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'Discernment, decisiveness, and courageousness are essential features of effective leadership that is visionary'.

Len Sperry, Ministry and Community, 107.

ARCHBISHOP STOPS BAD LAW—TWICE

THE ARCHBISHOP INFORMED THE NOVEMBER meeting of the Standing Committee that he had withheld his assent to two Ordinances, which Synod passed narrowly on the final night of sitting.

The *Authorised Services Ordinance 2011*, promoted by the Bishop of North Sydney, attempted to define what services were authorized to enable those making solemn promises to use only such services. Speakers opposed it as limiting the freedom of the local minister and as another unnecessary layer of legislation. Bishop Davies declared that 'law is good when it is good law'.

With regard to serious breakdown of relationship between a clergyman and parishioners, the *Parish Relationships Amendment Ordinance 2011* attempted to decrease the moratorium on initiating a licensing review from four years after the clergyman commenced in the parish (as prescribed in the 2001 Ordinance), to two.

Objectors considered this period far too short and were fearful of the potential for good and necessary changes to be thwarted under threat of such a review.

It is a rare thing for the Archbishop of Sydney to withhold assent, but occasionally it is necessary when Synod passes something unwise or even illegal. The legality of the *Authorised Services Ordinance 2011* was suspect because of its inclusion of the 'white book' in the Schedule, and unwise in that it appeared to limit freedom. The wisdom of the *Parish Relationships Amendment Ordinance 2011* was seriously questioned during the debate, and, given it was introduced on the last evening of Synod, the matter was insufficiently debated.

The rhetoric in favour of both bills managed to wrestle a slim majority from a tired Synod. But this was not good law. The Archbishop's decisions have stopped the introduction of bad law—twice. 🗣️

A NEW BISHOP RICK

Rick Lewers, the Rector of Engadine, has been elected as the next Bishop of Armidale.



PHOTO COURTESY RAMON WILLIAMS

WHEN THE ARMIDALE DIOCESE ELECTION SYNOD met in Moree on 11–12 November they had a short list of three candidates to choose from in their quest for a replacement for Bishop Peter Brain when he retires in April 2012. The local press met the announcement with pleasure, noting Lewers' reputation for being a thoughtful, caring and faithful leader. For his part, Bishop-Elect Rick spoke of 'a level of nervous apprehension when my job is to introduce people to the love of Jesus and an eternal future'. 🗣️

CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST

Steve Carlisle



JUST THE OTHER DAY I WAS speaking to a man, Alan, in the city about Jesus. I found out that he had some church background, but found it less than thrilling. Probing a little further, Alan was asked whether he was sure of his salvation. “I hope so” was the best he could muster. He explained that he hoped his religious affiliation, religious rituals and good life would count as something in the presence of God.

For some like Alan, it is as if life was a type of preparation for a final exam. Through this life you hope that you have studied the right topics, taken the right classes and talked to the right teachers, but at the end of the day, the exam is the unknown. Passing is hoped for, but remains always a ‘maybe’.

The reality is, however, the gospel doesn’t offer us a ‘maybe’s chance’ at salvation, but offers us the opportunity

to have complete boldness before the throne of God himself. The good news of the gospel of Jesus is that we can pass the exam with the flying colours of Jesus. Indeed the writer of the book of Hebrews states that because of the blood of Jesus, because of his death in our place, we can enter the holy place, the presence of God himself. (Hebrews 10:19-23)

This is very profound. God is not asking us to complete a set of tasks to enter into the holy place. He is not asking us to have certain religious affiliations, rituals or a ledger of good works which outweigh the bad. No, God offers us a free gift. His name is Jesus. Jesus’ death is all that we need to have full assurance of faith. It’s all too simple isn’t it?

For us, yes.

For God, this free gift to us, took the death of his dear son in our place.

For us, Jesus passed the exam, with flying colours, and he gave his perfect results to us.

Trust him and have full confidence. 🙏

DIGGING IN THE CRATES: WHAT HATH SYDNEY TO DO WITH THE BRONX?

Mark Earngey



THE OTHER DAY WHILST FLICKING through some of the old vinyl records in Gould’s Bookshop, Newtown, it struck me that there were some synergies between hip hop music and our evening service!

No, there are no rappers, nor gangsters who reside at our church.

What struck me was a much more ‘old school’ thought: one of the principles that drives our evening liturgy parallels a principle which drove the origin of hip hop music. That is, *creatively building on the recognised quality of a previous age*. Let me explain.

When hip hop began in the Bronx during the 70’s, financial constraints meant that musical production needed some thrift. By sampling old jazz, funk and soul records, hip hop musicians would isolate classic sections of music and reuse them for a new context. They would search out the greats such as Herbie Hancock, James Brown and Aretha Franklin (this is called ‘digging in the crates’), and recreate their music for a new audience. For the African Americans in the Bronx, this rooted their identity in fellowship with the

greats of a previous era. The principle at play was *creatively building on the recognised quality of a previous age*.

At our evening service, which consists of young adults (who incidentally, are of a demographic likely to appreciate hip hop music) this principle is at play in our service. The set form of words used in the prayer book is augmented seamlessly with informal and contemporary warmth of language (perhaps this is ‘digging in the prayer book?’). Funnily enough, many of the hymns we sing are classics, set to a contemporary tune. And the weekly creed (Apostles or Nicene) is often introduced as to show the relevance of a true confession before the watching world. This year we even tried reading the Athanasian Creed on Trinity Sunday—it twisted a few tongues, produced a bit of perspiration, but kindled curiosity and genuine interest in theology and history.

It seems that for our younger congregation, there is a real appreciation of *creatively building on the recognised quality of a previous age*. We don’t want to be slavishly stuck in the past, but nor do we want the latest novelty. As a young person myself, I can testify that in our evening liturgy, this principle helps root our identity in fellowship with the saints of a previous era. 🙏

EDITORIAL

LIBERATION FROM LEGALISM

JESUS PERSISTENTLY ATTACKED IT, AND YET HIS people continue to fall into it. Paul's gospel of justification by faith set it firmly to one side, and yet Paul's Reformation followers have so often tried to breathe life into the old law. Luther championed the *Freedom of the Christian Man*, and yet that freedom is often so feared it is quickly bound in the shackles of rules, regulations, procedures, laws, statutes, codes, compacts...

Unlike the law, Jesus' yoke is easy to bear (Matt 11:27–30), because it arises from being at rest with God through his atoning work. Forgiveness of sins liberates human hearts, and turns them towards their God with an inner disposition towards him that external regulations can never provide. If the Son shall set you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:36).

The Apostle discovered his own liberation through the crucified Christ, cursed for us. His gospel of justification by faith alone transformed even Gentile hearts and, eventually, even Gentile society. It is for freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (Gal 5:1).

Simon Baron-Cohen, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge, has recently published *Zero Degrees of Empathy: A New Theory of Human Cruelty* (2011). In his view, there are two pathways to Morality: one by way of empathy; one by way of rules, regulations, and laws. The latter is attractive to those with a tendency towards 'systemizing', which includes those with Autism or Asperger's, but also encompasses

other kinds of creative 'geniuses'—or perhaps even your humble maths teacher. The higher a person is on the 'systemizing' scale, however, the lower they tend to be on the empathy scale. Although moral (through a great desire to keep order and patterns), they find it difficult to recognize the feelings of others, or to respond with appropriate feelings of their own to the other person in front of them.

Is this a case of science at last catching up with God?

Jesus' advice to the legalists of his day was quite simple. Their legalism was destructive of human life. It

makes people afraid, even of good things, and so it destroys relationships. It even led his opponents to condemn the innocent (Matt 12:7)— and in the end, one innocent man in particular, when, out of envy, they hung him on the cross (Matt 27:18). Despite the appearance of 'morality', the legalist can be just as evil as the libertine.

Jesus came to this world as the great physician, dispensing the healing balm of forgiveness of sins. The legalist needs to 'Go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice"' (Matt 9:13). Learning empathy from the empathy of God will open a person up to the Saviour. 'For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners'. ❧

Justification by faith alone transformed even Gentile hearts and, eventually, even Gentile society.



The Australian Church Record has served Sydney Synod for over 100 years, seeking to promote

independent and evangelical thinking amongst Australian Anglicans. See our recent issues at www.australianchurchrecord.net

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containing all things necessary for salvation and the final authority in all matters of faith and behaviour.

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GRASS ROOTS UNDER FIRE?

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT THE CHURCH IS THE LOCAL congregation of believers, gathered around God's word. This is reflected in the Anglican Articles of Religion (Article XIX). It is also enshrined in the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia, as Archbishop Jensen reminded Sydney Synod in his 2011 Presidential Address (<http://www.sds.asn.au/Site/104352.asp?a=a&ph=sy>):

Sydney always insisted that the national federation be decentralized in ethos and diocesan in structure as it is under the Constitution. [...] We think of the Constitution as a compact, an agreement between Australian Anglicans to behave within certain boundaries and where possible to leave each other to get on with local initiatives to defend and promote the gospel. The national church is best served when the decentralized, diocesan-focused constitution is

observed in fact and in spirit. [...] In our federation, it is the dioceses which matter most, just as in the diocese it is the parishes which matter most.

[...] This is a view which we have held tenaciously and in a principled way. In part it arises from our view of what it takes to defend the gospel and in part it arises from our view of what it takes to proclaim the gospel.

This stubborn Sydney commitment to the priority of the local congregation, then the diocese, then the national church—and, we might add, then the Anglican Communion—is, however, not shared by all. And despite these 'concentric circles' throwing significance upon congregational life, these very grass-roots are under fire. Vigilance is required against external and internal attacks.

... FROM THE NATIONAL CHURCH?

SYDNEY V. GENERAL SYNOD STANDING COMMITTEE

SYDNEY REPRESENTATIVES HAVE LONG BEEN IN conversation with the Standing Committee of General Synod over, amongst other things, the 23% increase in Sydney's General assessment. A lengthy motion called for some relief from this assessment, and for support of various principles in respect to General Synod finances. In addition, the motion noted that three bills promoted by Sydney for canons introducing amendments 'critical to the maintenance of harmonious relationships within the Anglican Church of Australia' were not considered at the 2010 Session. These amendments each seek to strengthen the priority of the dioceses, over against the national church:

1. the bill to amend section 30 of the Constitution so as to make a declaration by the synod of a diocese that a canon affects the order and good government of the church within a diocese or the church trust property of the diocese conclusive, and

2. the bill to amend section 32(2) of the Constitution so as to ensure a financial liability imposed on a diocese is limited to the costs, charges and expenses necessary to maintain the Constitution, and
3. the bill to amend section 63 of the Constitution so as to bring to an end the advisory opinion jurisdiction of the Appellate Tribunal.

The motion requested these amendments be made known to the General Synod Standing Committee and that they be promoted at the next session of General Synod.

To date there has been a negotiated outcome concerning the financial questions but no progress on the constitutional questions. ❌

... from our finances?

While expressing a clear preference for the Diocese to move towards a Corporate model and recommending a Central Investment Board, the Report of the Archbishop's Commission noted the need to respect the autonomy of the local churches (1.4). Despite this acknowledgement, the response from the Anglican Church Property Trust felt the need to insist at a number of points: 'The Diocese is a voluntary association of interconnecting entities and needs to be viewed in that way and its governance processes applied accordingly'.

GRASS ROOTS UNDER FIRE?

... FROM THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION COVENANT

Gav Poole



LAMBETH IS IN REPAIR MODE. Many parts of the communion have declared that they are in a state of impaired communion with The Episcopal Church (TEC) and the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC), as a result of their unbiblical innovations. Many look toward the instruments¹ to

maintain the Communion. A solution should include:

1. a clear recognition of schism and demand for repentance by the offending provinces—not because their actions have caused offense or provoked controversy (there is nothing inherently wrong with that) but because they have failed to uphold Biblical teaching;
2. limiting or suspending the offending provinces involvement in some or all of the instruments of communion until they have repented. Eg. Their Bishops may not be invited to attend The Lambeth Conference;
3. support and encouragement to those who have withdrawn from the offending provinces.

To date, no solution has been found from the Instruments of Communion. In 2004, Lambeth published the Windsor report which recommended that a Covenant be established 'to make explicit and forceful the bonds of affection which govern the churches of the communion' (The Windsor Report, paragraph 118). The Covenant is now published and the province of Australia has been asked to sign up. This year's Sydney Diocese Synod considered the question and opposed its adoption.

The document we have before us is a description of our heritage, life together and an agreement of how we propose to hold the different parts of communion accountable to each other.

The General Synod could adopt the Covenant either by constitutional amendment, canon or resolution. It has asked the dioceses to consider the Covenant being adopted by resolution. Adopting it by resolution is probably the easiest and quickest way. This can be passed by a simple majority vote however it has questionable legal force in

Australia. In NSW there is no legal force of a resolution passed at General Synod (2011 Synod Report on the Anglican Covenant, paragraph 35). Although the Covenant claims that it will be in a better position to discipline the parts of the communion that have signed up to it, there will be no additional power given to the province should a diocese act in a way that is incompatible with the Covenant.

The most compelling reason for not adopting the Covenant is that it is too little, too late. A document like this is too weak to restore the communion. It refuses to name the presenting issues, is full of words like "if" and "may" and its tone is soft and uncertain. It doesn't come close to the firm stand that is required in the face of schism.

The instruments of the communion are struggling to operate. 214 Bishops from 206 dioceses boycotted the last Lambeth Conference. Seven Primates boycotted the last Primates meeting in Dublin this year, citing the recent developments in the North American provinces as their reason. Many orthodox believers now refuse to participate in the instruments of communion. The time for covenant and agreement is over. It is now time for renewal and reformation within the Anglican Communion.

There is an underlying ecclesiology that sets it off on the wrong foot. The Covenant states, '... various families of churches have grown up within the universal church...' (Introduction to the Covenant Text, paragraph 4). There is an underlying assumption that the churches are a subset of the one universal church. There are practical implications of this theology in the Covenant which gives a heightened authority to the provinces, its bishops and the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion. The report strives for structural unity above gospel unity. Any discussion of the church must maintain that the local church is the complete, heavenly and spiritual reality. There must be no sense in that it is a part that makes up a whole. (*Donald Robinson, Selected Works, Vol 1, p220*)

Donald Robinson wrote '... intercommunion is our great practical problem today. But it will not be solved unless we have a proper assessment of the true character of the local church and its relationship to that heavenly reality ...' (*DWR, Vol 1, p221*). It has been more than 50 years since Donald Robinson wrote this. The practical problem is now at a crisis and we are still to have the discussion. ❧

¹ The Four instruments of communion are: The Archbishop of Canterbury, The Lambeth Conference, The Anglican Consultative Council and The Primates Meeting.

GRASS ROOTS UNDER FIRE?

... FROM OUR OWN MISSIONARY ZEAL?

DIOCESE V. LOCAL CONGREGATION AT ORAN PARK?

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE NEW ORAN PARK Township? Something was certainly struggling to get to the surface across the course of Synod.

Day 1. As questions began, Archdeacon Deryck Howell fired one about why Evangelism & New Churches should plant in Oran Park Township, when the parish of South Creek already had well-developed plans to do so. The question was disallowed for making an argument.

Day 2. When synod rep Gary Allen asked a more general question about ENC, the answer declared plans for a plant in Oran Park, and also suggested that it was a 'desert area'.

Archdeacon Howell managed to gain an answer to a second question, that the promotion of mission is integral to the role of the regional bishop, that the local congregation is the basic unit for mission, and ENC have kept the regional bishops informed with each new church plant.

Day 3. Rev. Michael Williamson drew upon his card playing experience to ask:

'Does the Bishop or Archbishop have the authority to trump the work of Mission Area Leaders and Rectors to plant new churches or parishes within existing parishes?' The answer was clear: 'Yes. The Parishes Ordinance 1979 has for many years given the Archbishop the authority to form a new ecclesiastical district, being a provisional parish.'

The issue bubbling away broke to the surface with a long motion from Rev. Joe Wiltshire, which sat ripe for discussion on the final evening of Synod. Wiltshire's

motion asked Standing Committee in their review of the Ordinance governing ENC to answer a number of very significant questions. Oran Park sat in the background with, 'how much ENC's operations reflect the priorities and modes of operation' in the Explanatory Report of the ordinance, 'particularly in regard to church planting in new geographic areas where the local parishes have already created plans and have the resources to begin a new work'. Another question asked for review of the personnel concerned with ENC church plants, their theological training, and their willingness or competency to be ordained Anglican—but this is probably another bubble to be discussed at another time.

Since the time was frittered away on two unfortunate matters of law (see page 1), this most interesting matter was never discussed by Synod. Fortunately, however, because the motion was put and passed before the evening was done, the Synod can now await the airing of the report it calls for. When that report is tabled, Synod will have a chance to discuss how the priority of the local congregation as the basic unit of mission sits in relation to diocesan organizations with a similar missionary purpose. 🗣️

Oran Park: [it was] suggested that it was a 'desert area'.

... FROM OUR ARCHBISHOPAL DESIRES?

WITH AN ELECTION SYNOD LOOMING ON THE 2013 horizon, a cautionary warning is timely. One of the easiest ways to give away our local church priority is to introduce an Archbishop into the mix who either doesn't share the same priority, or is not vigilant enough to maintain it. It would be extremely difficult for someone not already part of the Sydney Diocese to eat, sleep, and breathe this priority as much as a 'son of the diocese' would. If an Archbishop is selected on models of 'leadership' which stress taking control, a firm hand from 'above', driving the diocese like a corporate machine or multi-million dollar enterprise, this would also threaten our theological and practical priority. If someone is used to being a 'hands-on

Rector' with years of experience at 'running things', this too could transfer into an Archbishop who can't leave his hands off sufficiently to let the local churches do their thing. A good Archbishop so holds the centre, that the real work in the parishes can flourish. Archbishop Mowll apparently set a goal for his Archebiscopacy that was thoroughly parish-centred. In his inaugural Presidential address, he urged Synod to carry back 'a new inspiration and perhaps a new vision to every parish and individual member'.¹ That doesn't seem so bad. 🗣️

1 M. Loane, *Archbishop Mowll*, 134.

'Unless the lengthened sittings of the synod overtax my strength in the meantime, it is likely that this synod will also meet in August 2013 to elect a new Archbishop'. Archbishop Peter Jensen, 2011 Presidential Address

To continue the ACR's 'shopping list for a new Archbishop', Glenn Farrell thinks through the Archbishop's role within the hierarchy of diocesan leadership. As Synod chooses someone from within the diocese to be the new Archbishop, he will need to know the diocese well, and, to best serve the congregations, to work well with his assistants.

DIVINITY AND HUMANITY AND THE OFFICE OF ARCHBISHOP

Glenn Farrell

THE 49TH SYNOD WILL ELECT A NEW ARCHBISHOP in August 2013. How, then, should we think about the interplay between the Anglican (human) structures and biblical (divine) revelation about "leadership" in the church? The Archbishop exercises biblical leadership, but within human authority structures.

Anglican polity is hierarchical. We have bishops, presbyters and deacons. The NT usage of these words does not map directly onto the Anglican offices of "bishop, presbyter/priest and deacon", but it is fair to say that the NT picture includes a clear hierarchy of leadership. The 'leaders' of a church, under God, are responsible for the membership of the church. This is a 'chain of command' not to serve the interests of those up the chain but to serve the interests of the Father as he gathers his people together.

In the early church the office of bishop/overseer grew out of the office of presbyter/elder/priest. As local churches were established by the apostles, local elders were appointed. As these churches multiplied in a place an elder was appointed to oversee all the local churches and their elders. Thus the biblical kernel of our Anglican oversight process began.

The NT language of 'church' applies to local congregations. But our local churches operate in a fellowship of local churches, which we Anglicans call a diocese. An Anglican diocese has to find a way to express an appropriate biblical hierarchy for the health of our life together.

So what kind of archbishop would fit into a biblical hierarchical diocesan government?

Firstly, he must fit the criteria laid out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, as would any presbyter.

Secondly, he must be a true overseer. If the role of the overseer grew out of the need for an elder of a local church to take on oversight of daughter churches, our archbishop must be familiar with the goings on in all our local churches. This is a big job. Our system of "regional bishops" is a form of convenience in which the coadjutant bishops take responsibility to oversee the regions on behalf of the ruling ('arch') bishop.

The archbishop must therefore, thirdly, be capable of building a team of capable "under overseers", or coadjutants, to assist him with his oversight.

Fourthly, it follows that the archbishop must be a team player who empowers and entrusts the coadjutant bishops under him to act on his behalf, while not abrogating his ultimate responsibility.

In such a hierarchical system it is essential that the archbishop is able to make wise appointments, and to back the men he chooses.

This serves a twofold purpose: firstly, in recruiting coadjutants they will know the archbishop will "have their back" and secondly it gives those under the archbishop and his coadjutants confidence both in their archbishop and those he chooses to assist him. But the archbishop must also take responsibility when they act on his behalf, for this is the manner in which they operate in a biblical hierarchical system.

Fifthly, it flows then that if the coadjutant bishops enjoy this backing from their archbishop, then the archbishop, via his coadjutants, must back the locally appointed presbyters in their role. Biblical hierarchical order will fall apart if the coadjutants act on behalf of the bishop with his full support, but they themselves fail to support the presbyters in their charge.

Sixthly, the archbishop must be a very humble man, devoid of all ambition other than to superintend the churches and their presbyters in his care, and work with all his energy to see them presented perfect in and before Christ on the Final Day (Col. 1:28.29).

So searching for an archbishop is not like electing the class captain. The next archbishop may not be a man of great charisma, charm or wit. Such a 'charismatic' person may or may not be suitable for the task. But his suitability is not based on his ability to work a room so much as it is on the criteria of how he will operate in the hierarchy of our human diocese, for the good of God's household, gathered together in every church. ❧

EFFECTIVE MINISTRY UNDER GOD

Mark Thompson



IN A YEAR OF REMARKABLE conferences, perhaps one of the most significant for contemporary ministry in Sydney was held at Moore College on 23 November. The conference was called to discuss research done into trends in church attendance, church life and the context of Christian ministry

by Anglicans in this diocese. The analysis of data, largely but not exclusively from the National Church Life Survey, promised to raise significant questions about the health of churches throughout Sydney and the most effective way of engaging current challenges and opportunities. The overwhelming consensus of those who attended was that the conference more than realised upon these promises.

The conference brought together practitioners from all over Sydney to discuss research initiated by Tim Sims, a member of Christ Church St Ives who has spent his life helping organisations (usually businesses) analyse their current situation and plot a way forward. His extraordinary success in helping stagnant or declining organisations to understand where they are, and what needs to be done to move on from where they are, encouraged him to consider whether the same evidence-based analysis might aid the diocese of Sydney as it seeks to breathe new life into the Diocesan mission.

The level of analysis presented at the conference was indeed extraordinary and the conclusions drawn deeply insightful, even if, like many of the most profound insights, they look very much like common sense in hindsight. The bulk of the research so far is already available online as a two part interview with Tim Sims at www.effectiveministry.org/resources.html.

Here is a sample of the conclusions:

- Australians are not as alienated from Christian beliefs as some political or social commentators would like us to think. The percentage of Australians who believe in God (74% in 2009), the divinity of Jesus (42%) and the resurrection (43%) has remained relatively constant over the past 50 years. Church attendance may have declined sharply but Australians remain remarkably religious in their outlook. We face not so much a crisis as an opportunity.
- The decline in church attendance can be strongly correlated with the decline in marriage and family life in

the community in general. The significance of the 1975 Family Law Act and the introduction of no fault divorce is reflected in the statistical data. This raises important questions about how we help people understand and prepare for marriage and how we serve those who have suffered the shattering loss of a broken marriage.

- The current model of multiplying staff has not delivered uniform and substantial growth but has meant a quite unsustainable increase in costs.
- The single most significant factor in people leaving a church is moving house. Sydney residence patterns are anything but settled. In some suburbs the percentage of the population moving house over a five year period is very high indeed. What are we doing to identify and make meaningful contact with those who have recently moved into our local community?
- A typical church of 200 attendees will be visited by 200 people over the course of a year. One very practical goal might be to retain many more of those than we presently do, with more intentional approaches to meeting, greeting and integrating visitors.
- Small groups remain critical for the life and vitality of Christian congregations, though far too often we fail to make the most of this by training, resourcing and monitoring small group leadership. A snapshot of small group life across the diocese indicated it is not as healthy as we would all want it to be.

Tim Sims' presentations were undoubtedly the highlight of the conference, combining a humble concern to think through the practical dimensions of our theology with manifest skill in interpreting statistical data. An interview with Col Marshall and Tony Payne, authors of *The Trellis and the Vine*, was another. But there were also very fine contributions from others who were exploring innovative ways of reaching their community and making the most of opportunities that already exist. The overall tone of the conference was one of hope and a willingness to share insights and resources.

What was refreshing about this conference was the determination of the organisers and the key participants

The current model of multiplying staff has not delivered uniform and substantial growth.

not to overthrow our theology but to help us think through the practicalities of Christian ministry and congregational life within the context of our own theological convictions. In this regard what we discussed at the conference was markedly different from so much of the church growth literature and so many church growth/leadership models, which operate on the basis of very different theological convictions about church from those that have been well-honed in Sydney. The fellowship of churches which is our diocese was taken very seriously and perhaps the most promising outcome from the process of gathering and disseminating the research of Tim Sims and his team has

been a new, honest cooperation between those involved in leading our various congregations.

The impact of any changes made as a result of this conference remains to be seen. However, this one attendee was reminded yet again of our core business: the centrality of proclaiming and living the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ in the context of genuine personal relationships and with a passionate concern for those lost men and women who live all around us. In the final analysis all our hope rests, not in strategic acumen, nor in our capacity to follow through on our commitments, but on Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Son who is the resurrection and the life. ☪

CHRISTIAN LEGO-LAND: THE UNHAPPIEST KINGDOM OF ALL

Scott Blackwell



“Look I’m sorry, I just can’t be a Christian. I can’t live that way”.

“What way?” I asked.

“You know what way... with your head in the sand avoiding reality. Like life is some big, squeaky-clean version of Lego-land. Christians live in Lego-land”.

THIS WAS MY GOTHIC FRIEND’S PERCEPTION OF the Christian world—a life lived inside some bubble of safety and protection from the real world. Christians lived a deluded life, a lie... and I knew exactly what she was saying. Many Christians have a wonderful way of wearing the ‘Sunday mask’ when they go to church in order to make sure everything looks fine and perfect on the outside. To wear any other face to church is somehow unwanted and certainly unwelcome. There is no doubt that sometimes, the church community can be the most superficial of all communities.

I proceeded to explain to my friend why it was, in fact, impossible for a Christian to live in such a way. No Bible-reading, Bible-believing Christian could possibly sustain such an outlook on life. In truth, the Bible forbids the people of God to hold such an outlook. The fact that many Christians *do* embrace this kind of communal pretense appears to bear witness to the fact that many have never come to terms with imperfection—either their own or that which is all around us. Neither do they seem to want to. By

and large, when you go to church, the required response to the question: “Hi, how are you?” Is... “Fine thanks, how are you?” Not... “Well actually I’m a little worried about my job security...” or “I think my husband is having an affair...” or “My daughter is really struggling with an eating disorder...”

These answers would be more honest, because this would be the reality at any time in every church. None are perfect and all struggle with life. One of the most important lessons I have learned is that virtually everyone I meet is struggling with pain, disappointment or grief of one sort or another in some area of their life. Pastors have to be ready for anything—or decide that more than likely they are in the wrong job!

It is beyond my comprehension why the people of God are so taken by surprise when divorce, death, infidelity, depression, accident, illness or disability occur within their ranks. Unfortunately my observation within church communities seems to be that the most common ‘in church’ response to such phenomena is avoidance, denial, or worse—rejection and disdain.

I look in vain to find any passage of Scripture which implies that Christians or the Christian church will be protected or immune from such things. There is no guarantee from God anywhere that the community of faith will be spared such consequences of this fallen world.

There is however, this exhortation in Galatians 6:2, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” ☪