

**EXTRACT FROM  
THE PRESIDENTS ADDRESS  
to the  
52nd Synod of the Diocese of Melbourne  
Wednesday 19 October 2016**

**The  
Most Reverend Dr Philip Freier  
Archbishop of Melbourne**

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I pay tribute to those who have gone before us, from our beginning as a diocese in 1847 to the present day. Next year will be the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the diocese and of Charles Perry's consecration in Westminster Abbey on 29 June 1847. Who can imagine what Perry, one of the founders of synodical government in the Anglican Communion, might have imagined of the future as he arrived on the vessel Royal Mail Ship (RMS) Stag at the Port of Melbourne on 24 January 1848? We build our own lives as Christians on the life and witness of all those who in their day and circumstances shared and lived our common faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We meet as the first session of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Synod only days after the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what has been called, "The first legally constituted Church Assembly in the British Empire" that commenced here in Melbourne on 16 October 1856. This Church Assembly was the forerunner of our Synod and was itself a pioneering innovation in church governance not just in Australia but one that has been determinative throughout worldwide Anglicanism.

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Over the last year, the Anglican Church of Australia along with other churches and community groups has responded to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. We have engaged with the Royal Commission's work at many levels both practical and spiritual. I am grateful for the continued work of the Royal Commission and its officers. Their work is now in its final phase having completed 44 Case Study hearings and over 6000 private sessions with survivors of abuse and their families. There are a further 1500 people still on the waiting list to provide their private testimony. Like me you have no doubt been appalled by the stories of abuse and the process failure that has so often followed. I continue to be impressed by the courage of all who have come forward to speak. Our Christian faith acknowledges that, in life, the good and the bad are often mixed together. Our faith calls us to look to a future where the pain of this life is gathered through the redemptive work of Christ and transformed to wholeness. While healing and wholeness await us in the future we need to be attentive to the opportunities for improving our own practice and

especially our response to any who have suffered through the misconduct of clergy or church workers. My prayers are with all those who have suffered from abuse, wherever it has occurred.

The Commission has already made a number of important recommendations to Government. We have discussed these recommendations at the General Synod, Provincial and Diocesan level. We have a responsibility to act, to review and to improve. This Synod will consider Professional Standards legislation that has been developed in response to the Royal Commission's recommendations. As I speak as Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia on this unhappy past I have wanted to own the responsibility of the Church for all of our history, the true history, in both its positive and negative impacts. It is in this way, by truth telling, that we learn together and can find ways of celebrating the good and continuing to right the harm of the wrong. St John's Gospel is very clear about the liberating power of truth – in fact John 8.32 "The truth will set you free", is the motto of the Anglican Communion. On the way we have the blessing of knowing the encouragement of the good and the beautiful signs of that future, however these will not be seen without an acknowledgement and restoration of the painful history of failure that has been the focus of the Royal Commission's work.

In March 2015 the Provincial Council in Victoria initiated a working group to establish a uniform system of Professional Standards across the five dioceses of the Province. Bishop Andrew Curnow was appointed as the Chairman of the Working Group and has guided it with assistance from representatives of each of the Victorian Dioceses. Our own Chancellor, Michael Shand, has once again played an instrumental role in framing the legislation that is before us.

The motivation behind the uniform system is to make it easier for survivors of sexual abuse to be able to access an independent process that gives them confidence of a fair hearing and outcome irrespective of the diocesan boundaries within Victoria. The synod of the Diocese of Bendigo has passed cognate legislation and I hope that the passage of the Uniform Professional Standards Bill through our synod will mean that we can combine with Bendigo and bring an independent Professional Standards Corporation into operation. We hope that soon the three other Victorian Dioceses will join this approach.

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