

Bishop Ian Coutts
Bishop of the Diocese of Bunbury



Synod Address 2021

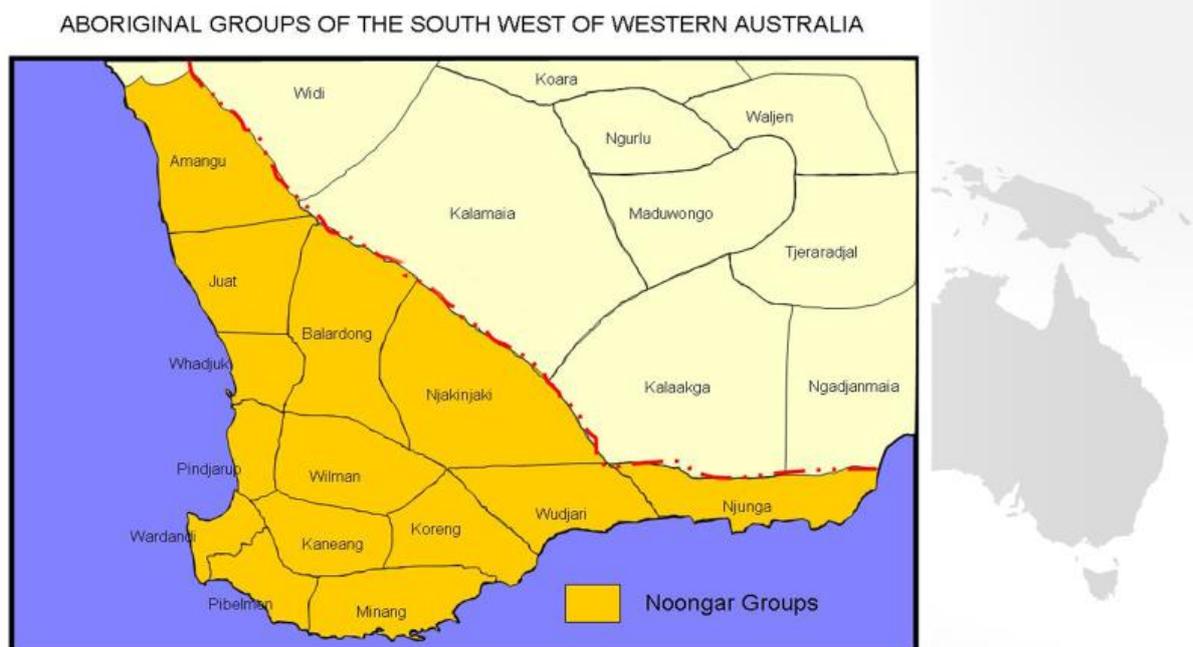
Presented to the Synod of the Diocese gathered at

Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School

8 October 2021

Presidential Address

I begin by acknowledging the Noongar people on whose land we are meeting, and pay my respects to their elders, past present and emerging.



In this address I am going to be naming some names, not shaming, rather the opposite intent, and showing pictures but I will not be able to name all the names or show all the pictures as there is insufficient time to do so. Accordingly, please regard what follows as indicative rather than entirely comprehensive.

This was us, socially distanced, a year ago in the Italian Club!

I would like to thank the Principal, Mr Matthew O'Brien, and his staff for facilitating our return to Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School for this first session of the 41st Synod of the Diocese of Bunbury, on the eve of the school's 50th anniversary. I would also like to acknowledge Matthew who was appointed Principal at the start of this calendar year, and Kathy Chiera who became the Head of Senior School with 22 years plus of service, and Mrs Jenny Nobbs who has recently left after 13 years of being the School Manager but is still assisting the school until her replacement can make it here from over East.

You may have noticed we are still in a Pandemic. I have been so impressed about the care and trouble people have gone to right across the diocese and in our Anglican Schools to adjust to new ways of doing things and in continuing to follow and update Covid safety plans for the safety and benefit of everyone. Peel region, in particular, suffered a couple of shortish lockdowns and we are now on our 31st Covid 19 update since the start of the pandemic. However, we have not had a new update since 31 July, which is the longest gap yet. Moreover, talking with Revd Tracy Laurensen, a Priest in Charge in Gippsland, they have only been able to worship in church now for 2 months in the entire period from March 2020 until now. I was also speaking with a Clergy person in the UK who had seen his 3 congregations of some 200 all up dwindle to 70 post a long lockdown. As one member of Carey Park observed, when I mentioned about Gippsland on Sunday, “we have been very fortunate”.

Perhaps those doing it most tough in our region are the seafarers who bring in and ship out vital goods for our economy, and who, due to Covid, are subject to very long periods away from home and their families and friends. It has made the work of our Albany and Bunbury Missions to Seafarers in facilitating the use of wifi in the ports and bringing on gifts and clothing that much more important.

As a result of Covid, the Deans’ Conference, scheduled to be held here in Bunbury, for two years running, has not taken place other than via Zoom. The Bishops were also unable to meet face to face back in March and despite wishing to hold another meeting this year we will not be able to do so. General Synod had to be cancelled this year for a second successive year, and likewise the Lambeth Conference. Our February Ordination had to be put back by exactly one month, from February to March due to the snap lockdown in Peel and the South West.

With the start of the first session of the 41st Synod, I would like to record my sincere thanks to all the Trustees and members of Bishop in Council who have served throughout or indeed for part of the past 40th Triennium: for your dedication to the diocese, for your sacrifices

of time and travel, for some of you overnight, for your participation in the discussions and decisions, and for your wisdom and advice.

Those thanks also extend to all the members of the sub-committees and working parties: Boniface Care, Finance, the Litigation Sub-Committee, the Ordination Council, the Diocesan Safe Ministry Authority, the Sustainable Living Working Party, the Family Violence Group and the Aboriginal Reconciliation Group. The Mission Council also deserve our thanks and as you will see there is a proposal before this Synod that they might also become a sub-committee of Bishop in Council.

Particular thanks go to Archdeacon Julie for the very considerable role and responsibilities she carries in our diocese. I am indebted to her and to the Dean, as the other member of a currently reduced Exec team, in dealing with an extraordinary range of matters on a weekly and often daily basis. Revd Dr Lucy Morris, too, has shouldered a considerable number of responsibilities as Priest in Charge of St. George's, as an Area Dean, in setting up the Diocesan Safe Ministry Commission and coordinating the Litigation Sub-Committee, the Family Violence and Aboriginal Reconciliation Groups, in running the pre-Synods, and working tirelessly with Tiff to ensure our Safe Church is as safe as it can be whilst trying to comply with what has seemed to be a never ending Safe Church Audit!

We cannot of course, omit mention of Mr Steve Biggar and his nearly 23 years of service to Bunbury diocese. The wonderful messages at his retirement party in July were testament to his servant leadership, care for people, sheer hard work and the prudence with which he conducted being both Diocesan Secretary and Registrar. It is hard to describe just how many things Steve did or knew about. For weeks after his retirement he was still appearing in the diocesan office to help with the audit in August, to make sure the computers were being properly serviced, etc. This photo is of Steve in retirement (he would never have dressed like that in the office pre-retirement) sitting on the floor, trying to work out why we were having difficulties re-filling the staplers for the photocopier. A vital service given how much we use this facility for Synod books, for example! The picture on the right is

of Laura and Tiff trying to work out how to re-start the modem after we had lost telephone connection – something that Steve would usually be all over. The office staff keep compiling lists of new things we discover we need to ask Steve about because he would have unobtrusively dealt with them in the past.

You will be pleased to know that yesterday a panel of Trustees interviewed a candidate for the Diocesan Secretary's post.

It is to Tiff, Laura and Cheryl's credit that they all have stepped up with Steve leaving, in order to ensure all the normal processes and procedures are operating, from pay and stipends, to property and insurance, to preparation for Synod. With 79 paid or stipend staff, payroll, super, parish invoicing, queries alone take up a considerable proportion of Laura's time, let alone dealing with grants, over 7000 payments, transfers and invoices each year. Similarly, Tiff has responsibility for managing the paperwork for 2910 volunteers, and Cheryl assists the Trustees with some 270 properties. All of these positions, of course, are part-time because the office is not personned on Fridays.

One of the difficulties we have been experiencing is an inability for any more than one member of staff to access the database at the same time. This makes it harder for the staff and for the parishes. Consequently, we are about to change to a new database and recruiting a part-time, six month long additional member of staff in order to input all the data, as the team have no capacity at present to do so. This person will also assist Tiff with the mountain of safe church paperwork, and in turn she will be able to relieve some of the current pressure on Laura and enable her to go back to the hours she is supposed to be working.

Canon Carol and Kerrie Forrest continue to come in each Tuesday doing vital archiving, sorting and filing, not to mention Synod preparation and making us cakes. Their assistance is invaluable. This slide has nothing whatsoever to do with the Presidential Address – I simply could not resist including Carol drinking the largest triple shot cup of coffee we have seen.

I would like to pause here and acknowledge the literally thousands of volunteer and lay people who week by week assist in churches, Op shops, Emergency Relief, cleaning, preparing morning teas, sorting, cooking for those who need food, ferrying people, reading the lessons, playing musical instruments, leading worship, preaching, practising hospitality and being kind and considerate towards others.

I am only showing pictures of a few examples, otherwise this would be a very long address but they reflect many more people. This is Naomi Backhouse at Northcliffe, preparing and leading a children's special slot in church each Sunday, or David Swain in Manjimup who meticulously plans the worship and chooses the pre-recorded hymns and worship songs and inserts them in the service PowerPoint, so that all can join in singing on a Saturday night in Manjimup and two services on Sunday in Northcliffe and Pemberton.

Let me give you some other examples: Is Mrs Dollarine Brady here? Dollar has served on the Frederick Irwin School Council for very many years and along with Howard Snow both are retiring. We thank them and all our members of GMAS School Council and the BCGS Board for their time and dedication.

Our Chancellor, the Hon Kevin Prince, is someone who responds, night and day, to my ever-growing list of email queries, about all manner of matters, with witty, analytical, thoughtful and wise advice. But you will also find him mowing the lawns at St John's, Albany or helping Peter Fitzgibbon fixing up a fence to prevent the Revd Karen Cave being woken up by under the influence would-be intruders in the middle of the night.

This is Adrian Price who currently chairs the Sustainable Living Working Party, who is a Shire Councillor, an expert recycler, an LLM regularly leading worship and here ringing the bell for worship at Boyup Brook.

Not shown here but just a couple of other examples would be Marjorie Trott who is not a young lady but can be found singing praises in Secret Harbour church and giving generously of her little to the Foundation for Ministry Fund each time I meet her, and to many other causes. Or

Dr Don Reid, Revd Carol Reid's husband, who is a quiet person but has a powerful and prayerful servant ministry for peace and justice.

The Revd Kevin Toovey, otherwise known as Rev Kev in Wagin, translated from being one of the LLM's to being the deacon in the same church but still has to ring the church bell for the start of the service, play the organ as well as do all the deacon bits in the service.

A number of parishes are doing all this without any clergy or with clergy only able to come once a month or less.

Whilst I am on the subject of thanks, thank you to the very many parishes who have entirely voluntarily paid back the suspended parish assessment from March to June last year.

I would also like to thank the generosity and welcome of so many parishes who have invited Anne and I to celebrations and confirmations, events and meals and indeed on occasions picked one or both of us from a local airport. It is very nice to be greeted in this way. This is Tom Spicer and Revd Lindy at Katanning and Kojnoup, and Revd Esther dropping me back to Albany, and Revd Kevin again, this time providing afternoon tea at Wagin airfield.

On 28 February, we held a Thanksgiving service for Canon George Harvey who was priested in 1969 and served in Ravensthorpe, the Cathedral, Lake Grace, Narrogin, Brunswick, Clarke Street and was also a Police Chaplain. It was special that it was held in Clarke Street, as no service had been held there for a year, due to Canon George's illness and to Covid.

The past year has been a tough one for a number of our clergy and indeed some of our laity, with some significant challenges for them or their partners:

Canon Karon

Revd Paul Bartley

Revd Rodger Bull

Revd Mere Rukuatu

Revd Dennis Caporn

Revd Ann Frost and Ray
 Revd Kevin Hall and Doreen
 Revd Mary Esselmont and Iain
 Revd Justine Richmond and her husband, Tony
 Revd Sally Buckley and her husband, Chris
 Revd Shane Marques and Heidi
 Canon Linley Matthews-Want and Ken
 Revd Harold Lee and Sue with their daughter Therese
 There are others besides...

Retirements

Ms Kerry Roberston, as Principal of Frederick Irwin School, at the end of this year.

We will be welcoming Mrs Tracy Gray

Revd Noel Oakey, after an additional year due to Covid

Canon Bill Byleveld from Secret Harbour and Mission Council

Revd Ann Frost at Pentecost

Revd Cheryl Absalom

Revd Allan Taylor from the Albany Mission to Seafarers

Canon Karon who relinquished Southern Forests on 31.10.20 and retired from Boniface Care as of this Synod. Karon who has had a vision and a drive for the support of people doing it tough right across our diocese and who ensured the distribution of over a third of a million dollars per year for the last two years, not to mention gifts, meals and other services that have assisted thousands of people. Revd Sue Kemp taking over.

Revd Lindy Rookyard has given notice that she will retire next Easter. Lindy will be much missed in Kojonup and Katanning and from Trustees and Bishop in Council.

Our growing number of retirees prompted the Bishops Ministry Advisory Council to see if there was some way we could minister appropriately to this group and Revd Mavis, designated by the office with NRR after her name on correspondence, standing for 'Not Really Retired', has kindly expressed an interest in coordinating the first steps.

Indeed it is thanks to a whole team of 'Not Really Retired' that we have been able to run services and pastoral care in a number of places. Our thanks go to the Revd Sue Lodge-Calvert, Canon Alan Harrison, Revd Mavis herself, Revd Carol Reid, Revd Harold Lee, Revd Dot Bailey, Revd Audrey Payne, Revds Tina and Max Morrison, the Revd Rodger Bull, to Archdeacon Emeritus Brian Newing at Bunbury prison who has also been taking funerals as far away as Manjimup when we have been desperate to find someone to do so. On 30 November this year, fittingly on St. Andrew's Day, the Patron saint of Scotland, the Revd Mary Esselmont will have fulfilled her commitment to Bishop Allan at Ordination, when she was still being treated for cancer, to serve for 10 years.

Although not retired, Revd John Jones' journeys to Bremer Bay, Lake Grace and now, for a time, Southern Forests has also extended our ability to minister and worship in these places, which would be otherwise hard to do. Likewise, Revd Lynda Myres taking on Collie as well as Wickepin, Pingelly and Narrogin, has been of great assistance.

Just as Canon Linley and Revd Jackie Davies travelled to Williams and the Gateway Parish, Revd Ian Mabey has been travelling once a month to support the Christians at Kulin and Hyden. Corrigin.

Deaths

Bishop David whose service in Adelaide Cathedral was relayed to ours, the Rev Ray Colyer, the Revd Graeme Weaver, and the Revd Don Finlay, whose funeral service was on Monday.

New appointments

Revd Sue Kemp became the official Assistant Chaplain Bunbury Regional Prison

Revd Karen Cave was appointed a voluntary Police chaplain in Albany

Revd Lynda Myres was officially recognised on 25 March as the Priest in Charge of Collie as mentioned and only after a year of being there.

Revd James Tabor as School Chaplain at Freddie's 13 May

Canon Linley Matthews-Want became the new Chair of Mission Council and will be addressing us about this at this Synod.

Revd William Thomas at Pinjarra/Waroona, 10 June

Revd Esther Leach as the first ever Palliative Care Chaplain in the Great Southern,

the Revd Paul Watson at Secret Harbour on 12 August

Revd Karen Cave and John Jones as Chaplains to Albany MSF as of 1 September

New Triennium, new Area Deans

The Revd Dr Lucy Morris

The Revd Mavis Tyler

The Revd Lynda Myres

The Revd Karen Cave

Other events

Although I have mentioned a number of things that did not happen this past year due to Covid, it is worth recording a number of events that did occur.

- Mothers Union Country Rally in Mandurah in October
- Most of our normal Christmas events
- Although we had to postpone the Ordination it did take place on 6 March, albeit with 60% Covid capacity. Bishop Jeremy was still willing and able to lead the retreat which was ably hosted at Kojonup.
- New Cathedral Hall, Turning the sod on 6 March and work began on 8 March. Members of the Cathedral have waited decades to have a Hall on site. Here are a few pictures of the work which is almost on schedule to finish on 26 November. Official opening in February or March for which the Governor has been invited.
- Chrism Eucharist at Kojonup
- 1st combined Cursillo at BCGS
- Memorable and moving Clergy Retreat with the Revd Tess Milne
- Lay Retreat has just taken place also at St John of God Retreat centre.
- Bishops Lambeth Conversations

- Refurbishment of St. Paul's Marradong, St Boniface Quindanning,
- Re-ordering of Audio Visual at Oyster Harbour
- Refurbishment of the bells at All Saints Collie in time for the Bicentenary of the Ellacombe Chimes.

Awards

Border Force Award to Bunbury Mission to Seafarers for their collaborative work with Border Force, and this week they were also commended by the International Human Rights at Se for the work they have done on establishing a Port Welfare Committee.

AM for Hon Murray Montgomery and OAM for Revd Pam Halbert. Some of the wine for tonight's Synod meal is the last case of Montgomery red we have so please enjoy it.

Ven Brian Newing and Revd Sue Kemp mentioned in dispatches by Revd Alan Harrison and the CCWA for keeping the prison chaplaincy afloat at Bunbury Prison when there was a severe shortage of chaplains from other denominations.

Shire Awards for the contribution that Cliff's kitchen and Manna and Mercy make to Busselton and Dunsborough communities respectively.

Revd Karen Cave drew praise for the session she ran on Self-Care for Police Officers in Charge in the Great Southern

The Masterbuilders' Award for the Best Office in the South West, awarded to our diocesan office, just a fortnight ago.

Some other events

1. The Royal Commission recommended that clergy should receive a defined number of hours of Ministry Development training each year, regular Professional Supervision and Annual Reviews. Bunbury Diocese has been trialling these for the entire Australian Anglican Church this year with all our stipended clergy (other than school chaplains).

2. For our own internal purposes we have been trialling the Diocese of Bendigo *Australis* training for ordinands, particularly more mature candidates.
3. The Voluntary Assisted Dying Act came into force on 1 July 2021.
4. LLM training and the work that Archdeacon Julie and Canon Geoff Chadwick have done
5. The thinning out and sale occurred of our forest in Dingup.
6. We have renewed MOU with Kapsabet Diocese for another 5 years
7. Our covenant and connection with the Maori Diocese
8. The Aboriginal Reconciliation Group has got off the ground and the Sustainable Living Working Party has been carefully beavering away.
9. The Anglican Church conducted the first research of any denomination in Australia into family violence and has produced 10 Commitments which the Standing Committee of the ACA is encouraging all dioceses to adopt. Bishop in Council decided that it would not try to bring this to Synod this year but instead will do some work on this with the intention of doing so next year. The full report is available on the ACA Website and I have a copy of the 10 Commitments themselves for everyone available at the back.

As I explained in the pre-Synods, Covid has caused us to think about what it means to be Church. How do we worship, minister pastorally and conduct mission when our church buildings and Op shops are shut? We face the real possibility that could recur. Whether that happens or not we still face questions about how do we do all this in a world that is often hurting and when we know we lack numbers or energy or youth, when we feel fatigued or few or marginalised? What do we have to offer? How can we make a difference? Can we even survive? Hugh Ryder's story in this month's *To The People* is instructive. He had the notion of starting a Community Hub with counselling, computer skills, community garden, repair café, art and craft and music and teas, at Carey Park, but wondered how it would work in a small church with lots of seniors. At their Christmas Carol service, he felt God saying to him: 'You have everything you need!'

We have launched our diocesan Vision and Strategy: 'To be God's Church in God's world.' I will be sharing further about this tomorrow. In the Lambeth Bishops' conversations going on at the moment, in a video in the session last Wednesday about being Salt and Light in the world Bishop Mary from North America observed she is much more effective in being Salt and Light when her prayer life is good and she is soaking in God's love and power. It is for this reason that our first Strategy is to deepen and grow our prayerfulness as individuals, groups and churches.

On 21 December we had the opportunity to witness an historic event. If you can see the tiny dot of light at the top middle of the screen that was the great conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. They are the two biggest planets in our galaxy and were only 0.1 degrees apart. Known as the Christmas Star this conjunction takes place every 20 years but this was the closest since 1623 and the closest observable since 1226. The next reasonably close conjunction will not take place until March 15, 2080. I should point out that although they appeared as one dot of light to the naked eye on Back Beach here in Bunbury they were in fact 729 million kilometres apart and Jupiter is almost the same distance from our Earth. I mention this because we believe that the God who created the heavens and the earth is the same God whose power and love we are relying upon. We had a visit from dear friends from Canberra this year who originally came from WA and who were back visiting family and friends at a time when we were letting them in! He is retired Professor Ken Freeman who has part of a Nobel Prize for discovering dark matter, thought to be one of the major constituents of the known universe. He is also a Christian who has no problem in believing God created this universe. It is this God that we are turning to in prayer and relying upon in order to minister to God's world. In the past week in Morning Prayer we have also heard the story of Elijah who thought he was the only person left believing in God, and yet God ministers to him and encourages him, and reassures him that he is by no means alone – there are in fact thousands of others besides him.

I finish with an entirely different slide – this time of clergy hoovering!