

Synod , the Diocese, New Cranmer, and VAT.

Philip Nicholls, VAT Treasurer, quoting heavily from the Revd Dr Peter Adam.

Peter Adam trained for ministry at Ridley College and was ordained in St Paul's Cathedral Melbourne in 1970. He completed his Bachelor of Divinity at King's College London, and gained his Master of Theology at Durham University, where he also gained his Doctor of Philosophy in systematic theology. After serving twenty years as Vicar of St Jude's Carlton, he was appointed Principal of Ridley Melbourne and was later awarded an OAM for his service to the Anglican Church and to theological education.

Peter has spoken at preaching training conferences, and Bible and missionary conventions throughout Australia, and in England, Scotland, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Switzerland, New Zealand, Singapore, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Canada, and USA. He is a former President of the New Cranmer Society, a parallel organisation to VAT, which is distinguished from VAT by its partnership with organisations such as EFAC and GAFCON, which VAT opposes.

Peter is an outstanding Melbourne Anglican, whose article on the importance of Synod and the diocesan structures I quote here almost in full, to show how close the New Cranmer Society and VAT are, but to note also that the main divisions between the two organisations are issues of gender and sexuality. Put plainly, those who advocate for a literal interpretation of (certain translations and sections of) the Bible, cannot countenance intimacy between homosexuals: many hold the mistaken view that homosexuals are welcome fully to live out their faith in the Lord Jesus, but they may not have sex. I believe that many members of VAT remain focussed not on the sexual practices of members of the church but on justice and inclusion.

Whilst I acknowledge the genuine injustice and discrimination the Church continues to meet out to the LGBTIQ+ community by not welcoming them fully into the quasi sacraments of the Church (especially Marriage), these matters have become extremely polarising at recent synods. I encourage members of Synod privately to assent to this acknowledgement, prayerfully consider what might be done in future to undo this injustice and discrimination, and to get on with disagreeing with some and agreeing with others, all whilst taking their part in shaping the future of the Church at our Synod.

Peter writes:

'We should be concerned about long-term gospel growth, reformation, and more effective ministry throughout the Diocese. Participation in Synod is one way to work together to achieve these goals. Synod passes laws, votes on motions, determines priorities, elects people to committees, and elects the Archbishop.'

'Although we cannot all be active throughout the year in serving on committees, we should go to Synod and vote to support our brothers and sisters who are able to do so, and elect others to join them. If you are a member of Synod, then your membership brings spiritual responsibility and accountability to God. Non-participation is a definite act which has consequences. We tend to underestimate the significance of sins of omission, of things we don't do, but they are significant.'

‘We are all gradually growing in holiness, or growing in ungodliness. This is true of each believer, of each minister, of each church, of each Christian organisation, of each Christian school, and it is true of each Diocese. The larger the organisation, the slower it is to change, either in growth in holiness, or in ungodliness.’

‘Many people find Synod hard to engage with, and hard to participate in. If you do not know people, you do not know who to vote for.’

Philip writing here. In his article, Peter encourages readers to join and engage with the New Cranmer Society. I encourage you to visit New Cranmer’s website and read their material. I know some people are members of both New Cranmer and VAT. The reason I would not join New Cranmer is that I cannot say that I am in favour of seeking to prohibit the ‘life in abundance’ that Jesus Christ gave to us all, and that, I argue, is what telling homosexuals not to have sex does. Doubtless, others have more nuanced views. VAT and the Synod Working Group (with whom we partner) will help you get to know people, and offer you advice on how to vote at Synod.

Peter continues:

‘I encourage clergy to get involved in at least one committee in the Diocese or in Synod. I encourage ministers to find suitable lay people to stand for Synod and so get involved in the Diocese. Lay people also have a responsibility for the welfare and spiritual progress of the Diocese.’

‘In the longer term it is good to develop and put forward positive ideas and programs in Synod. We should be supporting positive ideas and programs, and not just attacking bad ones. And if others put forward positive ideas, then support them!’

‘Here is some advice about speaking in Synod.

- i. Ensure that your speech is relevant to the current issue being debated.
- ii. Do some research on the topic, so that you can make a useful contribution.
- iii. Prepare a respectful, appropriate, good-tempered, and short speech. Make only 1 or 2 points and make them clearly.
- iv. Prepare a positive speech. You may include the negative consequences of your positive viewpoint, but don’t do the negatives without the positives, and give the positives more energy and time. Work out what positive values you stand for and proclaim them.
- v. Assume good motives in other speakers, even you suspect otherwise. You do not know why people say what they say. It is unpleasant to have other people assume that you have bad motives: don’t do it to others.
- vi. Appeal to the middle ground of Synod: your friends agree with you, people with other convictions are unlikely to change their minds: try to gain widespread support by the way you speak and the arguments you use.
- vii. Speak slowly and clearly, so everyone can hear you.
- viii. Be good-humoured if possible.
- ix. Sit near a microphone and move quickly!’

‘PS: I always made it a policy not to sit in a block of like-minded people, but to sit among people who were not my tribe. I did this to try to break down the ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality, and to enable middle-ground people to see that there was a variety of view possible among general Synod members. If I got too bored, I would go and have a coffee to catch up with people!’

‘More broadly, pray!

- Pray to the Lord of the harvest to raise up gospel workers, ordained and lay, for the Diocese [as well as beyond]. Future ministers are in your congregation, your youth group, your children’s ministry. The next minister after the one after you may be in your creche! One effective way to transform a Diocese is to raise up the next generation of ministers. I love going to inductions of new ministers, because it so often the case that this person will grow gospel and Bible ministry in this church.
- Pray for the Archbishop, Bishops, Diocesan Council and Synod, that God would rule his church through them, and transform and grow it in godliness and good ministry.
- Pray that God would frustrate the plans of those opposed to gospel ministry and godliness.
- Pray for vacant parishes, that God would supply them with good ministers.
- Pray for good people engaged close with the Diocese and with Synod, that God would support and encourage them, and prosper their ministries.’

Philip again. Peter here advertises New Cranmer. I would echo his words by saying that the Synod in 2023 is especially important because ‘Synod elections function in a three-year cycle, and that cycle begins again with this Synod. If all you can do is vote, then do so!’ Get the VAT and Synod Working Group advice, ‘and follow it!’

If you want to read Peter’s article unabridged, it may be found here:

<https://www.newcranmer.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Why-Synod-matters-why-the-Diocese-matters-Peter-Adam-1Sep19.pdf>

I respect Peter and his views enormously, and I disagree with only a couple. I would never seek to tell him what to think or do, as, I suspect, would he.

Philip Nicholls
2 March 2023

Philip is a graduate of the Arts and Music Faculties of the University of Melbourne, and holds a Master of Philosophy degree in Anglican Liturgy from Trinity College, the University of Divinity. He is Director of Music, Lay Minister, Child Safe Officer, and Reconciliation Working Group Convenor at St Paul’s Cathedral, Secretary of the Australian Hymn Association, and Treasurer of VAT.