

From Down Under to Over Yonder: Anglican Future Conference 2015

In March, a number of Kiwi Anglicans from around the country attended this Melbourne conference. Latimer Focus invited three of them to give their impressions and reflections.

BRIAN CARRELL (RETIRED BISHOP & FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE LATIMER FELLOWSHIP)

Forty New Zealanders made the three hour flight across the Tasman to join 420 Australian fellow evangelical Anglicans and a handful of Africans for a three day conference on what the Anglican Church faces in the immediate future, particularly in this corner of the globe. We Kiwis took with us critical concerns that in this current year were threatening to break up our otherwise strongly cohesive Church. However it soon became apparent that our Aussie cousins had come to this Conference with different but equally pressing domestic concerns. And looming in the background, yet only occasionally raising its profile over these three days, was the issue of the nature and health of the Anglican Communion world-wide.

Anchoring this disparate assembly in plenary sessions each day were two outstanding guest contributors. Kanishka Raffel, a Rector from Western Australia, provided an exceptionally clear and helpful chapter by chapter exposition of 2 Peter 1-3. Canon Ashley Null drew on his international standing as a scholar specializing in Cranmer and the English Reformation to argue the need for us to recover our identity as a reformation Church distinguished by the primacy it gives to Scripture in shaping its life and its worship. He made a strong case that the attractiveness of the Anglican Church lies in its Cranmerian understanding of the gospel as first an appeal to the heart before it becomes a conviction of the mind or a determination of the will. A phrase Ashley Null reiterated daily was: 'What the heart loves, the will chooses and the mind justifies'.

There were other plenary sessions along with a plethora of competitive yet competent working groups addressing particular concerns that had drawn participants to this Conference. For us as NZ Anglicans our 'moment in the sun' came

in a plenary session which, to this participant's perception, highlighted differing perceptions of our local situation. In this context four NZ attendees were invited to describe difficulties faced by evangelical Anglicans in their country. The introduction and the specific questions put to them – and even the responses they then gave – suggested a dire situation. One Vicar and his parish (represented on the platform) had already withdrawn from the Church; others, we were informed, are in the process of making their decisions. Other Kiwis present, however, were not of the same mind about the direness of the situation for ACANZP (Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia). For them, talk of departure is premature when definitive decisions have not yet been made by ACANZP's General Synod.

One working group took up this issue for New Zealanders in more detail, but its title indicated its assumptions: 'Deciding when to stay or go.' Contributing to this group Australian Peter Adam, a former Principal of Ridley Theological College, was a calming voice pointing out that history showed that separating churches or new denominations are not guaranteed great success or greater doctrinal purity. We all live in the same world, with the same dilemmas before us.

But for Australians it was clear this kind of crisis was not their priority - or even for them a threatening concern. They were more troubled about the state of the Anglican Church in their country and its need for change if it is to successfully evangelise a new generation. The nature of most of the working groups reflected this. How does one plant a new congregation? What are the obstacles hindering this? How can an existing church be turned around? What opportunities do social media present for reaching through to an otherwise unreachable age group? Discipling new believers. Gender issues in Australia. Rural ministry challenges. The future of dioceses.

Over all, the Conference was marked by measured presentations, the absence of histrionics or hyperbole, the platform contributions of women, respectful listening to others, and the high quality of the lead speakers. Out of all this a consensus could be sensed that liberal theology, and parish ministry based on this, was a dead end; and that there was a need to bring our whole Anglican Communion, beginning with ourselves, back to its reformed Anglican roots, based on the primacy of Scripture in telling our story and determining our future.

**PETER FARR (VESTRY MEMBER,
SHIRLEY, CHRISTCHURCH)**

The conference in the main was clearly aimed at providing the Australian Anglican Churches with a reminder of the priority of evangelism and practical steps of how to do it in a difficult context. However, it also sought to give a glimpse of what is happening in the wider church beyond their shores such as in North America and here in NZ. This came with a warning of what they will most likely be facing in the coming days... I refer to the NZ situation of Motion 30.

Personally I found the conference to be most worthwhile and I remarked at the time how fantastic it would have been if our whole congregation had been able to attend! To have teaching sessions each morning delivered by two superb speakers in Kanishka Raffel and Ashley Null was excellent.

Kanishka Raffel from Western Australia spoke to us from 2 Peter. He clearly and powerfully reminded us of the danger of false teaching. It was apt for our current age and was a real encouragement to be astute and firm in our stand for the truth both inside and outside the church.

The in-depth and fascinating talks from Ashley Null, noted expert on Cranmer and the Reformation, were riveting. It made me realise that I am someone who has been brought up in the Anglican Church from childhood but, like many I suspect, taken much of what the Anglican Church is founded upon for granted. He described how the structure of our services and liturgy were designed to the last detail to ensure all people, from the ordinary to the eminent, would have

scripture running through their veins that they may indisputably know salvation through Christ and Christ alone.

The plethora of workshops offered provided many options to participants during the three days. They included topics such as Understanding World Views, The End of Gender, Understanding Islam, Financial Leadership, Developing Disciple-Making Ministries, Raising Up Leaders, Church Planting Strategies, Disputable Matters and When to Make a Stand, FCA Strategies, Why Be an Anglican?, plus many more. Naturally attendees were forced to make choices as one could only attend three of the twenty odd available.

The evening plenary session on the Thursday was entitled Standing With The Global Community and was led by Peter Jensen. This session attempted to provide an insight into what has happened in the Anglican Global Community in regard to the issue of same-sex relationships. Four New Zealanders were interviewed to help explain the situation in New Zealand and the various actions that have already been taken and the possible flash point result. Although it was clear to me that the Australians are not yet at the same point we are in NZ, they recognise the issue will come to a head at some stage and desire to be working cohesively and decisively to manage the situation.

This was reflected in the launch of FCA (Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans) Australia on the Wednesday evening. The global support for FCA was evident with the attendance and address by Archbishop Eluid Wabukala from Kenya. The organisation began signing up supporters on the launch night, with Archdeacon Condie (FCA Australia Chairman) saying he would welcome people who "love the scriptures and want to submit to them as the final authority in doctrine and morals, who are not afraid to stand against the world to honour Christ and His word, who are prepared to call out error in the church and press for its reform and who want to be in fellowship with other Anglicans who together with us hold to this historic faith."

The reason for my attending this conference and I believe why most of the NZers attended, was borne out of concern in regard to the direction

the NZ Anglican Church is taking with Motion 30 and the possible support networks that can be available should this crisis force some to find themselves unable to continue in communion with the Church. While some may play down the current situation we are in, I personally believe we are in a perilous position that requires a priority focus. The days ahead will undoubtedly be a defining period in the history of ACANZP.

**KIMBERLEY HEWAT
(SENIOR YOUTH PASTOR, WEST
HAMILTON COMMUNITY CHURCH)**

For Anglicans who wish to remain connected to the global Anglican Communion, but for whom there is no longer a place within the New Zealand Province, the opportunity to go to Melbourne and connect with the Australian Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans (FCA) was a godsend. The New Zealand contingent, though only 10% of the attendees, was made to feel very welcome. Having the Chairman of the Global FCA Primates' Council, Archbishop Eliud of Kenya, attending the conference affirmed that this was not a marginal group meeting, but that the conference had the support of much of the global Anglican Communion. So often we in NZ can feel isolated and out of step with our brothers and sisters overseas. We were reminded that this is not the case.

For me personally, my licence as the Waikato Diocesan Youth Facilitator was withdrawn when I could not support Motion 30 and therefore could no longer submit to General Synod. However my commitment to Youth Ministry remains strong. Over the past 20 years, in this Diocese, I have seen a steady decline in young people coming to faith, attending church, and being discipled to lead. I wondered if it would be the same in Australian parishes.

The first thing that struck me was the bold, biblical leadership at the conference. To be in an auditorium filled with over 460 Anglicans passionate about the truth of God's Word and his church; leaders who spoke purposefully about church planting and training up church leaders in sound doctrine (and having Theological Colleges doing this) was stimulating to say the least. It was a refreshing, God-inspired environment to be in

for three days. This contrasted for me with our own situation in NZ, where evangelicals tend to be tired of the ongoing struggles and resigned to a declining church.

FCA leaders seemed to be prepared to build the ark before the rain comes, knowing the church is under attack from within over the issue of the truth of scripture and sound doctrine. On the first evening Peter Jensen drew on testimony from the UK, US, Canada and NZ to illustrate for Australians a range of consequences for evangelicals of standing for the Gospel in an increasingly compromised church environment. Paul Perkin, rector of St Mark's Battersea Rise, spoke of the culture of the Church of England as worldly, unbelieving and immoral.

Bishop Stephen Hale's answer to such woes, at least for the Australian Church, was an eightfold strategy which prioritises:

1. Strong parochial churches with good team leadership.
2. A new lay revolution
3. Localised mission done in community
4. Planting new congregations and replanting dying ones
5. Ethnic churches
6. Permission-giving bishops (low control, light accountability)
7. Allowing people to have the best training possible
8. Riding the boomer wave, embracing it now and feeding into the new lay revolution

I can't help thinking all of these priorities fit our context well too.

The collegiality and unity appeared strong, with representatives from all over Australia, and from orders of bishops, clergy and laity. The obvious gap was indigenous leaders, though this issue was raised and recognised as needing to be addressed. For our parish, nine of whom attended, the FCA was a lifeline back into a vital Anglicanism, and we are very glad we attended. It gave us a renewed confidence that Anglicanism is a good brand.