

23 August 2018

My dear brothers and sisters,

The last couple of months have been very challenging for the Diocese of Tasmania, as we have grappled with our response to redress. I know that many Parishes have been thinking and praying hard about how to respond to the Synod's plan to levy our investments and the proceeds of sale of some of our property. I am very conscious that the impact feels greater in some parishes and communities than others. Community groups are also understandably very passionate about what we are doing.

We need to remember that this is all about meeting our obligations to fund redress for survivors of sexual abuse in our churches. We have a moral and ethical obligation to do this, and believe that the method we have chosen best serves this end, and also preserves the Anglican church's work in the state.

I want to say thank you for the gracious and courageous way that most Parishes have embraced the challenge. For many it has entailed a painful recognition that the current model of ministry in their parish is not sustainable and needs attention. Grappling with the truth of these challenges is never easy. I am so encouraged by those who have welcomed the opportunity to seek ways to move forward. I am also encouraged by the number of people who have been praying for the church and its leaders.

We need to pray for the unity of the spirit so that church communities stay united in the midst of these challenges. It would be a terrible tragedy if the worldly attitude of "not in my backyard" was how we responded. I am expecting the Christian people of our church to provide an example in generosity and sacrifice, just as Jesus has taught us; that we will be shining lights to the world around us. I'm glad to say that is mostly how we have been reacting, and there are many encouraging responses.

One Parish has realised that by selling some of the properties on the list, they will have enough money in the balance of sale to fund a Rector or Youth Minister that they haven't had for years. Another Parish has thought creatively about a block of vacant land, that if sold would not only cover redress, but give them some return to invest in ministry without the loss of a single building. A couple of Parishes have been able to raise 25% of the value of the property as their contribution to redress and will have the church building removed from the list. One parish is working on subdividing the land so that a portion can be sold, and the church building retained. In addition to this the Diocese has had a number of offers to purchase church buildings to retain them for community use.

Some of our own members have publicly suggested that there are alternative ways to fund redress. I want to assure you that the Diocesan Council and the Synod are convinced that the way we are doing this, is the best way both to meet our obligations for redress and keep the Anglican Church in Tasmania vibrant and alive for the decades ahead.

Some have suggested that we don't have the legal or moral right to sell church buildings. Trust law makes it clear that property can only be held in trust for a person or for a "charitable purpose". Our Trustees hold the titles of our land for the "charitable purposes of the Anglican Church", which



ANGLICAN DIOCESE
OF TASMANIA

THE RIGHT REVEREND
DR RICHARD CONDIE
BISHOP OF TASMANIA

is essentially about our ministry of making disciples of Jesus, and are therefore free to buy and sell property on our behalf. While it is true that many of our forebears sacrificially gave time and resources to build and maintain our church buildings, our understanding is that they gave this for the purposes of the church and to the glory of God. I believe we are giving God the glory by making sure that we both meet our redress obligations, and keep the ministry of the church alive into the future. The Anglican Church is not (and never has been) simply a caretaker of buildings for community use.

There are a number of public meetings happening across Tasmania to oppose what we are doing. Meetings of this nature rarely lead to constructive outcomes, so I have reached out to the organisers to ask them to come and sit down to have a discussion, so we can share our concerns. I hope that they will take up the offer. We have made it abundantly clear that we are interested in community and parish feedback, and have provided the mechanism for this to happen.

It has been suggested that I am trying to force a particular style onto Tasmanian Anglican churches and that I am especially trying to stamp out traditional worship. This is simply not true. I love the variety of styles of worship across the Diocese, and want each of them to flourish in making disciples of Jesus. With one or two exceptions, the churches that are growing in Tasmania offer a variety of worship styles. We ALL need to consider how we can best reach the many Tasmanians who don't know Jesus.

The Diocesan Council is engaging specialist Heritage advice to help us with our work. We are also appointing a Project Officer and an Assistant to manage the Redress Project. We are working with the Government on their review of the Burials and Cremation Act to protect cemeteries. The Diocesan Council is currently receiving submissions from Parishes and Community groups about property and funds. Archdeacons and consultants are available to help Parishes put these together. These submissions will be assessed by an expert panel, including two members of DC, a Trustee, an Architect with heritage experience, and a retired Bishop with rural ministry experience. All of this will be overseen by an independent Probity Advisor, Mr Harvey Gibson from WLF, who will ensure the integrity of the process. The Panel will report to Diocesan Council in December, who will make final decisions about the property sales.

I am hopeful that the final outcome will have us selling far fewer church buildings than we initially anticipated, and that the Anglican Church in Tasmania will be able to support survivors of sexual abuse. I also think that if Parishes take up the challenge that this has presented, they will be much healthier moving into a confident future.

Please continue to lift our church to the Lord in prayer, and especially the work of the Diocesan Council and the Registry team. We must pray that our vision to be a *Church for Tasmania, Making Disciples of Jesus* is at the forefront of what we do.

Warm wishes in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard".

The Rt Revd Dr Richard Condie
Bishop of Tasmania