

2023 Synod Report to Wellspring

Synod (the “parliament” of the Anglican church) met in Launceston on 28-29 July. Wellspring parish was represented by Matt Bowdich, Gemma Kleywegt and Richard Lord, and was also attended by Wellspring staff Rob Imberger, Sam Gough and Anna Davy.

Bishop Richard's opening Charge to Synod was a passionate call to uphold gospel truth in a secular world, a powerful call to be Jesus-focussed in all we do.

Regarding the upcoming referendum on the First Nations Voice to Parliament, he called us to pray, to discuss, and to bring Jesus to the discussion. Regarding the increasing financial burden of meeting our obligations to redress the sexual abuses of the past, he emphasised our commitment to justice, and that we can be confident in our future under God.

His hopes for the coming year were that there be individual spiritual renewal for each person, and that there be courageous sharing of faith, marked with generosity, “there is no other road to be on,” he concluded.

Synod dealt with several necessary administrative, financial and procedural matters which are not reported here. Synod also addressed a number of significant issues worth reporting in further detail.

Wellspring's Anna Davey, attending as a Youth Representative, became the youngest member of Synod ever to successfully move a Bill: in this instance to lower the age of Synod representation from 18 to 16 years of age.

Director of Ministry Development Stephen Carnaby and helpers have done great work to further Children's and Youth ministry round the Diocese, and presented a comprehensively researched report and plans to support parishes in this area of ministry over the next 5-year period.

Professional Standards: good legislation was passed to create a more coherent approach to Professional Standards in our parishes, modelling scriptural guidelines to manage conflict, grievances, and discipline issues within the household of faith. James Oakley, in moving this legislation, observed that the legislation of itself achieves little, and that over and above this we need to working constantly in our parishes and organisations for “what builds a culture of peace.” The details of how individuals, parishes and the Diocese can manage these issues will be circulated to churches during the coming year.

Redress scheme: having earmarked \$23 million for Redress claims in the past, we were advised we may need to provide another \$10 million in coming years, as civil claim amounts escalate. Bishop Richard reflected on the heart-breaking nature of these past sins, and on our commitment to making reparation in enacting restorative justice.

Following a sobering debate about making orderly provision for our responsibilities, the longer-term plan passed by Synod is to levy parishes up to 50% of their investment income, if needed, in 5-8 years' time, ie income from shares, trusts and rentals, but not from live giving. This will impact some parishes more severely than others. “The back of the envelope” suggests that Wellspring may need to contribute about \$50,000 a year for several years to the scheme.

Disability inclusion: Synod resolved to form a Disability Inclusion Working Group to look at how we can fully include those with disabilities in the full life of the church. Moving on from providing a welcoming physical environment, such as level access and hearing loops, Synod raised considering the needs of those with psychological disabilities such as PTSD, autism, or ADHD, for example, and how these might be met.

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The Orthodox marriage support motion was passed without much fuss, and a remarkable speech from Robert Jarman, a same sex attracted celibate man, who spoke frankly about the tensions of remaining true to a biblical understanding of fidelity outside of marriage.

Chris Bowditch's motion on affirming biological sex as a God-given attribute was refined beforehand with Sam Gough's input, and passed after a nuanced and careful debate. A proposed amendment from some liberal members to add "but only within the requirements of current State and Federal laws" was voted down- an addendum which would have denied biblical truth. Never-the-less the mover of the motion acknowledged that as Christians we may well sometimes find ourselves holding to a position at variance with the laws of the secular state.

It was a privilege to attend Synod and contribute to the significant decisions which shape our church ministry and mission into the future.

Richard Lord – on behalf of the Wellspring Synod team