

An Excerpt from the Presidential Address to the Second Session of the 40th Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Gippsland: St Paul's Anglican Grammar School, Warragul

If ever a people had cause to call others to repent, it is the First Peoples of this land.

Instead, the Statement from the Heart reaches out with grace, as expressed in the prayer recently composed by NATSIAC (the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council), which begins:

God who listens, open our hearts to hear the gentle invitation of those without a voice;
placeless and dispossessed of all that was theirs, instead of anger, revenge or blame,
they offer in their open hand absurd generosity,
an act of transformational forgiveness from the centre of their being to ours ...

Redemption is an act of absurd generosity: the Creator of all being bound in time and place by human flesh to absorb the anger, revenge, and blame of humankind – an act of transformational forgiveness from the centre of God's being to ours.

In the forthcoming referendum, we are being invited to participate in the redemption of this nation's original sin, and the creation of a new chapter in our history in keeping with the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us (2 Cor 5:18-19).

The Statement from Heart concludes: 'In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.'

Is saying 'yes' to that invitation risky? Some would have us believe so. Yet creation and redemption are risky enterprises.

In 2016, our Synod adopted a motion on Constitutional Recognition put forward by The Revd Sathi Anthony, seconded by Archdeacon Emeritus Philip Muston, which read:

That this Synod urges the Federal Government to work with Aboriginal communities to ensure the recognition, without delay, in the Australian Constitution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as Australia's First People to be presented to and agreed by the Australian people at referendum.

Seven years on, such a moment is before us. In keeping with this year's Synod motion calling us to prepare for same, Canon Aunty Phyllis Andy and The Revd Kathy Dalton will join me in co-hosting a webinar featuring Wiradjuri man, Canon Associate Professor Glenn Loughrey, during NAIDOC Week in July. Details are on the diocesan website (www.gippslandanglicans.org.au). I urge Synod members to attend, and to invite others to do so.

Readers of *The Gippsland Anglican* will be in no doubt about my own views. I hope you will read many views, hear many voices on this topic, including each other's here. Read the study guide [*A Voice in the Wilderness*] in your packs, featuring Glenn's artwork and generously donated by ABM. Read what Indigenous leaders have to say – opinions that differ, as we should expect.

Above all, read the Statement from the Heart; and then read your own heart. Listen for the voice of Holy Spirit in you, and in the churches, and in the stirring of a nation's conscience.

It is not my place – nor anyone's – to tell you how to vote. Suffice to say that as Christians, let it not be fear that drives us. Rather, let it be our openness to absurd generosity, to transformational forgiveness from the heart of God, and the heart of this land.

+Richard Gippsland, 20 May 2023