

Bishopdale Theological College, Nelson, New Zealand

Conference - [Institute for New Anglicanism](#) - 13 February 2010

A Vision for New Anglicanism: Context and Contours

A New Openness to Change: The Tasmanian Experience

Speaking notes by Bishop John Harrower¹ based on his chapter 20 in 'Facing the Future (of the Anglican Church in Australia): Bishops Imagine a Different Church' edited by S. Hale & A. Curnow, Acorn Press, Brunswick East, 2009. More info on [Bishop John's blog](#).

Introductory words

As I mentioned last evening at the Cathedral launch of the *Institute for New Anglicanism*, it is a double pleasure to be here in Nelson. Firstly, to share with you in this mission initiative. Secondly, because the invitation provided the stimulus for my bride and I to celebrate our 40th Wedding Anniversary with a week's holiday touring your beautiful region of New Zealand. On behalf of my wife and I, "Thank you".

Tasmania and New Zealand have much in common.

Did you know that in 1848 The Bishops of New Zealand and Tasmania were both under the supervision of the Bishop of Sydney who was also The Metropolitan of Australia. You escaped the grip of that big Island to your west and our north: Tasmania did not!

Your tourist tea towels have also not gone unnoticed. Can you picture those tea towels which have a map of New Zealand all in colour and looking lovely and to the west there is a grey mass looking remarkably smaller and called, if I remember correctly, the Western Island!

You are not alone in having problems with that particular Island! Nor are you alone in producing a tea towel expressing your identity. Here, I have a Tasmanian tea towel. It shows the true size of Tasmania and the joys of life in Tasmania as opposed to the venomous snakes, deadly spiders, crocodiles and flies of the so called 'Mainland' of Australia!

As a token of our mutual solidarity and the shared missiological task of understanding cultural identity I present this Tasmanian tea towel to the *Institute for New Anglicanism*. Thank you Dean Tim Harris.

I have been asked to speak on our experience in Tasmania as we have worked to bring about a new openness to change to be involved in God's work in the world.

¹ John Harrower is Bishop of Tasmania. He is grateful to Paul Cavanaugh, Director of Ministry Services in the Diocese of Tasmania, for his contribution to both the writing of the chapter and the nurture of its possibilities.

As regards a new openness to change, firstly, it is important to know where we are.

At our recent CMS Tasmania Conference Peter Adam, Principal of Ridley Melbourne, told the story of Admiral Sir Cloudisley Shovell. On the 22nd of October 1717 he was bringing his small fleet of 5 ships with 2000 troops on board back from the Mediterranean. He turned right thinking he was going up the English Channel, but in fact they had gone a little more further west and were at the south west tip of England. A sailor dared to approach the Admiral and informed him that he was heading North at the wrong point and was about to lose all his ships. The man was promptly hanged for mutiny. Soon after the ships struck the rocks, the five ships went down and the 2000 troops drowned. Cloudisley himself by some miracle managed to make it to the shore. A woman found him, saw on his finger a ring that she wanted, so killed him to get the ring.

The point of the story is not only to listen well and to beware of women carrying knives on beaches, but also to recognise that it is important to know where you are.

In Tasmania are at a time of great change in society and challenge for God's people. There is no doubt in our minds that **a new openness to change** is evident within the Anglican Church of Australia. Two decades of National Church Life Surveys (NCLS) have provided a shocking reality check grimly detailing our critical decline. Many of us have taken these and similar challenges seriously. The key question is whether this is a new openness to deep change that will bring new life, or simply tolerable minor adjustments that are only making slow death more palatable.

Deep change has to be transformational change.² The evidence of **openness to transformational change** is found where leaders are stepping out of the *status quo*, to refocus on the church's biblical mandate as God's mission agency. These leaders are committed to liberating the people of God for mission rather than maintaining an institutional mission.

In the words of a former Archbishop of Canterbury, 'We are not in the business of institutionalising mission; we are in the business of liberating the people of God for mission.'³

In 1997, the previous Bishop of Tasmania, wrote, 'What stands out with clarity is that merely trying to do what we did in the past only better, working harder, pedalling faster, has not turned the ship around. It has, if anything fuelled the sense of frustration and failure in our clergy and lay leadership. We need a different way of being church.'⁴

In Tasmania in 2000, I shared the vision of 'Every Tasmanian committed to Jesus Christ', declared that the diocese be known as 'The Missionary Diocese of Tasmania',

² R.E. Quinn & A. Caza, 'Deep Change', in *Encyclopaedia of Leadership*, Eds. G.R. Goethals, G. Sorenson & J. M. Burns, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks CA, 2004, p. 326

³ George Carey, 1996 'Looking to the Future' [Archbishop of Canterbury: Presidential Address at ACC-10](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/1996/10/30/ACNS1007) <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/news.cfm/1996/10/30/ACNS1007>.

⁴ The Tasmanian Anglican August 1997 p.2.

and challenged every Anglican to live as a ‘missionary disciple’. These strong statements of missional intent highlighted the commencement of intentional deep change in the Anglican Church in Tasmania.

Tasmania is an island state of Australia with a population of 500,000. The population centres are greater Hobart (207,000), greater Launceston (104,000) and Burnie/Devonport (80,000), with the remainder of the population spread in smaller towns and rural districts across the state.⁵

In 2006 some 160,000 Tasmanians declared themselves to be Anglican. Sadly, only 3,000 of them would find themselves in Anglican worship centres on any Sunday morning. The nineteenth-century mission strategy to have a church building and priest within easy walking distance of every Anglican has left a legacy of church buildings and parishes scattered across the state. Following some rationalisation, there are now currently 50 parishes with 139 worship centres in active use. The decade of evangelism in the 1990s saw church attendance in Tasmania decline by 30 per cent. The Anglican Church faced critical decline.

Another mark of an openness to change is openness to a different kind of leadership. The mood of the diocese at the end of the decade of evangelism was best described as highly anxious with very low levels of understanding of how to address the reality of critical decline. At this time the diocese needed to call a new bishop. A deeply conservative community faced the stark reality of ‘change or death?’

Tasmania prayed for and called a missionary to be their bishop. Following my consecration as Bishop of Tasmania I recall the first synod in October 2000, when I concluded the Presidential Address by saying,

You elected me, trust me.
 You elected a missionary, let us be missionaries together.
 You elected an innovator, let us be innovators together.
 You elected a change agent, let us change together.
 You elected a missionary bishop, let us be a missionary diocese.⁶

This declaration was met by a standing ovation from synod, leaving the bishop in tears.

A further mark of openness to change is leaders who are willing to take risks.

Peter Adam, of Ridley Melbourne with which your College has a link, tells the story of the retired Archbishop of Canterbury, Donald Coggan, falling as he alighted from an underground train in London. A young man kindly helped him to his feet. Donald thanked him and as the young man departed he turned to the Archbishop and said, ‘Now take care, won’t you?’ Donald Coggan replied, ‘Young man, don’t take care, take risks.’

⁵ ABS, *Tasmania at a Glance*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p. 2.

⁶ J. Harrower, ‘Reaching Tasmanians for Jesus Christ’, 2000 Tasmanian Synod Keynote Address, Anglican Church in Tasmania, 27 October 2000, www.anglicantas.org.au/resources-synodaddress2000/.

Another way of expressing a willingness to take risks greeted Gayelene and myself on the welcome sign in the foyer of our hotel at Hanmer Springs here in your beautiful Diocese. The welcome sign said,

“If you are going to skate on thin ice, tap dance, and go down in style.” Fantastic!

The new bishop’s slogan for the diocese ‘All Tasmanians committed to Jesus Christ’ clearly expressed his commitment to deep and transformational change. Some said that the church needed entrepreneurial leadership, but we preferred to see it as spiritual leadership; leaders taking initiative and relying on God’s power, as modeled by St Paul who established indigenous churches wherever he went. We decided to leverage every piece of episcopal authority toward these priorities.

We also needed to take with decisive action to **address critical and urgent matters**. We ‘cleaned the cupboards’, to deal with the potentially crippling issue of child sexual abuse by Anglican church workers. This involved a public apology to victims at my first media conference, developing a Pastoral Support and Assistance Scheme, making myself available to meet pastorally with victims and to personally apologise to them, the use of diocesan funds to finance the pastoral support, and the active media presence of the bishop in seeking to make our complaint processes and pastoral care transparent.

We took every opportunity to embed a missional ecclesiology in diocesan life.

The missiology of Roland Allen⁷ was foundational to our establishing a pattern of parish life known as Enabler Supported Ministry. Parishes who could no longer afford reasonable levels of stipendiary ministry, yet sustained a heart for ministry and mission in their districts, would be enabled to continue in full ministry. The priority was to sustain the mission of the church rather than institutional guidelines or inherited structures.

‘**Permission giving**’ in our diocese involved me delegating new authorities to rectors. This included the conduct of weddings, funerals, baptisms and worship services in non-consecrated buildings; determinations with regard to the marriage of divorced persons; the development of ecumenical partnerships; the licensing of lay workers; and the use of new liturgies to respectfully reflect the culture of the people to whom we were seeking to minister more fully.

We believe that transformational change can be built on trust. Permission giving is a sign of trust, of openness to change, and it needed to be a characteristic of our diocese. If the bishop could not trust his clergy and lay leaders, and they could not trust him, then we were doomed.

In a very mixed and dysfunctional environment, the focus had to be on missiology. There is much that divides us. The hope is that **the mission of God would unite us**. Within two years, the diocese became the Missionary Diocese of Tasmania, the bishop became the Missionary Bishop, archdeacons became Mission Support Officers,

⁷ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St Paul’s or Ours?*, author’s preface to 2nd edn, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids MI, 1962, p. vii.

archdeacons became Mission Networks, the Diocesan Ministry Officer became the Diocesan Mission Enabler, bishop's visits included mission conversations, and parish priorities became Mission Action Plans. There is no doubt that we could be accused of overkill, and in many ways we under-delivered; however, no one could say our intention was not clear!

'Mission Conversations' became a central strategy in moving the diocese toward deeper levels of understanding. It was a simple idea, really: bring the lay and clerical leadership of clusters of parishes together to talk about mission and their role in the work of God in their patch. We found that many Anglicans simply did not have the language of mission and were deeply fearful of evangelism. Many had lost confidence in the gospel and the work of God in the world.

This church needed to be lovingly re-taught not to be afraid but to trust God and each other. At our 'Mission Conversations' we would talk about the things that we could see God doing in our lives and in the church. As we told stories we came to understand that God was at work through us in our homes and communities. We also managed to gather a few ideas of how we could get closer to God and to participate in his work in our communities.

The appointment of Mission Support Officers began a critical **rethink of the role of the bishop's support team**. These offices needed to enhance the missional agenda. We decided to move many of the traditional responsibilities for property and management matters from archdeacons to the Registrar. Mission Support Officers were then released from some of the burden of line-management to focus on supporting local mission. This action was one of the earliest in our intent to reshape and integrate institutional structures to facilitate a 'missionary diocese'.

We aim to facilitate the consideration of missional priorities at every level within the diocese. For example, a missionary diocese must have a synod that facilitates mission, but the same must apply at every level. We challenged the diocesan council, the ministry council, Anglicare (Tasmania), our schools and our agencies to critically re-examine their missional agenda.

Monitoring the mood or climate of the diocese has been essential in **adjusting the pace of change**. Our aim has been to lower levels of anxiety and raise the levels of understanding to the point at which it is possible to undertake significant strategic planning. However, it is essential to lead the diocese knowing its reality. We refused to take the 'she'll be right mate' approach, or worse still, to hyper-spiritualise our situation by not balancing faith with appropriate action.

The office of the bishop was able to bless and release evangelists to seniors' ministry, sailing ministry and family outreach using donkeys.⁸

⁸ Gayelene Harrower trains donkeys for church and community events as a way of sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Gayelene's donkeys have appeared in Cathedrals, parishes, street

As anxiety levels lowered and understanding grew, we were asked to explain our vision for the diocese. People had begun to see that the future might look very different to the past. In 2004 I released my vision for the diocese entitled ‘**a healthy church ... transforming life**’.⁹ We embarked on an ambitious plan to transform the life of the Anglican Church in Tasmania over the coming years. The heart of strategic planning within a church is our relationship with God. Therefore our work is a spiritual process.

Seven principles guide this work:

1. Be faithful to our relationship with God and one another.
2. Develop and implement plans at every place of calling and responsibility.
3. Examine every aspect (theology, demographics, economics, etc) of our diocesan community and propose plans that reflect these realities.
4. Think big and do not be afraid to take risks and ask big and difficult questions.
5. Listen to one another with open minds and un-defending hearts.
6. Explore and identify the relationships and resources essential to carrying out our ministries.
7. Invite broad and open contributions to the process.¹⁰

We have been encouraged by the reaction to this process.

The approach is to **continually increase understanding and lower anxiety levels**. As these two goals are achieved, we will have an environment which is much more conducive to significant change. We have often run a long way ahead of the capacity of individual parishes to respond. There has been tension and debate, but we are moving in the right direction.

The role of the bishop in modeling openness to change. Many of you will realise that within Anglican polity, the diocesan bishop has very little power other than persuasive influence. However, it is possible, and very effective, to stimulate change through modeling key principles. By way of example, the diocesan bishop has undertaken three external reviews of his work and performance, and each of these reviews has been made public. Each of the senior staff has undertaken similar reviews. As a result, we believe that we are slowly building a culture of review within the diocese. Not all are ready to submit to a formal process, but we are certainly able to talk about the issues of continuous ministry review and professional development. We have also undertaken

parades and community events offering ‘living stables’ and rides explaining the cross on the donkey’s back and the One who rode them in love for us.

⁹ J. Harrower, ‘ahealthychurch ... transforming life: The Bishop’s Vision for the Missionary Diocese of Tasmania’, Anglican Church in Tasmania, February 2004, <http://www.anglicantas.org.au/index.php?item=file&target=transformingLIFE>

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 22.

reviews of key ministries that we have developed, and in particular, enabler-supported ministry and youth ministry.

We have not underestimated **the difficulty of transforming local parishes**. At times we have been extremely exasperated with what we have felt to be a very slow pace of change, and this has been most frustrating in the light of our hope to develop many ‘fresh expressions’ of our life together. While we continue to promote the healthy life of our parishes with diverse models of ministry that they may be God’s people transforming life in their communities we felt that we had to find a new complementary way to develop ‘fresh expressions’ of being church in Tasmania.

In what has become known as ‘**The Imagine Project**’¹¹ we found a way in 2008 to establish diocesan-based rather than parish-based fresh expressions of a mission shaped church.

The Imagine Project is a three-year trial involving three local mission projects under the supervision of specially appointed bishops: a missionary bishop for projects and training, and another for stewardship. The appointment of missionary bishops has appeared as an extraordinary step by many. However, we believe that it is absolutely necessary for us to rediscover the primary missional or apostolic role of a bishop in the life of the church.

One hundred years ago Tasmania was blessed by such a **missioner bishop: Bishop Montgomery, 1889 - 1901**, and we have recently been gifted with his biography, *Montgomery of Tasmania: Henry and Maud Montgomery in Australasia* by Robert Withycombe, Acorn Press, Melbourne, 2009.¹² I take this opportunity to gift this missionary biography to the resources of the *Institute for New Anglicanism* as a further expression of our commitment with you in learning from and honouring the missionaries that have gone before us, that we ourselves be mission hearted Anglicans. In recapturing the best of Anglicanism we take forward a new Anglicanism for the glory of God.

We hope that you find this brief account of our missionary diocese of interest. We now have a missionary bishop, two missioner bishops, six mission support officers, a mission action plan and hundreds of Tasmanian Anglicans who would claim to be missionary disciples. We have a long way to go. Change is never easy. **It is our simple hope that the heart and hands of our missionary diocese bear a sign of an openness to change.**

¹¹ This is a reference to Ephesians 3:20, ‘[Our God] who ... is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we could ask or imagine ...’ See more on *The Imagine Project* at, <http://www.anglicantas.org.au/resources-imagineproject/>

¹² See *Montgomery of Tasmania* book review at <http://imaginarydiocese.org/bishopjohn/2009/09/11/%e2%80%98montgomery-of-tasmania%e2%80%99-%e2%80%93-my-commendation-for-the-publisher/>

Let me bring this presentation to a close in prayer, adapting my prayer for Tasmania to New Zealand. We turn to **Prayer for transforming life**,

Transforming God,
as we meet together
fill us with your wisdom.
Give us the capacity to work
boldly and with humility,
embracing the challenge of mission.
Use us to bring transforming life
to our Christian Communities
and to all New Zealanders.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen