

BISHOP GREG THOMPSON ANSWERS THE QUESTIONS FROM THE BISHOP NOMINATION BOARD

1. Tell us who you are

Born and raised in Muswellbrook, I came to faith at a young age through caring Christian people in a small faithful Methodist community. I learnt to swim in the Hunter River and enjoyed beaches and the bush of the region as a child. At Newcastle University I met Anglican young people who were full of energy and Christ like love and began attending Anglican churches at Waratah, Adamstown and Cooks Hill. I was confirmed as an Anglican with my wife Kerry in 1978 when I was a member of St Stephens Adamstown. I have enjoyed the breadth of Anglican life from the time I left Newcastle in 1979 to work as a youth worker in the Northern Territory. I am a child of the Hunter, and of a faithful generous God who has called me to serve Christ in the face of stranger and of those marginalised by society. I am a pilgrim in a great country trusting God and walking with fellow travellers who want to live authentic faithful lives in Christ. Having served in the Dioceses of NT, Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra for more than 33 years, I have been nurtured and challenged by the Anglican Church as it engages its context with a rich sacramental tradition and heritage, with its immersed praying with the scriptures in worship and daily offices, by hearing God's Word preached in communities of diverse culture, urban and remote environments, and by the church having a missional life to share and live the good news to the local centre and to the margins of society.

2. Tell us something of your spiritual journey

At an early age I believed in a loving God – this was nurtured by caring Christian people and I was taught how to pray and read the scriptures at an early age. The years of growing into adulthood were about trusting God to lead me to use my gifts and life for God's good purposes. The missional journeys to the Northern Territory or with Bush Church Aid, or with inner city ministries to the street in Kings Cross have been about being fully who I am and truly engaged in God's transforming purposes. The spiritual journey has always been both an ongoing discovery of God's world through service with a returning to the sanctuary of Eucharist, Scripture and devotion to sustain my life. My life has been shaped by the Catholic, and inclusive communities (Fr Austin Day, Christchurch St Lawrence, Fr Warwick Turvey St Stephens Adamstown, Fr Ian Crooks and Fr John Cornish St Albans Epping, St Johns Canberra) that I have been a participant within. And I have known a loving holy God among people who have not felt included by either church or society.

3. Tell us about your ministry experience

I have known a breadth of ministry with developed skills and knowledge in;

- children's and youth work,
- pastoring communities with limited resources,
- defence chaplaincy and parish ministry in Darwin,

- developing marriage educator training and facilitating marriage education services,
- building ecumenical relationships, more recently as President of the Council of Churches in the NT in strengthening cooperative chaplaincy ministries and in Church- Government conversations. In Darlinghurst working collaboratively with Wayside Chapel, Baptist Inner City Ministries, and the Catholic Church.
- establishing, governing and leading complex organisational life,
- advocating and working for justice among the poor through transformative communities
- strengthening opportunities for vocations and support for local ministry,
- being a confidante, companion and colleague in diverse ministry teams,
- helping communities to imagine a future that they are prepared to get behind,
- building upon the Anglican Church of Australia's relationship with the Council of Churches East Asia as a member of their Executive, since 2011.
- developing policy and advocacy with government on community services (Chair NT Government Ministerial Advisory Council 1993) in rural remote policy (NSW Government Premier's Office 1996-99) and recently NT government on business and community life.
- being a Bishop to lead, protect and enable God's people in their spiritual and missional life.

4. Tell us about your training and education

- Studied ThL through GBRE 1978-82
- Ridley College ThL, Dip Min, BTh 2A Hons 1984-87
- Regular professional development through conferences and courses.
- Army Chaplaincy training 1989,
- NT and NSW Prepare/Enrich Trainer 1990- 1999
- Member of Australian Institute of Company Directors

5. What are your three primary proven ministry leadership strengths?

- strengthening Anglican missional activities in cross cultural settings in inner city and rural remote Australia.
- providing responsive governance and leadership within diverse organisational and church entities, at parish, diocesan, national and international settings.
- building ordained and lay teams that enable ministry within a parish and to its wider community.

6. What are two areas of your ministry in which you would like to develop further strengths?

- The research of and development of contextual theologies and missional action in the Anglican Church.
- Enhancing practises that strengthen missional partnerships between agency and parish, parish and community, community and Diocese.

7. What should episcopal leadership in the Anglican Church of Australia look like today?

Episcopal leadership faces as it does in every generation great challenges within and outside. Internally a Bishop must develop a living pastoral and spiritual vitality that supports people through a ministry of encouragement to lay and ordained ministers and their communities. He or she must be a linguist who understands and speaks the language of the people and yet also brings the strange and demanding language 'from above' which challenges our presumptions and priorities. He or she will not have all the ready answers but with a deep confidence in God's providential care seeks to make a way through dilemmas and controversy, to follow where Jesus has gone ahead. The prophetic pioneering leadership of Jesus needs to be in the praying and discerning life of a Bishop, in order to give momentum and permission to engage our world through the various ministries of our church. The Bishop needs to attend to demanding realities of our times with a confident voice of God's purposes for a world in need. The Bishop ought entrust to the body the mission of the Church, yet never abdicate the responsibilities entrusted in this office.

8. Describe your understanding of Christian spirituality as an Anglican leader

Christ invites us to live by grace, to allow the Spirit of God to both illuminate and empower our servant leadership. The leader shares in the office and vocation of being chief pastor to all and is sustained by the endowment of the Spirit in community. The spirituality of our Anglican heritage is a participation in the living tradition of Jesus Christ in hearing God's word for our community and our world. The leader calls the community to listen and consider its vocation in every season, discerning the gifts and opportunities that are within its life. The leader draws upon the Scripture, the living memory of the church's teaching, the praying practices and disciplines of the community and the discernment of God's Spirit at work in the world. The spirituality of the sanctuary needs to both give life and receive life from the Spirit in the street. The leader invites the world to share at the table of Christ and be transformed by the Spirit of Christ.

9. What are the main challenges facing ministry today?

We need to nurture;

- a confident voice and witness of our faith to strengthen the ministry of the gospel in the wider community. This requires reading the text of scripture within the context of the community, so that in our voice there is neither arrogance nor

naivety, but speaking the truths of Christ with an authentic life in the language of the people.

- a space-making church that allows the wider community to explore their questions with us and to find that they belong as people who work out their faith in Christ.
- a safe church not a fortress where people from all backgrounds know they are truly welcomed, and we are confident in our faith to open our lives to one another.
- a journeying church not a tourist group, where we are open to a pilgrim God, who takes us into uncharted territory with a apostolic heart and teachable spirit.
- a transforming church not a judging courtroom, where Christ is the benchmark of love and forgiveness.

10. Outline the place and shape of baptismal theology in your understanding of church and ministry

Baptism into Christ brings us into a new way of life and a new community. Baptism has the grace of the Spirit enabling every baptised person to exercise their vocation and gifts as part of the people of God. It is the outward sign of our belonging to Christ and the participation in the full life of the church. Our baptism is an indelible sacrament enabling us to be in discipleship and in ministry using the God given talents we have been endowed with, exercising gifts in the church and in society.

11. Will you as Diocesan Bishop personally ordain women and men to the diaconate and priesthood and join with other bishops in ordaining women and men as bishops? If you are a bishop, have you already exercised this ministry?

I was ordained alongside the first women deacons in 1986 in Melbourne. I have ordained men and women to exercise the ministries of deacon and priest. I have appointed women to be in charge of parishes. I have shared in the consecration of three women bishops.

12. How would you build on the foundation of Ministering Communities in Mission in the Diocese of Newcastle?

The Becoming Ministry Communities in Mission model is akin to the ministry development I have nurtured in the Northern Territory among Indigenous and non Indigenous churches over the last 6 years. I have sought to recognise, ordain and commission local leaders who work in teams under the leadership of an experienced well trained priest. I would seek to continue to develop a missiology and ministry practise that works well with the context, resources and gifting that God has provided to each community. I would seek to strengthen this model where it has been fruitful and recalibrate ministry directions where the model has not worked well.

13. What is your training and experience in corporate governance especially with incorporated bodies?

I have undertaken the Australian Institute of Company Director's Course and updated my learning through ongoing workshops as a Member of AICD. At the General Synod level I am a Member of the General Synod Standing Committee, Chair of the Long Service Leave Board as a company director (\$34 M fund), Member of the Aboriginal and Torres St Islander Ministry Task Group, and Member of the National Home Mission Fund. I helped establish Anglicare in the NT in 1989 and now am Chair of Anglicare NT (\$20M+ budget with 300+ staff). I am Deputy Chair of Kormilda College (750 students and boarders with (\$18M+ budget). I have been appointed by the NT Government Treasurer as the Chair of a Council for Business in the NT. I am Chair of the NT Diocesan Council.

14. What is your approach to Diocesan change management and conflict resolution?

Every Diocese is involved in change and conflict and the Bishop is pivotal in establishing effective processes of listening, conversation and governance that enable a way forward through complex considerations with the good of the Diocese and the wellbeing of communities and people as the desired outcome. I have undertaken a 2 year Diocesan wide strategic planning process in the Diocese of the NT enabling an overarching vision, with established values and practises, alongside local missional priorities to be commissioned at Synod and implemented over the last 4 years. I have helped negotiate between Diocesan Registry staff, local clergy and their parishes key property agreements for these communities. I have assisted clergy to carefully discuss changes to parish life with informed conversations with those most affected by change. I have supported Continuing Education Days for clergy to strengthen their change management practises.

15. What are your passions and priorities in ministry? How do you see these connecting with ministry in the Diocese of Newcastle?

I am energised by the warm hearted engagement of parish and organisations in their local community. I enjoy the theological and biblical reflection arising out of the lived experience of faith communities. I am overwhelmed by the generosity of churches that open their lives to people who need our love, support and kindness. I am stimulated by the stories and participation of newcomers who make their home among God's people and so help open our eyes to the Kingdom. I value schools and agencies which strengthen their missional engagement with communities in need. I am encouraged by seeing women, men and children exercise their gifts and passion to share their ministry alongside me. The Diocese of Newcastle has much missional life and ministry that is life giving which resonates with the learnt practises and experience I have received over the last 33 years of Christian ministry in urban, rural and remote contexts. In coming back to where my ministry life began I would hope to strengthen the good, care for the weak and grow a strong healthy open apostolic church in the Diocese. I have much to learn from the faithful and prayerful people of Newcastle and together grow a thriving city and hinterland of faith communities.