

# ONSLow ANGLICANS: THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

## Introduction

1. Here at Onslow Anglicans, we have much for which to thank God. We have a community in which we can work, individually and collectively, to deepen and strengthen our Christian faith. We have buildings and other assets in which we can worship, socialize together, and relate to the local community. We are especially fortunate in having each other, that sense of a spiritual family that binds us together and gives us the opportunity to support one another in a time of need. With Rosie's leadership and guidance, we have largely healed and put behind us the divisions and disagreements of the past and are learning to cope better with any differences we may have from time to time.
2. We also have some real challenges we need to face. Some are longstanding, and some have only revealed themselves more recently. Vestry has agreed that these challenges are serious enough that we should reconstitute ourselves into an intentional discipling leadership group in which, through study, reflection and prayer, we will seek to discern God's will in meeting these challenges.
3. Vestry cannot, nor should we, try to do this without your help and input. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to stimulate discussion and provoke some ideas which we can build on as part of this process.

## The Challenges

4. Any human institution faces challenges – this is inherent in being human. Normally, and especially if we are adaptable, we can take such challenges in our stride and deal with them quickly. At other times, the challenges can mount up and feel very large – almost insurmountable. However, with God's help these can be met head on as well. This paper makes no attempt to list all the issues we have as a Parish, but rather identifies four key challenges we need to address.
  - A. **Demographic**
5. Like much of the Anglican Church in this country, the profile of people attending our church is aging. We have a large bulge in the older age groups and then a smattering of people through various younger adult age groups, and a small number of children. Young adults and later teens are obvious by their relative scarcity. There is nothing wrong with growing old (some would say it is better than the alternative), but a healthy Parish maintains a balance. We are also overwhelmingly Pakeha and have a ratio of about 70% female to 30% male (with apologies to anyone who identifies as neither).
6. Perhaps even more seriously, we are not replacing those who leave or pass on with sufficient numbers of others to stop our numbers declining, let alone to generate some growth. Growth in numbers is not the be all and end all, but we are charged as Christians to

help build the Kingdom of God. Putting it bluntly, if these trends continue, the Parish will die. We have a choice therefore: do we allow this to continue – and seek to “die” well; or do we attempt to change things? Vestry is strongly of the view that we should try, but this will require effort and a willingness to change from all of us if we are to continue to shine an Anglican light for Christ in Ngaio and Khandallah.

#### B. Stress

7. Partly as a result of declining numbers, there is evidence of stress and burnout in the community. There are fewer people to take on the tasks that are required if we are to keep the Parish operating well. As an example of this, those on the roster find their names coming around more and more often, and at times there are gaps that cannot be filled. From time to time, people need to stand back from more active roles as they experience burnout.
8. A particular but critical example of this, is the burden we place on our Priest-in-Charge. Rosie is only supposed to work half-time, but the reality is that, while her stipend may be at the 50% rate, her hours are closer to 100% or more. This is simply not sustainable, but we have yet to find a way to stop, or at least reduce, this level of overwork.

#### C. Financial

9. We are not here to generate great sums of money, but furthering God’s Kingdom does require resources. There has been a long-run decline in the level of giving (again impacted no doubt by our numbers), and this was only halted in the last couple of years through considerable efforts and generosity. Substantial control of expenditure has been necessary to keep us afloat. Even then we have relied heavily on rental income from BHK’s use of the lower floor of the hall, and from the leasing of the All Saints’ Vicarage.
10. Earlier this year, it became clear that despite considerable efforts to prevent this from happening, the closure of Box Hill Kids had become unavoidable. With the level of BHK debt outstanding and the costs of closure, the combined net liquid assets of the Parish and Box Hill Close Trust were cut from around \$300,000 before closure to around \$90,000, most of which resides in the Trust. This leaves very little flexibility for us to come and go on, and any event with a significant financial impact could easily bankrupt us. Some special factors are helping us to maintain activity in the short run, but these will not last.
11. In due course we may be able to rent out the lower hall for some – probably significantly lower – level of income; and one day the sale of All Saints may happen and possibly give us a capital base on which to derive some interest income over and above what we will lose from renting the former Vicarage and drawing income from the use of the tower for telecommunications purposes. However, the reality is that we cannot and should not rely on such income. Realistically, an improvement in our financial position and performance is only likely to come from increasing the numbers of parishioners.

#### D. Missional

12. We do know that Parishioners do a great deal of community and charitable work on an individual basis. Over time, the Parish and its predecessors have also done a great deal of missional work in the wider community and overseas. In more recent times, the extent of corporate missional outreach has reduced as available resources (human and financial) have diminished. Those that remained, for example Box Hill Kids and Kotahitanga, have tended to see a loosening of their connection to the Parish, and of course BHK no longer exists.
13. Our vision as a Parish is “To be a welcoming, loving, faith-filled presence: doing God’s work in our Onslow community and beyond.” Clearly, there is some way to go to achieve this ambition. Without outreach to the community, it is also very difficult to achieve growth in

Parish attendance. Such missional work is also an important way of deepening our faith.

## Conclusion

14. This discussion paper has identified four key challenges facing the Parish. Obviously, these challenges are not entirely independent – there are connections between them. The brutal, underlying reality is that continued decline in the Parish roll would make these challenges even more difficult to overcome. Vestry believes that now is the time to face up to these issues seriously, and prayerfully to seek God’s guidance on how we should tackle them. Judging from comments made recently by Bishop Justin (see Appendix), the task is far from impossible, and God will walk with us on our journey.

## Questions

1. Do Parishioners agree that the issues identified in this paper are key challenges for the Parish to tackle?
2. What other matters, if any, are important for us to focus on?
3. What ideas do you have that might help us to make progress on these challenges?

## APPENDIX: NOTES ON BISHOP JUSTIN'S COMMENTS AT RECENT PRE-SYNOD REGIONAL FORUMS

There is real growth in the diocese:

- 40% in Whanganui in 2 years
- Bishop's new-planted St Peter's church now 28 +11 kids at 5 pm, half previously unchurched
- 150 youth now attending cathedral youth service on Sunday evenings. The majority of these people previously did not attend church at all.
- Wairarapa 8 to 52 in 2 years
- Naenae (13 parishioners and 80 yr-old warden) to ~50
- Etc.

Key features of growth - common in all mission units that are growing:

- Willingness to change (20% change in practice but no idols – i.e. nothing should be untouchable)
- Leadership and Parish must be prepared to have the hard conversations (addressing the dysfunctional elements)
- People actively taking note of their culture (I want, to God wants; I need, to we need: We need, to those not coming to church need)
- Stop trying to do everything - the 2 key focuses, not 50 things done badly.
- Gathering teams to lead change, with a formational and discipleship element
- Vestry has to be aligned and onboard - primarily discipleship communities that do governance.
- Prayer - renewing our Parish and beginning with the Vestry
- Realization by leadership that on a lifelong learning journey - we don't know enough
- Corporate daily prayer (this took +Justin by surprise!)
- An expectation that a transformative God would be turning up in this process - not lukewarm but white-hot in our faith.

3 Categories of parish/congregation:

- If growing, stay humble; if blessed, bless others (e.g. church planting)
- If not growing, why not? Do you have the stomach to change?
- So small, that lack enough representation to recover: if so, die well, so something else in the future can grow. Leave a legacy of blessings. (This category less than 10% of mission units).