

19-08-2022

Dear Friends,

You may have seen on TV, in the newspapers or social media this week about a 'schism' in the Anglican Church of Australia. As is often the case, not everything has been reported accurately, so I am writing in the hope of better informing you about what it all means.

In short, for us in the Anglican Parish of Carine-Duncraig, it means very little- at least in the short-term.

GAFCON (Global Anglican Futures Conference) is an organisation of clergy and others who have a particular interpretation and view of Scripture. It is their view, for example, that women should not teach or have authority over men, and so women cannot be ordained priest. They also believe that only married, heterosexual men- preferably with children- should be ordained; and that single, gay or differently-gendered people must always be celibate. This article contains some useful history:

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/it-s-a-sin-how-sex-and-women-split-the-anglican-church-20220818-p5bat7.html?fbclid=IwAR1hHMDII07h-EDbsW2Zcsde8Hgd2M5lx35WWWh6dr2SQyhTgv5EpuI900us>

Dr Renae Barker has written a helpful explanatory piece for The Conversation which is attached.

The so-called Diocese of the Southern Cross, as you will see, has no connection with the Anglican Church of Australia. Since its launch, one disaffected Anglican priest and some members of his congregation have left their Anglican Diocese and joined the new organisation, and others may follow- including possibly from the Diocese of Perth.

This diocese has for many years sought to be inclusive: Archbishop Peter Carnley ordained the first women priests, Roger Herft the first woman bishop, and Archbishop Kay has continued to be inclusive and welcoming. This parish seeks to be similarly inclusive and welcoming of all, regardless of gender or sexuality, age, ethnic origin, marital status, financial situation and so on.

While I am saddened by this action I am not surprised: supporters of GAFCON have foreshadowed it for some time. I am unhappy that they label everyone who does not follow their narrow, fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture as 'revisionist' and as not believing the Bible.

The Bible has always been, and remains, an important aspect of our worship and our lives as Christians; and the person of Jesus Christ is our focus, the One we seek to follow. The Gospels portray Jesus as a man who broke the social and religious conventions of his time to teach, to eat with, to heal and to love people of every kind. He is the Light of the World who came to show us what love looks like.

We will, by God's grace, continue faithfully to enjoy the richness of Anglican worship at St Nic's and pray for everyone who has been confused, hurt, or dismayed by the events of this week.

Here is a prayer from the Revd. Dr. Elizabeth Smith:

*We pray for the Anglican Church of Australia.
Holy Spirit, come and help our leaders and people
to continue in faithfulness to the Good News of Jesus Christ,
to open our hearts and our church doors to everyone,
and to be creative in our ministry in challenging times.
Whenever rainbow people, and their families and friends,
are finding faith and seeking your blessing,
may they be sure of finding it among us in this community. Amen.*

God bless,

Lorna

Behind the split of the Anglican church in Australia over gay marriage

In the opening address of this year's Global Anglican Futures Conference (GAFCON) Australasia, Bishop Richard Condie announced the creation of the Diocese of the Southern Cross. In Bishop Condie's words: *the Diocese of the Southern Cross is a new structure for Anglicans in Australia who can no longer sit under the authority of their bishop.*

What led to this rupture and what does it mean for the future of the Anglican Church in Australia?

Anglicans in Australia

Anglicans are the second largest Christian denomination in Australia, making up 9.8% of the population. They suffered the greatest decline in numbers of any Christian denomination between the 2016 and 2021 census, losing 604,900 members.

The Australian Anglican Church is divided into 23 independent dioceses and is a part of the worldwide Anglican Communion.

The Diocese of the Southern Cross is a new religious denomination that was first incorporated in September 2021, although it was not formally launched until this week. Its first bishop will be the former Anglican archbishop of Sydney, Glen Davies.

The new diocese describes itself as a parallel Anglican structure following key Anglican documents such as the 39 articles, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal. However, it is not part of the Australian Anglican Church nor will it be part of the Anglican Communion. In other words, it is not the 24th diocese of the Anglican Church of Australia.

Why has the Diocese of the Southern Cross been created?

The reasons behind the creation of the Diocese of the Southern Cross are complex. On its web page, GAFCON Australia states:

At the recent General Synod (the church's triennial meeting), a majority of bishops were unable to uphold the Bible's ancient teaching on marriage and sexual ethics.

However, in his response to the announcement of the creation of the Diocese of the Southern Cross, the Primate of the Australian Anglican Church Archbishop Geoff Smith noted:

The meeting of the General Synod held in May this year clearly affirmed the view that marriage is between a man and a woman, and declined to affirm same sex marriage. It is perplexing therefore that the leaders of this breakaway movement cite the reason for this new denomination as the failure of General Synod to explicitly express an opinion against the blessing of same sex marriages.

In 2020, the Anglican Church's Appellate Tribunal ruled that blessings of same-sex couples were permitted under church law. The Bishops of the church met in response to this ruling, and noted "with pain we recognise that there is not a common mind on these issues within the House of Bishops."

The 2022 General Synod did not pass any resolutions specifically affirming that marriage is between a man and a woman. However, a resolution on Exemptions Clauses for Religious Bodies included this statement that the Anglican Church:

Continues to affirm that marriage according to the rites and ceremonies of the Anglican Church of Australia is the voluntary union of one man and one woman arising from mutual promises of lifelong faithfulness. The doctrines, tenets, beliefs and teachings of our Church are expressed in the authorised liturgies of our church and there is currently no liturgy for the solemnisation of a same-sex marriage.

However, the House of Bishops also voted against a specific motion "that sought to affirm that marriage is only between a man and a woman and the blessing of same sex marriages was not in accordance with the teaching of Christ."

What is the future of the Australian Anglican Church?

While much has already been said about the split in the press and elsewhere, the future is very much unknown. Parallel Anglican organisations have previously been set up in other parts of the world including New Zealand, the United States and Canada with varying degrees of success.

The Diocese of the Southern Cross is not even the first parallel Anglican denomination to be set up in Australia. For example, the Anglican Catholic Church was established in 1987 and describes itself as the “traditional Anglican Church in that we preserve the Historic Beliefs, Holy Tradition, Creeds, and Liturgies used by the Church in England prior to their latest reformation”.

Australian Anglicans are used to a church that does things a bit differently. For example, while the Anglican Diocese of Sydney will only ordain women as deacons, the Diocese of Perth is headed by Archbishop Kay Goldsworthy, one of the first women to be ordained to the Anglican priesthood in Australia.

While things may be uncertain at the moment, the words of Archbishop Smith sum up the current position of the church well:

It is always easier to gather with those we agree with. But in a tragically divided world God's call and therefore the church's role includes showing how to live together with difference. Not merely showing tolerance but receiving the other as a gift from God.

My conviction is that the Anglican Church of Australia can find a way to stay together, graciously reflecting God's great love, with our differences held sincerely. This week's announcement makes achieving that end more difficult but not impossible.

Author: **Renae Barker**, Senior Lecturer, The University of Western Australia

Renae Barker is the Advocate of the Anglican Diocese of Bunbury and a member of General Synod.