



# Diocese of Dunedin

Responding to God's Call in Otago and Southland:  
Faith Communities reading the Bible, praying, living out the life of Jesus Christ

## Vicar General's Charge to the First Session of the Sixty Third Synod of the Diocese of Dunedin.

Tēnā koutou katoa.

As we begin this First Session of our 63<sup>rd</sup> Synod, I extend a warm welcome to you as we continue the work our predecessors have done in gathering to celebrate and give thanks for God's call to serve in this Southern See and to commit ourselves to ongoing discernment as we listen to the Holy Spirit.

If this is your first time attending Synod, would you please stand, welcome and thank you for accepting the call to serve in this capacity. We need the wisdom of all God's people as we gather and work together, I am glad you are here as part of our team.

### **2024 In Memoriam**

We take a moment now to acknowledge and offer thanks to God for the lives of those who have served on Synod in previous years. Will you please stand as we hold before God those who have died.

### **House of Bishops**

Pihopa Richard Wallace

### **House of Clergy**

The Reverend Airdry Dyson-Leask

The Reverend Neil Fuge

The Reverend Mary Greet

The Reverend Carl Somers-Edgar

The Reverend Boyd Wilson

### **House of Laity**

Ms Marilyn Dunn

Mrs Catherine Goodyear

Mr H Robert Wilson



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Rest eternal grant unto them, O God, and let light perpetual shine upon them. May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

The Venerable Te Ata Roy from the Hahi is unable to be with us this evening as she is attending the Hoani Parata lecture, she has agreed that after our worship tomorrow morning she will offer a tribute for Pihopa Richard.

## **Kiingi Tuheitia Potatau Te Wherowhero VII**

At the end of August, the country received news of the unexpected death of Kiingi Tūheitia who has been referred to as Te Kiingi o te kotahitanga, this theme of unity among Māori and in the nation as a whole being the dominant theme of his leadership. That was seen powerfully at the start of the year when

10,000 people gathered at Tūrangawaewae to attend a national hui on unity. I acknowledge the life and service of Kiingi Tuheitia and give thanks to God for his contribution to our country.

As energy continues to be expended around the proposed Treaty Principles Bill, expected to come before parliament in the next few weeks, the call to unity, to respectful listening and good debate is a wise call. Some of our parishes have taken the opportunity to engage with the Common Grace Aotearoa production, *Belonging in this Land: Treaty basics from a Christian perspective*. Being informed about Te Tiriti so we understand our history and what role the Treaty plays in our faith and daily life today offers a positive way ahead for our faith communities as we seek to carry the light of Christ in this nation. I commend this resource to you.

With the passing of Kiingi Tuheitia a new monarch has been anointed. Kuini Nga Wai Hono i te Po has taken over leadership of Kiingitanga, I pray she may, in her own unique way, be as strong in fostering kotahitanga as her father.

## **Bishop Steven Benford**

On the 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2024, Bishop Steve sent a letter to the Diocese announcing that he would step down as Bishop of Dunedin in May. Responding to a call to serve as our Bishop in 2017, Bishop Steve led us through challenging waters; including a global pandemic that required major adaptation in the way we gather



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as church, changes in the delivery of ministry, the challenge of declining membership and many other issues.

Bishop Steve acknowledged, *“I have been powerfully changed by my time here as Bishop, and particularly through the love and friendship of so many people. It has been such a privilege to serve here. I remain convinced that as we seek to proclaim Jesus Christ in words and actions we will continue to see lives and communities changed.”*

Bishop Steve, Lorraine and Marley were farewelled in May and have returned to England open to discern the shape of God's call on their lives now they are back closer to family. I acknowledge the many gifts offered to us during Bishop Steve's ministry in this Southern See and pray God's blessing on their new lives in England.

## **A time of Discernment**

With the departure of the Benford family we as a Diocese, supported by the wider church, began a process of discernment, of listening and seeking together who God is calling to be our new bishop. Some tasks necessary to entering a discernment process have already been completed; the Archbishops have appointed an Episcopal Commissary, Bishop Ross Bay. Bishop Ross as you will know has been bishop of Auckland for 14 years. He is guiding us through the next few months and is a real blessing in this role bringing wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, all founded on a generous and deep faith.

Diocesan Council has assured Bishop Ross that we are able to provide stipend, housing and allowances to support the ministry of a new bishop. An Arrangements Committee has been formed and under Bishop Ross's guidance is attending to the tasks that will allow an Electoral College to convene at the end of November. Thank you to all those who responded to the survey as we sought to gather information to create a diocesan profile. Your contributions are invaluable and will help both those who will attend the Electoral College and those discerning whether they are called to be a candidate.

This process depends on us being open to the leading of the Holy Spirit – we need to pray. To wait on God both individually and collectively. Recently one of our clergy, Rev. Michael Holdaway, suggested we hold a 24/7 prayer vigil. I would like



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to offer this suggestion to Synod and suggest each Archdeaconry could consider implementing it in a way that suits their region. There are many options that might work from gathering in person at a church, to filling a roster so we cover 24 hours of the day, perhaps repeating this once a week or once a month. A suggestion, because you will know what will work best in your part of the Diocese, but please know that what lies at the heart of the invitation is an understanding that we are to rely on God in this discernment, not our own resources. Prayer enlivens that relationship of trust and openness.

## **Whanaketia – through pain and trauma, from darkness to light (Bishop Ross's summary to his Synod)**

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care in State and Faith-based Institutions has

completed its work and published its final report, Whanaketia.

<https://www.abuseincare.org.nz/reports/whanaketia> Bishop Ross in addressing his Synod wrote the following:

*The Commission has been working since early 2018 and has heard from thousands of survivors, held numerous public hearings, examined countless documents, and published several interim reports. The final report is extensive and I encourage people to read it, at least its Executive Summary and Key Findings, to understand the extent and impact of abuse in institutional care through the second half of last century, and especially the Church's part in it.*

*It is not possible to adequately summarise the report, however it feels important that I record here some critical matters and especially some that relate to the Anglican Church. This is difficult material, and I want to acknowledge those among us tonight who may be the survivors of abuse themselves and for whom this could be difficult to hear.*

*The Commission estimates that 200,000 people were subject to abuse in the period 1950-1999 which it examined. The abuse was wide-ranging in its form, including psychological, emotional,*



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*physical, sexual, and spiritual. The environment for making abuse possible was created through institutional structural failures, societal attitudes, poor practice, lack of accountability and a failure to respond to complaints when they were made.*

*Within faith-based institutions further factors were the moral authority held by representatives of faiths, the trustworthiness of clergy and leaders, and the misuse of beliefs to justify abuse.*

*The impacts on survivors through the trauma experienced has been on the quality of relationships, a confusion and distortion of issues of gender and sexuality, physical and mental health, and has led to antisocial behaviour, substance abuse and crime.*

*When commenting on the Anglican Church, the Report notes:*

*The Anglican Church in Aotearoa New Zealand and Polynesia was at fault for:*

- (i) promoting corporal punishment, normalising bullying in schools, and suppressing Māori and Pacific Peoples' culture*
- (ii) failing to implement monitoring and leaving management to individual leaders*
- (iii) allowing complaints to be managed by those familiar with the alleged abusers,*
- (iv) with some unwilling to accept a fellow clergy member could be an abuser*
- (v) failing to protect people and hold abusers accountable by ignoring or covering up*
- (vi) abuse. Perpetrators were shielded by the sanctity of their roles within the Church.*
- (vii) disbelieving survivors initially and labelling them as untrustworthy or deceitful.*

*The Anglican Church has sought to participate in all these proceedings in good faith and along the way in these past 6 years has learned an enormous amount about the appropriate trauma informed response to survivors of abuse.*

*The Commission has called for actions to right the wrongs of the past and for public apologies*



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*to those harmed. This is work to which we are committed, and we have been working actively on redress with survivors of abuse within the Church and its related institutions.*

*Whanaketia has set out 138 recommendations to which faith-based institutions and the State must now respond as we establish a path forward and do our best to ensure that our churches, schools and other institutions are safe places where genuine care can be offered and received.*

*The publication of the final report is not the end of the mahi required to achieve this. Our Church is working across the Tikanga on a whole of Church response to the Recommendations so that we can respond with one voice.*

All of this reinforces the importance of the Safeguarding work and Boundaries training required of all who offer ministry within the church. Safeguarding is a proactive approach that aims to prevent the harming of children, young people or vulnerable adults. The responsibility to create a safe environment applies to every person regularly assisting in ministry in this Diocese. This includes all clergy, laity, paid, and/or volunteer leaders.

## **Community Ministry**

Anglican Social Service agencies provide valuable and effective ministry as part of our loving service in Christ's name in the wider community. In the last few weeks Anglican Family Care have been informed by Oranga Tamariki that funding for both their Dunedin Therapeutic service and family support services has been cut by a significant amount. This affects the employment of staff and the number of services that can be provided to vulnerable children and their families. The Diocese has found some small resources to assist Anglican Family Care in their initial response to this funding shortfall. Please pray for them and all Social Service agencies, as they seek a path into the future. Of course, any level of financial support communities can afford to gift would be welcomed.

Significant ministry is offered to vulnerable elderly members of our communities through the provision of residential aged care facilities, rest home, hospital, and dementia level care. Funding for these facilities is also under strain and has been for many years. The Aged Care sector is funded by grants from Health NZ and receives a gazetted increase each year. In the current round this was set at 3.2%



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well below the cost increases incurred. Please pray for wisdom for those involved in this area of ministry, and if you have an opportunity consider advocating for improved funding as we care for our seniors.

Shaping the lives of young people at both secondary and tertiary levels is the ministry of St Hilda's Collegiate and Selwyn College – Te Maru Pumanawa as they work to ensure a special character shaped by an Anglican faith is available for all to experience if they choose. Seeds sown in the lives of students can sometimes grow quickly, on other occasions a longer germination is required before the true beauty is experienced. Thank you to all who create these environments of opportunity and nurture.

If you have skills in governance or are willing to learn them, many of our Boards who support various ministries across the diocese would welcome hearing from you. There are current vacancies and some that will come up in the next months, most Boards have a matrix of skills they need to be covered. If you are interested in serving God in this capacity, ask a current Board member about how you can help.

## Ministry

*He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!  
What is the most important thing in the world? It is people! It is people! It is people!*

This whakatauki talks to the importance of human connection and relationships. This is what creates community and enables people to flourish. It values the humanity of each of us and reminds us of what is most important – not money, not success, not a job or a thing – it is people. Christ came to dwell amongst us and calls us to relationship; you and I are all beloved children of God and so is each and every person we interact with.

In an interregnum it is very clear that the ministry of a Diocese needs to be held carefully, and I believe it is best if it is held collaboratively. People working together for the good of all, looking to God as our guide. We are people who look to the cross, “the power of God and the wisdom of God” people who proclaim the sacrificial love of Christ for all people.



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Like the church everywhere we have opportunities and challenges to face, we must address questions about how we provide ministry across a large geographical area in an equitable way, how we green the church both in sharing faith with others and in our care of creation. How we speak to an unchurched generation and foster the treasures of faith a hurting world thirsts for. How we care for our property and ensure it serves the needs of God's kingdom.

We have an incredible group of people who have heard the call to follow Jesus in this Southern See. Amongst our Diocesan family we have people who were born and bred in the South, who know the beauty and challenges of this land, who know both the majesty of mountains and bush, rivers and sea, and the harshness of a landscape that can force us to bend and yield to its shaping. We are gifted with people who know this place and can be alongside others sharing the joys and sorrows throughout the seasons of life. We are blessed with people who have been baptised into the life of Christ and know themselves to be beloved children of God willing to share that love with others.

We have people who have come from afar with gifts to share, who now call this place home and are willing to engage in the mission of God in this Diocese. Diverse and wonderful, we are united by our call to follow Christ.

I am very grateful that we have a team of Archdeacons who work so well together, who can be present in local areas to lead and support the ministries of our parishes and local churches, who can support new ventures like our rural chaplaincy.

I am grateful for clergy and laity across the Diocese who pray and read the scriptures as they discern what God is asking of us in this generation in their local area. For chaplains and those who work in our institutions being with people day after day, offering love and hope.

I also acknowledge how as a Diocesan family we are served by an amazing team in the Diocesan office. Imagine if each of our faith communities had to duplicate all the work our administration and education team do to enable the mission God calls us to. I think we would grind to a halt. So, thank you to our central team for your care, your wisdom and your faith – we are richer because of your ministry.

There is so much that people are doing as they look to the cross, experience God's love and call and step out across this Diocese. As we work together as a Synod, I hope we will be encouraged as we hear one another's stories and see God at work amongst us.



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In November we will gather as an Electoral College under Bishop Ross's leadership, we will wait and pray and nominate a bishop for the wider church to endorse. Now more than ever may we be a people of prayer willing to allow the Holy Spirit to transform, lead and guide us.

My daily prayer includes a time of meditation (I use the Contemplative Outreach app), I have set as the opening prayer this invitation to the Holy Spirit:

*Come, Holy Spirit, come.  
Ignite within me the living flame of your love.*

My prayer is that as we meet as Synod the living flame of God's love will warm our meeting, listening, discussion, debate and decision making. That the living flame of God's love will ignite our Diocese in prayer, study and action as we live in this time of discernment and prepare to welcome a new bishop or bishops in t 2025.

So as people called here to this Southern See and ignited by God's love, let us continue our worship.



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## An advertisement:

We are prayerfully and practically supported by other dioceses; for example, this year the Diocese of Christchurch has invited us to join them for a living faith day in the Garden City.

**Living faith**  
PRAY DISCIPLE INSPIRE

**2024 CHRISTCHURCH DIOCESAN CONFERENCE**

**BOYS' HIGH AUDITORIUM SATURDAY OCT 26 9.30AM-5PM**

TO REGISTER  
SCAN HERE  
OR GO HERE  
[www.bf.nz/LivingFaithConference](http://www.bf.nz/LivingFaithConference)

## Living Faith Diocesan Conference