



All Saints Day, 1 November 2018

Dear Friends,

There is intense media commentary about possible responses to the yet-to-be released Ruddock Freedom of Religion and Belief Inquiry established by Federal Parliament. This commentary has been intensified in New South Wales given some perspectives articulated from within the Diocese of Sydney.

The focus of the commentary has been on the potential that faith-based schools might choose to discriminate unjustly against students or staff on the basis of gender and/or sexual orientation.

I want to assure students and staff in schools associated with the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle that I do not anticipate any change in the caring and welcoming approach currently in place in each school.

Each part of the Diocese is called to find ways of enabling people to flourish by grace. Our Synod last weekend affirmed expressly the Diocesan commitment to listen, learn and respond to the experience of LGBTIQ+ people.

I quote from Archbishop Aspinall of Brisbane, who has written helpfully in this area, "Central to Christian theology is the conviction that human beings are created in the image of God. Every one of us is loved unconditionally by God and is therefore of infinite value and dignity. Our highest aspiration is that all of our schools will be communities where all students and staff alike see themselves as persons known and loved by God, supported by their whole school community to face the challenges of their journey and to enjoy life in its fullness.

Within the Anglican Church there is a wide spectrum of understanding about human sexuality and gender. Within a school community there may also be diversity of opinion. For some, this is a sensitive topic. However, differences of outlook do not negate the necessity for school environments to enable all people to feel included, to be safe and to flourish.

In February 2017 following a debate in the Church of England General Synod, the Archbishop of Canterbury said, "*There are no problems here, there are simply people. People are made in the image of God. All of us, without exception, are loved and called in Christ. The way forward needs to be about love, joy and celebration of our humanity; of our creation in the image of God, of our belonging to Christ – all of us, without exception, without exclusion.*"

In each school associated with the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle we desire that every person: student, staff and family might be enabled to explore their unique gifts and calling as people created and nurtured by God.

Be assured of my prayers for what remains of the 2018 school year and for all that 2019 will bring.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Dr Peter Stuart
Bishop of Newcastle