

## Presidential Address 2007

My father received my final School Report in September 1960, just weeks before the crucial Leaving Certificate exams. I *hope* he saw that I was a capable leader of the School debating team, a capable officer in the Cadet Corps, a very capable House Captain, that I had come first in Divinity and third in the year in both History and English. I *know* what really caught his eye, however, were the complete failures in Chemistry (26%, ‘Can do better than this!’), in General Maths (26% ‘He has much more ability than this!’) and in French (38%, where the teacher simply wrote, ‘Rather weak’). In the Headmaster’s words, ‘A determined effort is urgently required’.

Alas.

I think it was then that I heard my father swear for the first and only time. He used the word ‘bloody’ in the course of giving me some very special advice. I understand that he used it again in very similar circumstances, but it was to a different son. In neither case did it work.

In our family swearing was rare. My initial teenage rebellion, therefore, was a defiant choice to use bad language, against the will of my parents and my God. After all, I was a prop forward. Admittedly, I was just a teenager and swearing is not the worst sin in the world. But, trivial as it was, it led to a larger discovery about human nature, a discovery which we all make in due course. Exercising freedom of choice is not necessarily true freedom.

You see, in seeking to be independent from my parents' constricting rules, I was slavishly following my peers. Our hunger for freedom leads us to enslave ourselves. It became obvious when I tried to stop, and could not do so. It was odd. Clearly I did not swear at home; that was unthinkable. And yet, at school I could not break the habit. I experienced this: that sin allows what is already evil in us to gain an upper hand. It has a capacity to grip us, to bind us; to worsen us, to loose the bonds of self-control. I discovered what the Lord said is true: 'He who commits sin is a slave to sin.' I knew the truth of Paul's experience: 'For what I do is not the good I want to do; no the evil that I do not want to do – this I keep on doing' (Rom 7:19). I discovered that the hunger for personal freedom which disregards God's will is the doorway to servitude and condemnation. I was caught in a rip pulling me out to sea, and could not think of a way to back to the beach.

It was the 1950s. There was a lot of church-going in those years. I myself was one of the young nominals; believing that the Bible was true, that God was real, that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world; but believing also that any path to salvation lay in keeping the Law of God and so winning his approval. Here in the deep recesses of my heart, however, lay this troubling problem – if a habitual sin was unbreakable, how could I possibly still be exercising freedom? Only a good person can afford to be free. I was a person divided – a domestic me, a Sunday me; but also a school me, a football me. My freedom was hypocritical. Human freedom does not consist in having a multitude of choices and being independent of others, but in commitment to a good I could not as yet understand.

The Federal election once again forces us to look at ourselves as a nation. Thank God for so much that is good. We see a system of government

rightly committed to justice and security, to equality and freedom. But we also see a nation whose love affair with personal freedom has borne unpleasant fruit. We see a culture that is resource-rich and relationship-poor. It is the greatest human problem confronting us.

The generation which embraced the libertarian choice of personal freedom in preference to lasting relationships, is facing an old age of being cared for without love, and experiencing loneliness without rest. It forgot that human beings may declare themselves to be free, but that we cannot declare ourselves to be good. We see a nation which has manifestly failed its indigenous people in recent decades through a sort of libertarian paternalism. We may be grateful for recent government action on abuses, but what are the human values which will enable us to think of the long-term future?

Our major political parties exhibit the same paradox within themselves. They have embraced the economic freedom which they see as essential to our prosperity. They do not see that economic freedom trumps the social conservatism – or better, the Biblical principles - which sustains our values. We can only vote ourselves the freedom that we want, if we are also as good as we suppose.

Worse, within all parties there remain some attached to the old, failed libertarian philosophies of the past decades, which have delivered to us gambling without end, abortion without limit, alcohol without discipline, sex without love, work without shared time off, families without children, children without parenting, suburbs without community, divorce without accountability, men without women, women without men, and speech without constraint.

I believe that we need to hear again what the Bible has to say about such themes as righteousness, law and freedom, human nature and human destiny, family life, love and faith. In particular we need to hear that there is meaning and hope, that we can be delivered from the dreary nihilism which belief in untrammelled freedom brings us.

Supremely our national problems are spiritual. Supremely, our nation needs the message of God's word.

God's word was available to me in 1959. Indeed I had been prepared for confirmation by the famous Dr Howard Guinness. Now, inspired by the preaching of God's word, there were people praying for the outpouring of God's Spirit on the public proclamation of the word, so that many may come to know Christ. In particular, many were praying for the impact of the coming Billy Graham crusade. Archbishop Mowll, observed in his 1958 Synod Address that, 'The preparation, by prayer and instruction for this visit is widespread and gratifying'. He was right. The fervent prayer experienced in those days was electrifying.

Twelve months later, Archbishop Gough called the 1959 Graham Crusade, 'the most remarkable spiritual experience enjoyed by this Diocese...probably throughout its history...Through this Crusade not only the Church, but the whole city of Sydney was stirred. Thousands of men and women have been truly converted to God and are now being built up into the family of the Church. The testimony of those changed lives and the joy of their new-found faith is serving as a tonic to us older Christians and is a challenge to those who still have not yielded their lives to Christ...the clergy have been given new vision and courage...The

preparation of the Counsellors would in itself alone, have made the Crusade abundantly worthwhile, for it now means we have thousands of Church people instructed in a new understanding of the Faith and experienced in explaining it to others.’

Caught up in this turbulence was this teenager, taken to the Crusade by faithful and prayerful youth leaders. The date was Sunday April 19<sup>th</sup>. Mr Graham preached from the Bible, and so with immense authority he told us about Noah, sin and judgement; he told us about the ark of salvation and Jesus; he told us that God had closed the door of the ark when Noah and his family had entered it; he told us that sin was atoned for by the death of Jesus, not by human effort; he invited us to repent and to put our confidence not in ourselves but in Jesus Christ the Lord, whose service is perfect freedom. Around us there were people from all over Sydney; the effort to bring it all together was immense; the technology was first class; the platform methods were crisp; the singing was simple and inspiring; the challenge was unmistakable.

The answer to my problem was not human effort. It required the explosive effects of the gospel of God’s redemption through Christ. The sense of my own moral and spiritual helplessness was the beginning of it. I was in a sucking-down-swamp with no one to help. My vague hope had been that God might simply make me a more worthy person. That is the religion which I may have invented.

But that is not the gospel of Jesus Christ – he did not come into the world to improve sinners, but to save them – and so to change them. And he saved them by conquering sin and the world and the devil through his death on the cross, the death in which he bore our guilt and suffered in

our place. The empty hand of faith meets the fullness of God's provision of forgiveness. We are saved by grace, not by works, lest any one should boast. God has yet to make me particularly good, but he has given me a good Lord to follow.

The Bible calls this gospel the power of God. This faith by which we are saved contains a precious element called 'assurance'. Assurance is the gift of God by which he confirms to us his acceptance of us as his children, even though in ourselves we do not deserve this standing. Assurance is only possible when we turn away from ourselves and turn entirely to Christ and what Christ has done for us at the cross. Assurance boasts in Christ. Assurance is the powerful work of God's Spirit. The Spirit persuades us of the overwhelming love which has been directed to us in Christ and demonstrated above all by his death on our behalf and in our place. Assurance is the end of self-reliance and is a complete reliance on Christ.

Mr Graham preached on many of the chief themes of the Bible – the awfulness of human sin, our hopeless state before God's judgement, the indispensable need of new birth, repentance toward God, the lordship of Jesus, the atoning sacrifice of Christ as the ground of our forgiveness and righteousness, the true freedom we have as God's people. He preached the gospel in such a way as to create assurance: 'Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidst me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come'; 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling, naked come to thee for dress, helpless look to thee for grace, foul I to the fountain fly, wash me Saviour, or I die.' He preached the same message that enabled a reprobate like John Newton to say, 'I am a great sinner, but Christ is a great Saviour' – and then to live for Christ

in such a way that we still feel the effects of his amazing witness 200 years later.

When we are serious about God, we long for spiritual power so that we may work more effectively for him. The secret of spiritual power is the assurance of the love of God through the Cross of Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is only here that the true Christian life can commence and continue. It is here, and by returning here again and again, that we can be inspired to 'be filled with prayerful and sacrificial compassion for the lost in all the world.'

Inspired by God's word, men and women prayed; Mr Graham preached; thousands became Christians; the city was shaken, and to this day those who put their trust in Christ live and sacrifice themselves for him and for others. God did that. He used his word and prayer to do it. Men and women were so moved by the gospel that they sacrificed themselves, their time and energy and money to see that it would be done. Holy Spirit assurance through the word of the cross was the secret of this sacrifice.

The Christian vision which inspired the visit of Mr Graham was that the whole of our region, indeed the whole nation, be within the reach of the word of God. It was a great vision. It is exactly the same as our own vision-. We have not wavered. Our Mission remains, to share with all the word of God. Our power to achieve this comes from the word of the cross which gives us the assurance to sacrifice all for Christ.

What sort of Anglican churches welcomed these new converts? There was real spiritual life, or else the Crusade could never have been so significant. Furthermore, as Archbishop Gough pointed out, they were the

best-trained churches we had ever had, because of the training for the Graham Crusade. But there were also many nominal Christians. Indeed, almost certainly the big impact of the meetings was amongst people who like me knew something of God, were attending our churches and had found that faith had come alive through the word and prayer. Now, however, the churches were about to live through the great social revolution in which personal freedom was the central concern and human relationships were to be imperilled. How would we respond?

When I returned to my church with the new eyes of a convert, I found nourishment and fellowship within certain limits. The Rector was the pre-eminent figure in our church without challenge. He was dressed in the clerical attire which set him apart. As I remember, he took all the services and all parts of the services, with very little assistance or lay intervention. The services were taken ‘by the book’ – and what a book it was! It was both a gospel liturgy and the very model of the proper approach to God, God thought of as robed in the majesty of kingship. We knelt as before a king and used the ‘thees’ and ‘thous’ of courtly address. The book was packed with long scriptural extracts, much of which were sung or ‘chanted’ in a way which I for one found utterly unintelligible and even painful.

The central visual point of the building was the holy table, and the building was constructed on lines which suggested that a third was reserved for God and two thirds for the people. Certainly it was absolutely forbidden for any but the cleaners and the clergy to enter certain parts of the building. The building was kept scrupulously clean and tidy. Services were solemn, ordered and dignified, with two sermons a Sunday. Talking in the building was discouraged. Refreshments after

church were unknown. The ladies all wore hats and men their suits. There were no small group meetings. Baptisms were held in the afternoon and family services had just been introduced as a daring initiative.

There are two wrong responses to these memories. We can despise what we see and regard it as quaint. Just remember that it was from churches like this that came the spiritual life and fire to support the Graham Crusade. Alternatively, however, we can be guilty of nostalgia as though a return to those far off days would save us. I can say without any doubt whatsoever that if we had stood still back then, we would have indeed been history today. The great church revolution of the last fifty years has been as necessary as, for some, it has been painful. It has matched the changes in Australian society. Had we not taken action we would be as relevant as the Amish are. Indeed, perhaps we have done far too little. It is the reason why the Diocesan Mission, with its summons to change, is not peripheral to our concerns; it is central to them.

One key matter is the relationship of the church and the surrounding community. Our long-ago church represented the community at prayer, or at least most of the community. We all belonged to a small group of major denominations. We all had our church, even if it was the one we hardly attended. It was here that we would be baptised, married, buried. The Rector was our minister, though some hid when he came to the door. The parish paper was delivered to us all: it was indeed a parish paper. The children went naturally to school scripture and perhaps just as naturally to Sunday School. The local church did not need to function as a relationship-building and sustaining place; our relationships were formed and sustained elsewhere. The suburb was never empty, even during a weekday. We did not need tea at church, for why would we? We were at

church to attend worship, not primarily to meet people. Church and community effortlessly intersected in a dozen ways.

There is little need for me to describe the modern church. Either you know already from your own experience what it is like, or you imagine darkly what horrors may be found in the next parish! Certainly if you use the norms of the 1950s you will be intensely critical of, even alienated by, a great deal of what now occurs in these same buildings which were once the spic and span temples of the Lord. In fact, even by raising this matter I am doing something which a wiser man may hesitate to talk about. There is hardly anything in our life together which arouses more passion, criticism and disagreement than how we use our Sundays.

Instead of falling into the temptation of offering criticism, I ask myself what is good in what has occurred? The great church revolution – whether our service is expressed formally or more informally - has captured three good things for us.

First, *relationships*. The church of 1959 contained many nominal Christians. Amongst us, the Graham Crusade was most effective. But the day of the local church as the community at prayer was on the point of extinction. Some decades later, we can trace the great change which libertarianism has created in the world. Who could possibly have predicted the revolution which has overtaken an institution as solid as marriage, for example? We can now see the absolute need for churches to become communities in themselves, sets of relationships in which people can care for one another, meet each other marry each other, befriend each other. Today about 61% of Sydney Anglicans attend small groups –

groups which hardly existed in churches in the early 1960s. We have retained community where the world has been against it.

When the congregation meets, therefore, we must encourage, support and nurture relationships – first with God and then with each other. To this end, formality or informality is not the issue. Either may foster relationships; either may hinder them. But it is certain that the mere repetition of what we used to do will no longer be meaningful. Furthermore, it is not biblical. Whatever we may think of modern church life, it far better fits the picture of the church we have in the New Testament than church life in the 1950s. This is one of the reasons why so much that succoured the spiritual life was found amongst the parachurch organisations and fellowships instead of the local churches. Look at the teaching about how to behave in Ephesians and Colossians. You will find that in order to obey it you are required to have close relationships with those you go to church with. We are the Body of Christ, not a collection of people who happen to live in the same suburb.

In thinking of relationships we also need to think of what we offer others. Human relationships are one of the most attractive products of the gospel. The older churches were accessible because people had prior knowledge. Thus Mr Bean knew more or less what to expect and even could sing the hymns. Now, however, entry to a church building is as foreign an experience to most people as it would be for us to enter a Hindu temple. This is compounded when the insider's behaviour is inexplicable and inaccessible. Our churches are part of what this nation needs. Let us make them more open to the outsider.

Second, *reality*. It is hard now to imagine the gap that exists between the piety of the older church and that of the newer one. But our social life has taken a turn away from formality, away from ritual, away from ceremonial. This may be illustrated in a hundred ways. It all represents a hunger for reality judged in personal terms; we may not like it; we may regard it as a sign of bad manners; we may think that informality is no more a sure bearer of spiritual reality than the formal. We may indeed think what we like. But the change has occurred, and if we wish to be missionaries within this culture, it must be reflected in what we do in church, at some levels. We must recognise that for many, many people, old church ways sound like the very epitome of the inauthentic, as well as being incomprehensible and deadening. I think that what we have done is to say that the Christian faith is serious and it is personal, authentic and spiritual.

Third, *technology*. One of the things which struck me when I went to the Graham Crusade meeting was the technology – it actually worked and it came out of the same world which I was inhabiting every day. We have entered a period of revolution in information technology as significant as the invention of the printing press. We cannot afford to vote for the past in this area. Our buildings are so frequently dated; some of them are merely museums to a lost form of religion. I would far rather see an untidy interior which shows signs of use than a spic and span mid-20<sup>th</sup> century edifice with stained glass attitudes: give me the teenager's bedroom, rather than the unused front parlour. Or put it this way, a place where you can feel at home rather than a place which makes you feel that you are a constant visitor. And if that requires the drum kit in the corner and power cords all over the floor, so be it.

I think that these changes were driven by our renewed grasp of the teaching of the Bible. Thus at the very time when nominal church-going began to collapse, we were being taught to think of the primacy of the local congregation and to give careful attention to the quality of life of the local congregation. The idea of the church as the Body of Christ was re-emphasised, and along with it the idea that all Christians have gifts of ministry to be used in the service of the Body. I see this beautifully reflected in church when the leadership is shared and not least when lay people bless us by their leadership, especially leading in the prayers which they so often do in a God-honouring and edifying way. I see a great deal of very mature Christian leadership in our churches and this is a testimony both to the pastors and to the people.

A second aspect of biblical teaching which has been strongly pressed in our churches is the priority of the word in teaching and preaching. We were always people of the word. But since the 1960s we have given enormous attention to the word and to teaching people whether in church or in evangelistic courses or in home groups. In a time when Christians need to be very well instructed, the teaching of God's word has been even more indispensable.

Have we given so much attention to human relationships that we have neglected our relationship with God? In a church which hears the word of God, believes it and obeys it, we see that Christ is in charge, the Lord rules. The test for Christ's presence in church life is neither silence and formality, nor rowdiness and informality – it is faith and repentance. We may ask, do we see faith and hope and love in this church? Do we see the fruit of the Spirit? Do we see men and women of prayer? Do we see ministry in the Body? These things may be evident or lacking in a stately

liturgy or in a lively African gathering. Let us not use irrelevant measures as we assess what is occurring.

A third aspect of biblical teaching which has shaped our life is the clear focus on the gospel itself and its demands on personal faith and repentance. This is also linked to the sense of reality for which people are looking. Our preaching calls for decision and seeks the hearer to trust in Jesus and become a follower of Jesus. We now have more people than five years ago who would say that they can set a date on their conversion to Christ. Let me hasten to say that this does not mean that other people are not converted – far from it. But it seems to me to suggest that our preachers mean business – as they should – in the preaching of God’s word. Billy Graham called for repentance and faith on the basis of the great truths of the Christian faith. I believe that we are both preaching those truths and making clear that they demand action. It signifies a quickening of our spiritual life.

In short, I am saying that whatever criticisms you may wish to make about the way in which we characteristically order our meetings these days – and let me say that Prayer Book form and substance is alive and well all round the Diocese, but often used contextually with imagination and sensitivity – theology and mission has driven us to make changes. I think that the shepherds are caring for the sheep, and we do not want to retreat from what has been gained.

Not to retreat; but can we advance? I am positive that every person here will have their own view about how we may develop. I certainly want to create the necessary discussion about this and indeed I have asked for some time to be set aside at this synod. It involves not just what we do in

church, but what we do with Sunday and whether we think of it as a special day. But we must avoid mere anecdotalism, or Prayer Book fundamentalism or unprincipled radicalism. The question of what we should do when we meet is pre-eminently a theological one. What does the Bible have to say about what we do when we gather?

Our great Reformer, Thomas Cranmer, thought long and hard about this issue. If we are wise, indeed, if we are Anglican, we will want to retain the principles of the Book of Common Prayer. They emerged from the mind of one steeped in scripture and with such a wonderfully firm grasp of the doctrine of justification by faith. It is not by accident that it was as a Church of England minister that John Newton said, 'I am a great sinner, but Christ is a great Saviour'. He was a man of the Bible and the Prayer Book. We must be sure to retain the Prayer Book's grasp of the gospel of God's grace, while we must also accept new ways of doing things.

For example, there is a great need to think about modern funeral services. I fear that Pelagius rather than Cranmer will be our inspiration in this area if we are not careful. Our commitment to the Bible does not make us automatically resist the very taste for unprincipled freedom which we have been fighting against all these years. I think that a thorough work-out with Biblical Theology is called for in our Diocese, including thought about sin, death and judgement.

So, re-enter theology. The gathering of the church is defined by Christ's presence in his word and by his Spirit. It is the Body of which Christ is the undisputed Head. I would suggest, therefore, that we start our theological thinking with the person and work of Christ. Thus, if we consider him in his threefold office of prophet, priest and king, how does

this help determine what goes on in our meeting? For those of you with a responsibility for what occurs in church, let us give sustained and serious attention to such questions. This year amongst the clergy I have inaugurated a theological and pastoral agitation about these issues. I need the help of the Synod to continue it. Strengthening the spiritual quality of our preaching, prayer and fellowship is of high importance to us all. One of the glories of the gospel is that it creates the sort of relationships which we need as a nation and this can only help us in the Mission which God has laid on us.

So, re-enter the Mission. Where are we, and what must we now do?

We have maintained a steady forward progress in the first five years of the Mission. We seem to have added about 5,000 adult members since 2002. The far more reliable financial results show, that from giving through the plate, we have advanced 33%, from about \$38 million to \$56 million. These figures are certainly cause for rejoicing. Furthermore, we are aware of many new ministries which have started during the course of the Mission and a rather extraordinary increase in the number of paid workers – we had 470 active licensed clergy in 2001 for example; we have now added 86 more, making 556, an 18% increase. In addition, of course, there are more lay workers employed in our parishes. Likewise there is a decline in the average age of parishioners, increasing numbers in small groups and the more frequent reporting of conversion experiences.

Our Mission Board says that the four policies of the Mission remain correct, but, while at this stage of the Mission we have accomplished much, the really difficult times still lie before us. We need to have a

significant mind-shift especially amongst the leadership of the Diocese. While still seeking to improve and expand churches and develop new ones, we now need also to take those actions which will reach out into the broader parish-community in which we are situated. We must actively contact the many people who have no connection at all with our churches and may not even know someone who attends church.

In particular the Mission Board argues that we have reached a point in the life of the Mission where we must,

- look for the *sacrificial concern* for the lost which is the fruit of the prayerful preaching of the word (Policy 1)
- enter a far more serious *engagement with the world* around us in order to penetrate the structures of society beyond the present reach of the parish church (Policy 2)
- provide, therefore, stimulus for *serious recalibration* of Christian ministry, lay and ordained (Policy 3)
- accept the need to *challenge the church culture* where it inhibits connection with the wider-community (Policy 4).

Our church population has expanded but there is no general breakthrough as yet. We could portray the present and desired state of affairs like this:



All this means that we are at a stage when the easier things have been done. We have gathered our strength, but we have not yet used it fully. If we wish to see exponential growth, the work of these years must be incorporated into an even greater and more determined forward move. According to NCLS work done ten years ago, 60% of the non-church attenders in the Australian population have no close friend involved in a church. We do not want this large segment of the population to remain without the gospel message brought by some person who seeks to contact them. As a result of the Mission we have become aware of the abyss which separates us from so many in the community. At this stage we need to respond sacrificially to the *challenge* of our Mission, and create an *opportunity* to reach into the surrounding community.

Take first, the challenge. This is what I said in the Presidential Address last year. 'My call today is for us to develop *leadership through change*. I give you this challenge: to fulfil our Mission we need leaders; we need leaders who are able to lead in the midst of change, and leaders who will themselves create necessary change. *We need leaders who are driven by a vision for the gospel to go to the whole community*. We need to give them permission to change. And we need people who embrace such a vision, encourage initiative and support their leaders...'

Now we must act upon these words and help accomplish them. My vision is to challenge the leadership of the churches to build bridges into the community, trusting the word of God to be effective, making the sacrifices needed to do this and shaking the city so that it will never be the same again.

Second, the opportunity; we need to create an opportunity for action, a catalyst which will help us reach out, reconnect and refocus. And so, *Connect 09*.

*Connect 09* aims to inspire our churches into a grand partnership effort during the year 2009, to bring all our neighbours in touch with the word of God. It seeks to contact and connect with all the residents of the area covered by the Sydney Diocese and provide an opportunity for them to understand the gospel. It plays to our strengths, because we can do this together. If we accept this challenge, it will reach out to people with the word of God; it will reconnect the churches with their wider community; it will refocus the congregations on to the world beyond themselves.

We have had simple Bible distribution programs before. But this is not enough. Such is the strength of our churches, much more is possible. The aim is to create relationships, that we aim not only to hand out Bibles, useful though that would be, but *to connect*. Indeed the word of God may come in different forms, aural, visual, personal, written. The purpose is 'to connect with people and connect them to Jesus Christ,' and each local church can make up its own mind as to how to do this in its own area. It is usually through people that the Lord brings his word and it is through the word that people become Christians.

Why 2009? Apart from the sense of urgency, God has given us in '09 an excellent year to do this. In 2008, World Roman Catholic Youth Day will raise the level of awareness of Jesus in the community and increase a sense of interest in him. We must be prepared to build on that. There is a plan to run the 'Jesus All About Life' television campaign in 2009, which would magnificently complement our efforts. Those of who came to know Christ in 1959 were also moved by the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Graham Crusade, as a point of great thanksgiving towards God. I cannot think of a better way of thanking him than once again seeking to bring the knowledge of Christ to the whole region. I will aim to gather the support of the Billy Graham converts in our Diocese towards this program as a way of expressing their gratitude to God.

In fact, the strategic thinking described above and the *Connect* initiative fit well together. The key point is that the *Connect* vision will be an ideal catalyst for what we are trying to achieve in the strategic thinking which flows from the Mission Policies and their current application. It does not change the Mission or exhaust the Mission; it is an outworking of the Mission. The overall challenge to all in the churches is to connect with all within the area of the Diocese. The preparation for such a program is an excellent way of training Christians and their leadership to engage with the community. The immediate impact of a call to sacrifice resulting in prayer and preparation, for example, will assuredly have long term beneficial consequences. *Connect 09* is not an end in itself, but the beginning of a new relationship with the mission field in which the Lord has set us.

We have always known that the mind-set change called for above will necessarily involve our church leadership at a fundamental level. They cannot accomplish such a change in the churches on their own, but without their willingness to think of new ways of reaching the community, we will make no progress. The value of a program like *Connect 09* is that it gives us an opportunity to help church leaders grow in their ministries, to help them in the task of looking not just at church but at parish. This could be a very significant lay movement.

*Connect 09* will cost money to implement. In particular the churches will need materials to use – gospels, CDs, DVDs. I am going to challenge each of the churches to commit to this to the tune of about \$1,000 per year for three years. You will have the opportunity to commit in this way through an Ordinance to raise the money for the basic materials later in this Synod. The Standing Committee believes that it can find the rest of the money needed for administration costs. At one level, \$1,000 is not a large sum of money, though I know that some of you will be thinking of the disparity between parishes when it comes to funds and workers. What we should be looking at, however, is not money raised by ordinance, but a willing and generous spirit of sacrifice and partnership in a great cause. This is true Christian fellowship.

Let me say this: here is a great challenge to reach our region with the good news. Our strength is that we are a Diocese – a network of churches combined for a common cause. I believe that as we hear about this program we should all be thinking ‘partnership’ – how can we help each other in it? I am sure that the Moore College Missions in 09 could be tailored to help; parishes could take mission teams to help in other parts of Sydney, the Mountains and the Illawarra. Here is an opportunity for

Christians to donate their holidays to assist. How can our great organisations and schools join in? Instead of saying, 'how are we going to do this?', I hope you will be saying, 'How can we help others to do this, so that we can have the joy of fellowship?'

Instead of money being a stumbling block, instead of lack of resource being a hill too hard to climb, why do we not accept the challenge, pray for the Lord to bless us and then look for his answer in the generosity of his people? We need to commit and to work with joy and with each other to make 2009 a famous year for the gospel in Sydney and beyond. Our willingness to find the money is symbolic of that.

To that end, I am announcing tonight three important new initiatives

First, **The Archbishop's Mission Partnership Fund**. I will raise as much money as I can to put into the fund and I will distribute it as I see fit to assist the Mission and especially the work of *Connect 09*. I want it to start off with donations from those who owe their life in Christ to the 59 Graham Crusade, and so the fund has begun already with donations of \$5,000 each, from two men who were converted to Christ as teenagers on the same day in April 1959. We are on the way! I am hoping to challenge others who came to know Christ then to thank him by donating generously in this way. But here is an opportunity for us all. We need a lot of money to carry on our work of gospel sharing, church planting, church building work. I am also giving the Synod an opportunity to respond generously by way of a collection during the service tonight, and also during the last night of the Synod. In days to come, watch out for further opportunities to give – it will all go to the furtherance of gospel ministry amongst the one in five Australians who live in our region.

The second initiative is this: **The Centre for Ministry**. If we are going to keep transforming our churches we are going to need to keep transforming our ministry. I am going to challenge the rectors of our Diocese to give themselves to a three week transformational experience, to help them lead the process of connecting to the community around us. The special ethos of this advanced Centre would be mutual help and personal tuition for future ministry. The aim would be to help rectors think through their own ministry, program, methods and context with the help of others in ministry, and specialists. We can do this say twelve at a time, and I hope to see the first experience available in March next year. Rectors, please plan to be part of this; churches, please encourage your minister to join.

The Centre for Ministry is symbolic of something which we must all become engaged in if *Connect 09* is to work as a Mission and as a catalyst. In accordance with the third policy of the Mission, we need many well-trained Christians. This is exactly what happened, with huge side-benefits, in 1959 and 1968 and 1979. We aim to resource parishes to engage in training with a special emphasis on training in place, training which involves doing. Evangelism Ministries is going to co-ordinate this and help with plans and programs. But churches will have to plan how they intend to reach every person in their parish with the word of God and what training will be needed for this in their own context.

The third initiative is this: **The Sydney Anglican Prayer Network**, open to organisations, parishes and individuals who have covenanted to pray for Sydney, Wollongong and our region with special intention and enthusiasm. Les Gray and I will register as the first members and we will

undertake to pray on Friday mornings. One of the tasks of EM will be to organise this Prayer Network, to register participation and provide materials. But none of us has to wait for a formal beginning. Why do we not all agree to direct some of our prayer time explicitly to the impact of the word of God on our nation and our region? Why not also undertake to gather weekly in small or large groups to pray for our community?

Did you agree with me, when I said that ‘Supremely our national problems are spiritual. Supremely our nation needs the message of God’s word’? If you did, what are you proposing to do about it? Of course we should be praying for our churches and ministries, but I believe that the focus of the Prayer Network ought to be on the community itself, rather than on the churches as such. I am summoning us to make next year and the year after special years of sustained private and corporate prayer for our community.

This year is suddenly struck me for the first time that although we have had at Moore College for a long time a prayer meeting for Ireland, we did not have one for Sydney. I have challenged the students about this and I am glad to report that we now have a weekly prayer meeting in our College for our City and region. Just as we had prayer meetings for the Graham Crusade, so we need prayer for Sydney and its environs. One in every five Australians lives here. Remember the words of God to Jonah about a country town saved from his wrath by the preaching of the prophet, ‘And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?’ (Jon 4:11).

These are daunting challenges. But do not be discouraged! Christian ministry has not grown any easier in the last five years. Scepticism is tougher than ever. Moving into a community which is strange and different is going to be especially challenging. The next stage of our journey together is not going to be easier, but more difficult. Speaking from my perspective and looking over the whole Diocese, I have to say that I am so pleased with what you have done. On every side there are advances, improvements, initiatives, interesting new ministries, church meetings which are sensitive to the culture while remaining faithful to the word of God.

What lies before us is not a mountain caused by our laziness or inaction or incompetence. It is because we have come so far that we have arrived at the mountain; it is for that reason that we are even able to contemplate our tough ascent. What spiritual resources are going to be needed? What is available?

When Billy Graham preached Christ so passionately and clearly, young people like Bruce Ballantine-Jones and Peter Jensen were won for Christ. We became assured that, through the death of Jesus, our sins were truly forgiven and that we could call God our Father by the power of the Spirit. The knowledge, the assurance, that God loved us flooded our hearts and we were by this means turned into passionate and life-long followers of Jesus. That gospel has the power to do that; only that gospel has the power to do that. That is why Spirit-blessed preaching of the word must remain at the centre of our whole effort. Preachers, pray for your people; people, pray for your preachers.

Whatever our schemes and plans, our strategies and our training, in the end it will be by raising the spiritual life of our people by the full gospel of God which will be the secret of the enthusiasm which we need. Only as we cannot stop ourselves from marvelling at the love and grace of God in Jesus, will we be moved to be filled with prayerful and sacrificial compassion for the lost in all the world, starting with our own suburb, our own city, our own nation. Then we will take the necessary action, embracing the sacrifice involved.

*Sacrifice.* Our lives are filled with such haste and demand. We scarcely have any time left over for ourselves, let alone the Lord's work. We feel that we must reserve little sections of our lives for ourselves, or we will go mad. Even the Lord himself may not enter some chambers of our heart, just in case he may demand from us what we are not willing to yield to him.

*Sacrifice.* When the Lord forgave my sins, he took me on, to own and transform. I never doubted that that was the deal. I did not plan to start with adolescent enthusiasm and conclude with elderly complacency.

*Sacrifice.* Dr Howard Guinness wrote a little book by that name. The Doctor's theology was odd at some points, I think; his book is now quaint, like our 1950-style churches. But its theme is still as powerful as ever. The copy I own was of the 1961 fifth edition and the 19th printing. It must have shaped the lives of so many of the generation who prayed for us in 1959. I know that the conclusion of his book, a conclusion I have just read again after a lapse of forty years, helped determine my life in response to Christ. I think that his summons to sacrifice is valid, and unless we see in our churches prayerful and sacrificial compassion for the

lost in all the world, we will not be able to climb the mountain that God has placed before us.

Listen to the Epilogue of Dr Guinness' book. He starts with a story.

'It occurred during one of the early offensives in the first Great War. The Australians were experimenting with mines, and it was of sufficient importance for the Brigadier-General to come up to the front line trenches to make observations for himself. Among other things, his was the job of pressing the button which would connect up the circuit and blow up the mine. The advance was timed for zero hour – dawn on a cold November day.

'All was in readiness. The sappers had done their work well, and the mine chamber was filled with T.N.T. the highest explosive then known. The men were buckling on their accoutrements, seeing to their bayonets, and drinking their grog in silence. It was the darkest hour preceding dawn, and nerves were on edge. Some were praying. And then just the faintest suspicion of light tinged the sky, and the black of night was beginning to give place to the grey of early morning. There were still five minutes to go. A whispered warning went flying down the trench. The Brigadier in his dugout looked at his watch and compared it with the Major's. They nodded assent. The hour had come. He deliberately pressed the button.

'Nothing happened.

'It was a moment of acute crisis. The men were almost immediately going over the top, mine or no mine, and the enemy's position was bristling with machine-guns. They might take it, but at a tremendous cost

of life. Just at that moment the Sapper Lieutenant, who had been standing by, turned to the Brigadier and said, “Excuse me sir, but I think I know what is wrong,” and in a moment he had disappeared through the doorway and down the tunnel leading to the mine. The moments seemed like hours to those two as they stood there tense and straining, with the perspiration standing out on their foreheads – waiting. A minute had passed. And then an ear-splitting and deafening roar told its own tale, the air became filled with smoke and dust and falling debris, and the men were already halfway across no-man’s land at a steady run. There was but little resistance, the position was soon theirs, and they commenced setting about the work of consolidation. *But the Sapper Lieutenant was not seen again.* He had to decide in a fraction of a second whether he would die or they; he had faced death for sixty seconds pushing his way through the mine tunnel, and had died the death of a gallant gentleman in the chamber itself.’

‘Where are the young men and women of this generation,’ asks Dr Guinness, ‘who will hold their lives cheap and be faithful even unto death? Where are those who will lose their lives for Christ’s sake – flinging them away for love of Him? Where are those who will live dangerously and be reckless in His service? Where are His *lovers* – those who love Him and the souls of men more than their own reputations or comfort, or very life?’

‘Where are the men and women of vision today? Where are those who have seen the King in His beauty, by whom from henceforth all else is counted but refuse that they may win Christ? Where are the adventurers, the explorers, the buccaneers for God who will count one human soul of far greater value than the rise or fall of an empire? Where are those who

glory in God-sent loneliness, difficulties, persecutions, misunderstandings, discipline, sacrifice, death?

*'Where are those who are willing to pay the price of vision?'*

To Dr Guinness' questions we may say this.

There was One once. When the Greeks who represented the whole world came to see him, out of the compassion of his great heart he announced the cross which shadowed his future, and summoned his followers to live by the same principle of sacrifice: 'I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be.' That is the Christian spirit and it is the very opposite of the spirit of this age which promises liberty and delivers slavery. The promise of Jesus assures us of true freedom: 'My Father will honour the one who serves me.'