

WE ARE PART OF A VERY BIG FAMILY

I am very grateful to Bishop Brian and to the Diocese for enabling me to be part of the Bishop's in the First Years of Ministry Conference at the beginning of February. It was very enriching experience and I will be a different bishop as a result of my time there. I'd like to share something of my journey with you.

The conference was held in the precincts of the historic Cathedral at Canterbury in the United Kingdom. The intent of the Dean and Chapter was that the Cathedral would be a home for us and offered very warm and generous hospitality.

The most significant part of the conference was meeting 29 other bishops. There were bishops from Canada, Ireland, Tanzania, the United States of America, Kenya, Nigeria, the Congo, South Africa, Mexico, India, Sudan, New Zealand, Melanesia, Papua New Guinea and we met some bishops from England. I was joined by Bishop John Stead from Bathurst and Bishop Barbara Darling from Melbourne to form the Australian contingent. Bishop Stephen Pickard now living in the UK was one of the presenters. Ken and Jenny Child (formerly from Kincumber) are an active part of the Cathedral family and sought me out to send their greetings!

The group of bishops was by no means monochrome and in the room some of the joys and tensions of the Anglican Communion were present. People with divergent views on human sexuality and the role of women in ministry kept at praying and talking even when the differences were very clear. As we did we also found much in common. In small groups we were able to hear each other's stories of faith and pray together. The dining room was often punctuated by laughter!

It was good to talk with David Irving – the Bishop of Saskatoon in Canada. They are moving into a form of Ministering Communities in Ministry (they have another name for it). They, like us, are focussing on education and formation. It was good to talk with Ross Bay, the Bishop of Auckland, and to hear how important their expression of MCiM is to that Diocese.

It was good to talk with bishops from Sudan and to hear first-hand of the importance of the referendum. There was great celebration when the day of independence for Southern Sudan was announced while we were at the Conference. We can never under estimate the importance of the financial support we offer as an expression of our shared mission through ABM and CMS. Some of the bishops are working with very little and facing many demands.

Among the highlights was the afternoon at Lambeth Palace where we met with the Archbishop of Canterbury who sat, talked and led as a 'first among equals'. The visit concluded with Evening Prayer in the Chapel with staff from Lambeth Palace, staff from the Anglican Communion office, the Archbishop and bishops in which we sang the hymn 'Brother, sister, let me serve you'. Later in the Conference we also met Dr Jane Williams who offered gentle but well focussed insights on self-care and the pastoral care of clergy.

The bishops at the conference wanted to hear about Newcastle so it was a great week to talk about our region, our history, and our industries. They wanted to know about the Australian Church.

It is good to be back with you in the Diocese. As I enter my third year of ministry as a bishop I have been thinking about the words of Archbishop Michael Ramsey who wrote, 'I do not here discuss dioceses large or small, and the bishop who is the sole father in God, or the bishop whose office is shared with others in a college. Whatever be the shape or form, the bishop will always be pastor, teacher, missionary, sacramental minister, the servant of catholicity and apostolicity among priest

and people. He must keep fresh, think, read, study, pray.' The conference was a great opportunity to do some of this. Thanks for sending me!

With every blessing,

+Peter

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