

AASN CONFERENCE 2008

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

22 AUGUST 2008

OPENING COMMENTS

Welcome to the 2008 Conference of the Australian Anglican Schools Network. I'd like to commence by acknowledging the Noongar people, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today. As you take your next step, remember the Aboriginal people who first walked this land.

It's wonderful to have so many delegates and accompanying persons at the conference, coming from all states, representing 108 schools and Anglican organisations. It's great to have Fr Davidson Nwaeromo from the Solomon Islands again with us this year, and Mr Ketut Budarma from Indonesia also joining us. Fr Davidson is a partner in mission and education with Shore School Sydney and Perth College, and Mr Budarma with John Septimus Roe Anglican Community School here in Perth. I also welcome those who are not connected with Anglican schools but share a common mission with us.

This year we're holding the conference in a hotel for the first time. This change came about by the proposed closing of the Observation City Hotel at Scarborough Beach, near St Mary's Anglican Girls School which was our original conference venue. The hotel was going to house our conference delegates.

The organising committee took the decision to move to a central hotel location, enabling easy access to the city, the Cathedral, other accommodation options and even a short walk down to our beautiful Swan River! The host state is responsible for choosing the venue, and future conferences may be in a combination of schools and hotels, whichever best suits the local circumstance. We hope that you appreciate the convenience of everything within easy walking distance of the Duxton.

THEME

The Perth-based Conference Committee has chosen the theme of FAITH IN ACTION with a sub-theme of LIVING THE GOSPEL IN ANGLICAN SCHOOLS.

"My friends, what good is it to say that you have faith, when you don't do anything to show that you really do have faith?"

So wrote the apostle James to Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire in the first century.

Anglican schools are places where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed in word and deed. It's been said that our task is to proclaim the Gospel boldly, and use words if absolutely necessary! Well, words certainly have their place, and there will be thousands of them spoken over the next two days. But for many in our schools, it's what we do and how we do it, rather than what we say and how we say it, that will make Christ real to them.

Our schools have a proud history of 'acting the faith', living out what we believe. We've seen community service programs as essential components of an Anglican education long before governments mandated that community service must be part of a modern curriculum. Men and women have voluntarily served on our school councils, governing with integrity, diligence and faith.

As Christian leaders, Principals, Chaplains and other senior staff live the gospel in their school communities every day.

Our conference program picks up the various strands of 'Faith in Action' through a first-rate group of keynote speakers and workshop presentations. It's a special joy to welcome from overseas.... The Reverend Dan Heischman from the USA; Dr Trevor Cooling from the UK ; The Reverend Roly Bain also from the UK; and WA locals Michael Chaney , Estelle Blackburn, Archbishop Roger Herft, Bishop Mark Burton and our own Phillip Heath, Rick Tudor and Theresa Ardler as they challenge us to reflect on how we live out the faith in and through Anglican schools in whatever role we may play. We welcome each of you.

HISTORY OF AASN

Speaking of Phillip, I've asked him as the founding President of AASN, to write a short history of our Network, as this year we celebrate being one decade old. Phil's kindly agreed to do this over the coming months. It's important that we record our journey to where we are today... for two reasons... firstly, because as people change and move on, the corporate memory is lost; and secondly, because our schooling agenda is changing at an unprecedented pace, driven at the Federal level by our politicians.

What we knew in the past quite simply may not be recognisable in the future.

There are now almost 170 Anglican schools in Australia, educating over 130,000 students. Anglican schools represent approximately 5% of the school sector Australia-wide.

This places Anglican schools as the third largest collective of schools in Australia, after the government and Catholic sectors; government schools representing over 60% and Catholic schools approximately 20%. But what of us Anglicans – post GAFCON and Lambeth? Is our Church a communion? Are our schools a sector? I won't venture into answering the first question.... that's the domain of our bishops and others. But to the second question "As Anglican schools, are we a sector?", I feel that the answer is 'Yes and No'! In some ways 'yes we are', in others 'no we are not'.

The great tradition of Anglican schooling in Australia, formally dating back almost 200 years, has been built on the 'unique' feature of our Anglican Church origins – that of 'local governance'. Whether it's the parish, diocese or school, authority rests at the local level. This approach contrasts with the development of government and Catholic schooling in Australia, both of which are more 'centralised' and 'organised' in their establishment and operation of schools. You can contrast papal authority with Anglican diocesan or parochial authority, and you get the picture!

This 'unique' approach to schooling adopted by the Anglican Church (either intentionally or unintentionally) is arguably both our greatest strength and our greatest limitation, in these days of 'New Federalism'.

LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Most School Councils and Principals would rightly believe that the ability for Anglican schools to be governed at the local school level is one of the key reasons for them becoming schools of excellence. Decision-making, from curriculum to staffing and finance, has been locally focused. Large bureaucracies haven't focused the control of these issues centrally. Principals can 'hire' the best staff to suit local needs. Fiscal responsibility is taken seriously by school governors, who know that the fate of the school rests on their good policy-making.

Contrast this with each state's Education Department bureaucracy, which controls staffing, finances, curriculum and policy development. The Catholic Education Offices in each state are not greatly different to this either, although somewhat more authority rests at the local level.

Arguably, it's very good for an Anglican school to be locally governed. But are there any downsides?

History would suggest that, whilst Anglican schools pre-date Catholic schools in Australia, the Anglican Church has been 'left behind' by its Catholic counterparts in the development of faith-based schools. Indeed, Anglican schools pre-date state education also, as church and state lacked separation in the early colonial days.

One viewpoint as to why the Catholic Church has ten times our number of schools in Australia is that, whilst local governance will usually ensure a strong school at the local level, its focus will naturally always be predominantly 'local'. That's not to say that students aren't encouraged to look 'beyond the school gate' towards their community and society, through excellent service programs and the like, but resources will and must be directed inwards rather than outwards.

So whilst the Catholic Church has grown approximately 1700 schools throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and continues to do so into the 21st century, our Anglican Church has only managed to develop just under 10% of that number in 200 years, even when throughout this time official census figures suggested that between 25% and the overwhelming majority of the Australian population have called themselves 'Anglican' or 'C of E'.

Now it's not for me to address the rights or wrongs of the way Anglican schooling has or hasn't developed in Australia since 1788! Nor will I enter the debate about external factors such as government funding policies of the day which have affected school development. These issues are well documented elsewhere. Rather, I'd like to focus our minds for a minute as Anglican school leaders on where we find ourselves today and how best to position ourselves for the future.

20TH CENTURY AUSTRALIA

It would be fair to say that 'The Church' – represented by our Bishops, Synods and Parochial Councils - and 'The Schools' – represented by School Councils, Principals, parent communities and staff - have not always and do not always share a common understanding in relation to the mission and purpose of Anglican schools. For example, whilst Bishops may

see the role of Anglican schools in one light, School Councils and Principals may share different views. These differences are often most magnified in the area of Christian mission and purpose, funding, fee accessibility and new school development.

Our annual Conference has provided an invaluable forum in recent years for creative informal conversations to be 'had' over such issues, with Bishops, General Secretaries and other church leaders engaging with governors, Principals, Chaplains and other school leaders, and we value that greatly.

A clear example of the 'creative tensions' that exist in this regard is no more clearly evidenced than in the attempted creation of our very Network. It took some ten to fifteen years of meeting, discussion, debate and argument (together with prayer, grace, faith and hope) to see sufficient agreement to establish the AASN. And now, ten years down the track, we have matured into a collegial body which provides a growing role for our Church in schooling.

Our terms of reference are limited to what's called in our Constitution the 'Purpose' of AASN:

The Network, giving honour to God, putting God first and working within God's will, seeks to:

- 3.1 Provide a forum at National level for Anglican schools to facilitate discussion particularly on spiritual, moral and values related issues as they have a bearing on education.
- 3.2 Be an effective network of General Synod of the Anglican Church
- 3.3 Achieve recognition of Anglican Schools as part of the mission of the Anglican Church.
- 3.4 Be a forward-looking, dynamic organisation aiming to develop a strong unity of purpose among Anglican Schools.
- 3.5 Report to General Synod on major matters discussed at the Network.

In the end, the AASN Constitution was framed so that it made our Network a means by which colleagues could meet in Conference or undertake the occasional collective activity which would be of mutual benefit, such as the Chaplaincy Shadowing Program and Travelling Scholar Program. Reports on both of these initiatives will be given later today at the AGM. Ten years ago when our Constitution was framed, we weren't positioned to engage with government and 'government funding' was off our agenda.

Such an approach was based on 'the Anglican way' of local governance. We operated by the general 'unspoken and unwritten' understanding of schools' governing bodies that "no-one is going to tell us what to do"! And rightly so! In reality, that 'no-one' has extended to the AASN and to some extent the Diocesan Bishop, government and beyond. After all, we are 'independent schools' and proudly so!

THE REALITY OF 21ST CENTURY AUSTRALIA

The last decade has seen major changes in the way government 'governs' in Australia. The world is now viewed as a 'global economy', borders seem somewhat meaningless, and there's even a strong push in Australia for traditionally held 'State' responsibilities such as education to become federal ones. It's happening right now; it's driven by our Prime Minister and Deputy PM, and will continue to happen at an ever-rapid pace. The only point for debate is the **extent** to which states hand over their traditionally held domains – partly, substantially or wholly.

The level of government intervention into non-government education, with increased accountability requirements by schools, has meant that the world of schooling in Australia has and is changing rapidly. Government no longer hands out substantial funding and lets us 'do what we will', with minimal accountability. Good local governance in our schools meant that this model worked extremely well on the whole in the past, enabling Anglican schools to become known as the finest educators of young Australians.

The reality of government modus operandi today is that the Anglican Church is not set up to engage with government effectively to contribute to the setting of the future educational agenda. We are being driven largely by the needs of the government and Catholic school sectors, both of which are structured to engage with government effectively and efficiently, at both the state and federal levels.

GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION

The Federal Minister for Education, together with senior officers from DEEWR, wish to engage with all school sectors in the shaping of policy that will impact greatly on our schools. More often than not today, their level of engagement is by spending a few hours around a table in Canberra, 'consulting' with all key stakeholders as they see it. At such meetings, as well as state and Catholic representation, there are people who can speak on behalf of the Lutherans, Seventh Day Adventists, Christian schools and even Montessori and Rudolf Steiner schools, but we Anglicans effectively have no ability to influence policy except as best as the President can speak within the limitations of our Network's purposes.

There are numerous occasions in a year when the Federal Government engages with key schooling stakeholders, and we Anglicans are simply 'missing in action'. Some recent examples include:

- The whole 'values' debate and the development of a values framework for schools
- The future direction of Indigenous Education
- The Chaplaincy in Schools program
- The Assessment and Reporting Debate
- Curriculum reform
- Funding – both recurrent and special project funding, such as students with disabilities and indigenous needs
- National Standards for Year 12
- A common school starting age across the nation
- And the list goes on

We may have the third largest enrolment base in Australia, but our Anglican schools are missing out in many ways on consultation at the national level with regards policy development, because there's no clear channel for communication. Consultation and communication is achievable for DEEWR or a Minister when they can speak to one person on behalf of 'Catholic Education' or 'Lutheran Education' and get some broad position on an issue.

On most issues, the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) is an outstanding representative of our sector. We should do all we can to support this key role of ISCA. But there are some matters about which Anglican schools should have a distinctive voice. We can be assured that the Catholics and other denominations and religious groupings do.

A WAY FORWARD

Over the next twelve months, the Management Committee wants to explore how AASN may or may not be able to position ourselves to play some role in engaging with the Federal Government as a voice in support of Anglican schooling. In so doing, we mustn't lose sight of the very strength of Anglican schooling being based on local governance. Any attempt by the Federal Government, National Church, the AASN or any other entity to erode this governance base will likely be met with strong resistance, and this is rightly so and a good thing! We also mustn't do anything which will erode the good work of ISCA as the independent schools' prime voice with government.

However, there are many Anglicans who believe that we must address the issue of effective representation and engagement with government (most especially at the federal level) and put in place appropriate structures to allow this to occur. It would seem logical that the AASN is an appropriate means to achieve this, but under our current terms of reference, we're largely prevented from such engagement. All other schooling groups have a means for effective engagement with Canberra. I put the question to you... Is there a means by which we can influence policy as Anglican schools, yet retain our valued independence and local governance?

During the coming year, members will be asked to consider this matter carefully, discuss it around your state, and when we gather in Adelaide at next year's conference, be in a position to give direction to our Management Committee on this matter.

Anglican schools are as diverse as the Church itself. We come in all shapes and sizes, from large to small, single sex to co-educational, old to young, high fee to mid and low fee. Governance structures include Diocesan owned, order owned, system-owned and independently owned. Acknowledging this diversity, the Anglican Church, with a long and proud history of quality schooling in Australia, must position itself to appropriately engage with government to ensure that our voice is heard and our interests are represented. I look forward to dialoguing with you on this matter during the conference and over the coming months.

ACTIVITIES OF AASN THIS YEAR

So what's been happening – AASN-wise – since we gathered at Trinity Grammar School in Melbourne one year ago?

We've been involved in two major projects outside our annual Conference. Firstly, the Chaplaincy Shadowing Program has continued to operate, under the watchful eye and prayerful heart of The Reverend John Jenner. This year saw the 4th group of Chaplains participate in the program, with 8 pairs spending a week in one another's school. This program is an important initiative of the network and we'll be reviewing it to see if it's the best way for AASN to use our resources to support the ministry of Chaplains in our schools.

At this point I would like to introduce our Conference Chaplains, The Reverend Gerry Nixon and The Reverend Toby Sherring. They will minister to us through the liturgies and are also available to speak with you during the Conference.

A new initiative of the Network is the Travelling Scholar Program. Our inaugural Travelling Scholar is Dr Trevor Cooling. Trevor is known to many of us, after being a keynote speaker at the 2005 Launceston Conference. It's great to have you back with us Trevor, and we look forward to your keynote session tomorrow. The Travelling Scholar Program kicks off here in Perth on Tuesday, then Trevor heads around the country over the next month, to Adelaide, Hobart and Launceston, Melbourne, Brisbane and the Gold Coast, and finishing in Sydney. We look forward to hearing of the good things that come from our first 'travelling scholar' visiting member schools.

On a number of occasions over the past year, either Peta Smith or I have represented the Network at national meetings facilitated by DEEWR or ISCA. It's important that we have a presence on such occasions.

Next year, we're looking at having a week designated in the Australian Anglican Church calendar in which all schools 'celebrate their ministry as Anglican schools'. We envisage all parishes being advised of this week and being encouraged to pray at this time for the work and ministry of Anglican schools. Through Dr David Cole, Senior Chaplain at Overnewton Anglican Community College and a member of the Management Committee, AASN will produce some liturgical suggestions for use in schools. The Primate has given his endorsement of this project. We'll be liaising with the Primate's office in this regard and I hope to advise schools in the next few months of the proposed date for this common week of celebration. We've borrowed the idea from our Episcopalian friends – so thanks Dan for not copyrighting it! Fr David will be talking to this proposal at the AGM this afternoon.

One of the areas in which many member schools are keen to make a contribution is that of indigenous education. There is an unprecedented focus in the area by our national and state governments, with all parties desiring better educational outcomes for indigenous children and youth. Anglican schools have given leadership in this area at the local level in a number of instances. We'll hear of St Andrew's Cathedral School's and Trinity Grammar School's work in this area tomorrow. Yet we know that there's so much more that can and needs to be achieved. The Network proposes to undertake some research into what is happening across schools and present those findings at next year's Conference, with the aim of considering 'where to from here'. Dr Tim Wright, Headmaster of Shore School and a

member of the Management Committee will also be talking to this proposal at the AGM this afternoon.

THANKS

Finally, I'd like to acknowledge the work of Peta Smith, who stepped down as President and Executive Officer in early March. Peta was a fine servant of the Network, acting as our Executive Officer for a number of years. She also served as President-Elect and then President for six months. I thank Peta for her contribution to AASN.

Dawn Andersen, who served as Peta's PA and our part-time Administration Officer, stepped down from the role at the end of June to pursue other professional opportunities. Both Peta and Dawn supported the work of the Network from the Brisbane Anglican Schools Office. AASN owes a debt of gratitude to the Brisbane office who has provided the secretariat for the Network since our foundation ten years ago. Recently the Management Committee took the decision to move the national office to Perth. I welcome Jan Kaye as our new Executive Officer and Rachel Fitzgerald as our Administration Officer. These roles are very much part-time, with both Jan and Rachel working at the WA Anglican Schools Commission.

Stephen Norris, Headmaster of Launceston Church Grammar School and our 2005 Conference Chair agreed to take on the role of Acting President-Elect earlier this year. At the AGM later today, Stephen's name will go forward for the substantive position of President-Elect and I encourage the meeting to support the Management Committee's nomination of Stephen.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Speaking of the Management Committee, I'd like to sincerely thank all the members of the hard-working Management Committee. The Management Committee has met six times since the last Conference – three face-to-face meetings (one being here in Perth yesterday) and three teleconferences.

I ask them to stand as we recognise them:

Stephen Norris, Acting President-Elect

Lynne Thomson, Immediate Past President

Our state representatives:

John Fradgley, Queensland

Tim Wright, NSW

Stephen Higgs, Victoria

Philip Grutzner from South Australia is not here

Anne Ford from Western Australia who is also not able to be with us today

David Cole, Chaplain

CLOSING COMMENT

The apostle James wrote in the second chapter of his Letter to the early Church...

“Faith that doesn’t lead us to do good deeds is all alone and dead!”

My prayer is that this conference will show that Anglican school communities across Australia are neither alone nor dead. Through the Network we are connected and engaged in a common purpose. I hope that you find this conference a time of good fellowship, challenge and inspiration. Friends, in the spirit of our ‘action movie’ theme, and as the Beijing Games draw to an end, ‘Lights, Camera, Action’... let our Conference begin! Welcome.