will be differing views on all these matters amongst our aligned parishes, and between individual members, but we hold firm to our watchword:

“Unity in Diversity”.

Lyn Bannerman
Christ Church St Laurence

**ANGLICANS TOGETHER 2019-2020
MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE.
Membership is \$35 (\$30 concession) pa.**

**Please send your cheque payable to
'Anglicans Together Inc.' with your details
to:**

**The Treasurer
7 Cheddar Street
Blakehurst NSW 2221**

**Your membership will help us to continue
representing a more inclusive expression
of Anglicanism in the Diocese of Sydney.**

**You also receive a subscription to our
newsletter.”**

‘AN ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP WITH REVERENCE AND AWE’ - Hebrew 12:18-29
SERMON PREACHED BY *BISHOP MICHAEL STEAD* at *St Luke’s Church, Enmore* – 25 August 2019

The Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter twelve paints a picture for us of the heavenly Jerusalem. It was written to a people whose faith in what God had done in the past and their hope in what God would do in the future was wavering because of the hardship they were experiencing in the present. As such, it is message that is just as relevant for us as it was for its first audience, for it is all too easy for us to so focus on the present struggles that our faith and hope get shaken. This passage says to us – do not be shaken.

The letter is called “Hebrews” because it was written to Hebrew Christians – that is, Jewish people who have recognised that Jesus is the long-promised messiah, who fulfils everything promised in the Old Testament. But, having become Christians, life got harder not easier. That was because Judaism was a recognised religion in the Roman Empire, which gave Jews the right to practice their religion. It also exempted them from the normal rules that required emperor worship.

In contrast, Christianity was not a recognised religion, and this meant that the Hebrew Christians copped it from both sides. On the one hand, they were persecuted by the State - *“Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution... You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property”*. On the other hand, they were ostracized by their Jewish families and pressured to return to Judaism. The letter called Hebrews was written to encourage them not to give up on Jesus, and not to go back into their former practices in Judaism. Over and over again, the letter makes the point that Jesus is by far superior to anything in Judaism – a superior revelation of God, a superior sacrifice for sins, a superior High Priest, a superior Covenant between us and God.

The passage from Hebrews chapter twelve is the final picture in that sequence – Jesus gives us a superior access to God and experience of God. It does this by comparing what Jesus gives us with what happened when God drew near to his people in the Old Testament.

The first four verses in the chapter describe what happened at Mount Sinai in the time of Moses. Mount Sinai was where God gave the Ten Commandments to the people through Moses. God ‘drew near’ to his people... and it was an absolutely terrifying experience – *“a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest”*. The people heard the voice of God thunder from the mountaintop, and they were so terrified they begged God not to speak to them anymore. No-one except Moses could go up the mountain - any person – even any animal – that got too close would be destroyed. When God drew near to his people in the Old Testament, you were meant to be afraid – be very, very afraid. Even Moses, who had a special relationship with the Lord, was terrified and said, *“I tremble with fear.”*

The point of the contrast is to remind them – and us – that this is not **our** experience. For us, drawing near to God is NOT terrifying. We haven’t come to Mount Sinai – we have come to ‘mount Zion’, that is, to God’s true dwelling place in heaven. Verses 22-24 describe what this is like. It isn’t a place of fear and gloom and terror – it is the place of joy and delight. Gathered around the throne are innumerable angels in *‘festal gathering’*. This place is where God is being truly worshiped as God.

But it is not just the angels who are engaged in this worship - this is the “assembly of the firstborn – literally, the church of the firstborn - who are enrolled in heaven”.

Let’s be clear – when it says “the firstborn” it is plural. This is not referring to Jesus alone; it is talking about **us**, about God’s people across all time, both Old Testament and New Testament believers. The ‘firstborn’ are those who have the inheritance rights. Jesus is the One True Firstborn, but those who are joined to Christ share in the inheritance of the firstborn. If you are a Christian, then you are part of this church of the firstborn – you jointly have an inheritance in this heavenly Jerusalem. You are there in this picture, joining the angels in joyful worship before the throne. Note – we are *“enrolled in heaven”* – our names are written in heaven’s book, guaranteeing our right of entry.

The next verse reminds us of the reason why we have this inheritance – it is because – and only because of *“Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant”*. As I said, earlier chapters of Hebrews have already said much about how Jesus has established the this ‘new covenant’ through his death, and how his ‘sprinkled blood’ leads to the forgiveness of our sins and cleansing from all defilements, so that we can enter into the presence of our holy God. On another occasion, I would love to dwell on this in more detail. But I will focus instead on just the last part of verse twenty-four – *“the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel”*. This is an allusion to Genesis chapter 4. When God confronts Cain over his murder of his brother, God says to him *“Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground”*. Figuratively, Abel’s blood cried out for justice and vengeance. Abel’s blood brought about Cain’s curse and condemnation.

Here’s the point - Jesus’ blood does the opposite to the blood of Abel. His *‘sprinkled blood’* speaks a word – not of curse and condemnation – but of forgiveness and cleansing. *‘Sprinkled blood’* is an allusion to the Old Testament sacrifices, where blood was sprinkled on the altar as a sin offering. But unlike the Old Testament sacrifices, which did not take away sin and did not cleanse the conscience of the sinner, the ‘sprinkled blood’ really deals with our sin and all its consequences. It is because of this – and only because of this - that we can draw near to the throne of God, and be unafraid. Without Jesus, we should be just as terrified as

they were at Sinai, because our God is a holy God, and impure sinners like me, and you, cannot enter into his holy presence.

Don't miss the crucial point in the passage – this confidence to draw near to God's presence is not merely what happens when we die. Notice that the passage is in the present tense, not future tense. We **have come** to Mount Zion. Physically, we dwell here on earth, but our spiritual home is in heaven. If you are a Christian, then spiritually you are already part of that great joyful assembly. This is what 'church' is, in its most ultimate sense – the heavenly gathering of all God's people. If you are a Christian, then right-now, you are already a member of this church – you **have come** to Mount Zion. What we do here as we gather week by week is both an anticipation of, and a participation in, that heavenly reality. As we worship God, we join our voices to those thousands of angels in joyful praise to God. But worship is more than just our voices. Worship is an all of life response of joyful submission to God. Part of our worship is living our lives in obedience to God's voice. Hebrews is reminding us that we already belong to the worshipping community of the heavenly Jerusalem.

That means that we have to stir ourselves into action, to live appropriately as God's holy people. The punch-line of the passage is: *See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven!*

God calls us to live for him and not for ourselves, and that means living in holiness and righteousness. In Moses' day, that generation had refused to listen when God spoke to them, and they all died in the wilderness. Immediately prior to this passage for today, Hebrews 12 gives the counter example of Esau – *“See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.”*

Living for the transitory pleasures or the transitory treasures of this world is crazy, because this transitory creation is destined to pass away. Verse 26 reiterates God's promise spoken earlier through the prophet Haggai: *'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.'* This phrase, *'Yet once more,'* indicates the removal of what is shaken – that is, created things – so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

God is going to shake, one final and last time, the earth and the heavens – that is, the sky and the universe beyond. When God does this, the entire cosmos that we are a part of will be no more, and what remains will be a 'kingdom that cannot be shaken'. Which kingdom are you focussed on right now? Will your inheritance be in the kingdom that cannot be shaken, or will you be clinging so tightly to this world that you will be 'shaken' along with the rest of the cosmos?

The call of this passage is to be stirred, not shaken. Stirred up to live in a life of worship and holiness and obedience, in response to what God has done for us in Jesus. The call to action comes in the final verse: *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give*

thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

It seems to me that the world around us – and the church as well – has lost that sense of reverence and awe before God. There was a time when people were fearful of the final day when we all stand before God. But the church has done a great job of communicating the truth that God is love and that God loves all people – which is true and right. But the side effect is that people look at themselves and think “What's not to love? Of course God will welcome me into his heavenly home”.



Hebrew 12 says that it is ONLY because of what the 'sprinkled blood' of Jesus has done for us that our experience of God is not the terrifying consuming fire of Mount Sinai. If anyone were crazy enough to turn their back on Jesus and following him in joyful obedience, then on that last day they will stand before God, the judge of all ... on their own. That will be 100 times more terrifying than Mount Sinai. God's holiness is a consuming fire – you are either purified by it, or burned up in it.

Let us be those who approach the throne in reliance on what Jesus has done for us, and receive that kingdom that cannot be shaken. As it says in verse 28, let us offer acceptable worship to God. Worship is so much more than what we do in church for an hour on Sunday. Acceptable worship is worship that declares that God is our God, by a life lived in reverent submission to him. A life of holiness is a life of worship. A life of obedience is a life of worship. A life of thankfulness and praise is a life of worship.

Let us offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe.

(Photo above: Bishop Michael with Rector, Geoff Parker and church warden, Eddy Reddy at the Institution of the Rector, February 2019)

ANGLICANS TOGETHER NEWSLETTER

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Celebrating Saints in the Parish of Hunters Hill

The Parish of Hunters Hill has quite a full calendar of events between the Feast of St Francis through to the patronal festival of one of its two centres on All Saints' Day.

One of our highlights is the Annual Blessing of Animals. We partner with the local branch of the World League for Protection of Animals to host this service, followed by afternoon tea in the Parish grounds. Over 100 animals attend, along with their human companions. This year's blessing included dogs, cats, birds, snakes, goats, fish, lizards and turtles.



The Rector, the Reverend Michael Armstrong blessing the snake

It has become a landmark event in the calendar of Hunters Hill, with some people even returning home early from holidays to attend. A further positive aspect of this event has been the number of people who return to other services throughout the year.

In the 1990's one of the teachers at Hunters Hill Public School was on exchange from the USA, and part of her influence on Hunters Hill has been Halloween. It is estimated that possibly 80% of the children in Hunters Hill participate in "trick or treating", with many houses now being decorated.

Four years ago the Parish decided to take up the challenge of telling the story of our Patronal Feast day (All Saints') and All Hallows Eve which is a part of this day.

On our first year we ran a children's activity in the Church which had a few people come and explore, but didn't seem to engage people. **The next year we converted the interior of the Church into a maze, and at various places had stories about the saints.** We had about 300 people come through the Church. The following year we built on the maze idea and had members of our Parish dress as some of the saints, and

tell their stories. Around 400 people came through the Church.

This year we created an All Hallows Tunnel in the Church. Around 500 people came through, hearing about the saints and their faith in Jesus. It was very moving to see many of them at the end lighting candles and saying prayers of thanksgiving for loved ones.

(Photo below).



Our celebration of Saints' concluded with the Feast of All Saints' on which we celebrated with a special Evensong that included the combined choirs of St John's Beecroft, St Alban's Epping and All Saints' Hunters Hill.

The Very Rev'd Katherine Bowyer, Dean of Newcastle, was our preacher and reflected upon the saints in the stained glass, and the light of Christ which shines through them.

It has been a very busy few weeks in which we have managed to engage with a diverse and reasonably large number of people across our community. **All have had the opportunity to see and hear the saints, revealing in their actions, singing, telling and service the love of Christ which shines through them.**

Photo : Combined choirs ready to process for Evensong



CENTENARY - St Mark's Anglican Church South Hurstville

'*Re-connect with St Mark's and God*' was the theme of the centenary of the dedication of the first St Mark's South Hurstville. The weekend of celebrations included a 7.15pm Evensong on Friday 2 August – the actual anniversary date – and a 4pm Choral Eucharist on Sunday 4 August 2019.

Many former parishioners and several former parish clergy returned for the Sunday Eucharist, at which **Dr Glenn Davies**, Archbishop of Sydney presided and preached. One of the largest representative groups of former parishioners was St Mark's Youth Forum – the youth fellowship – that was established in 1943 on the initiative of the first Curate-in-charge, **Revd William Brice**. At this time, St Mark's, along with several other churches in the St George area, was a daughter church of the St George's Hurstville. The infamous Forum was a significant spiritual and social force in South Hurstville and the surrounding suburbs.

At the Eucharist, **Dr Davies** preached on 'living stones' from Peter's first epistle. The central theme was that it is the people of God who are the living stones, and that was true one hundred years ago, and is true today. God is building his church upon the foundation stone of Jesus Christ, and so it is right and proper for us to rejoice and thank God for all that he has done in and through the people of God at St Mark's. More, that we should ask God that he would continue his work of building his church for the next one hundred years.

At the dinner that followed, **the Hon David Coleman MP** and **Councillor Kathryn Landsberry** (representing the Mayor of Georges River Council) spoke of the strong connections that St Mark's has with the local community.

The Rector, **Peter Greenwood** gave thanks for the past 100 years and spoke of the will of God for our lives – to rejoice always, to pray without ceasing and to give thanks in all circumstances). "We rejoice in our celebration, and we prayerfully give thanks to God on this special occasion." (1 Thess 5.16-17

St Mark's Centenary Committee published a booklet, **People of God**, (\$10 per copy) – Enquiries at centenary@southhurstville.anglican.asn.au The booklet focuses on the people of St Mark's and the connections with the community, concluding with a chapter on 'looking forward'. The rector, **Peter Greenwood** writes:

"The velocity of change in our society seems to be only increasing – including changes in family structures, in technology, in the workforce and in workforce participation, in cultural mores, political and religious affiliation, just to name a few. And yet, there is little consideration given to the toll of change – including the increase in marriage breakdowns, higher suicide rates, mental health issues, social dysfunction, alcoholism and gambling addiction. ... So, the future of St Mark's lies in its capacity to be a light on a hill in a time of turbulent spiritual, moral, and relational darkness."



The single bell of the first St Mark's Church was re-dedicated and displayed in a specially designed cabinet as a memorial of the centenary. In addition, new linen with appropriate hand-stitched text, for the Lord's Table was dedicated at the Evensong.

As the early Anglican community grew, the first St Mark's Church was becoming too small. Land in the same street, The Mall was purchased and the second and larger St Mark's was dedicated in 1960. In 1969, the adjacent Christian Education Centre was dedicated – part of which now houses St Mark's Pre-school Kindergarten.

St Mark's continues to work 'to see Christ honoured as Lord and Saviour in our community', basing its program on the '**Five Marks of Mission**' adopted by the Anglican Communion:

- * Witness to Christ's saving, forgiving, reconciling love for all people;
- * Build welcoming, transforming communities of faith;
- * Stand in solidarity with the poor and needy;
- * Challenge violence, injustice and oppression, and work for peace and reconciliation;
- * Protect, care for and renew life on our planet.

St Mark's early Sunday Eucharist is noted for its liturgical worship and choral tradition suited to those in southern Sydney who value contemporary liturgy in traditional style. The second 'family service' of praise and prayer is informal and attracting young families.

Revd Peter Greenwood, Rector;
Bruce Cooke, Coordinator, Centenary Committee.

Photo above: Archbishop Davies, Rector, clergy and choir.

SONGS OF LOVE - Volume 1 An Adaptation of the Psalms
by Graeme Curry*

Paperback first edition. 208 pages 60 songs, 9 original full page illustrations, 3 indices.
Price \$A30 or \$A55 for 2 copies includes GST – P&P extra. 10% of sales price to Asylum Seekers Centre Newtown

This book is the first in a series of adaptations of Psalms and Canticles from the Jewish and Christian sacred writings.

able to be contained in any one version, translation, interpretation or adaptation.

Some familiar and beautiful images and particular names of individuals and places are not included. This exclusion was sometimes difficult and painful but it was decided that the fundamental ideas expressed by these images and names would be made accessible to a more diverse readership.

Each Song is given a title not found in the Hebrew text. The titles are used to indicate a key theme of the Song.

Those not of the Jewish or Christian traditions and many within these traditions find some Songs challenging in their traditional forms. An alienating factor for some readers is the constant use of masculine nouns and pronouns to refer to the Divine mystery. In this book, almost all gendered words are removed reflecting a basic theological position that the ultimate reality is above all, within all, unspeakable and transcends gender. Another challenge are the many negative statements in the text. In this adaptation, they are often reworded as positive statements.

These ancient Songs provide new ways of speaking about our experience of the ultimate reality that transcends and interpenetrates our inner selves and all creation.

The book has been reviewed by Christian and non-Christian readers.

“For one who does not follow the Christian tradition I found the way the language is crafted absolutely engaging. A lovely work of art and spirituality.” *Wendy Flynn*

“As a non-religious but spiritual person I found this adaptation accessible and valuable.” *Michael Kirkpatrick.*

“A remarkable achievement.” *David Reeder.*

“A labour of Love” *Melinda Seed.*

**Graeme Curry*, RN BA(Hons) BD DipEd MA FACN FACMHN, a long term parishioner of Christ Church Saint Laurence, Sydney, has lived and worked in Australia, Papua New Guinea and Bangladesh. His qualifications are in philosophy, Hebrew, history, religion, education and nursing. Since the age of twelve, Graeme has lived closely with these Songs in various forms and contexts. They inform and enrich his life and his connections with others. He has been working on this project intermittently for more than twenty years.

Volume 2 is due for publication in November 2020.

To order: email: publisher@songslove.com.au
visit: www.songslove.com.au or mobile: 0432 786 901

Launched by *Father Daniel Dries*, Christ Church Saint Laurence, 24th November 2019.

SONGS OF LOVE

1

An Adaptation of the Psalms



Graeme Curry

This first volume contains fifty eight Psalms, as well as new forms of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*. The intention of the book is to complement rather than replace the many other excellent available versions.

These *Songs of Love*, in many forms, have been a source of spiritual strength and encouragement for millions of people of many nations for more than two thousand years.

In the adaptation the Johannine statement that “*God is Love*” (1 John 4:8, 16) is taken seriously. Most references to “*God*” or “*Lord*” are changed to “*Love*”. Names of individuals and titles are reworded usually as the “beloved” or “lover”. Although it may sound a very simple and straightforward process, the results are powerful and make available an inspired group of ancient Songs to an even wider audience.

In keeping with the Pauline assertion that “*the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*” (2 Corinthians 3:6), some core authentic meanings of the poetry are expressed and communicated. Attention is paid to the received Hebrew text and early interpretations. Often statements with a surface exterior reference are provided with an interior reference. This is characteristic of the Jewish mystical traditions of *Kabbalah* as well as the mainstream Christian monastic, patristic and medieval traditions. **The Songs have a richness that is not**