



ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

AD CLERUM

Dear Friends,

New Church Entity

I wish to bring to your attention the recent media **statement** from 19 July, 2021, that outlines proposals for what is referred to as a “new Church entity” which will affiliate what is then referred to as “former Anglican Church of Australia Churches”. The statement then envisages: “At a later date these churches will become a diocese, establishing a synod to elect a bishop and a standing committee.”

On 26 July, 2021, the Primate wrote to Australian bishops **encouraging cooperation** and patience and the need for “bearing with one another with love”.

I agree with the Primate’s view that there is no need for this “new church entity” – Anglican doctrine has not been changed by the recent Appellate Tribunal opinion or the effect of the Diocese of Wangaratta’s application of the national churches “Canon Concerning Services”. Undoubtedly, the proponents of this initiative think differently for the reasons they describe.

Church division is always painful – the separation of any human community around a matter of disagreement seldom goes smoothly.

I am grateful for the visibility of these intentions and the clarity that the description of “former Anglican Church of Australia” churches provides. At some point, and it seems from the document that this will be earlier than later, some individuals may choose to leave the membership of the Anglican Church of Australia and with it the Diocese of Melbourne and their local parish or Authorised Anglican congregation. This will be difficult and likely a painful time, depending on the decision that people make.

I don’t want to get ahead of things in my comments to you – these kinds of announcements can run in many directions. The developments its proponents advocate may change direction more than they or I can anticipate.

The Diocese of Melbourne has some experience in responding to such an initiative. In June 2012, the Roman Catholic Church formed the “Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of the Southern Cross”, colloquially known as the “Anglican Ordinariate”.

Making the Word of God fully known

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Five of our clergy in the Diocese of Melbourne, including the Incumbents of Preston and Kooyong, and an uncounted number of lay people left the Anglican Church of Australia in response to this initiative. So we have some experience at rebuilding parish ministries after the loss of leadership and, in Kooyong parish, the vast majority of membership.

As I understand it, clergy who leave the membership of the Anglican Church of Australia to be a minister in another church are wise to voluntarily relinquish their Anglican orders before accreditation or ordination in the new church. Under Victorian legislation, ordained Anglican clergy remain under the Tribunal jurisdiction of the Diocesan Bishop where they reside or minister. In the case of the ordinariate, I'm pleased to say, there was proper disclosure of Professional Standards history as clergy transitioned their membership.

If matters proceed as this new initiative proposes, we will need the same accountability. We will need open communication to ensure the highest probity of anyone exercising public religious leadership and avoid creating any gaps that leads to professional standards accountability being avoided.

As a closing comment, I want to express my concern that some, especially survivors of child sexual abuse, may see this initiative as an attempt to shed redress responsibilities or to leave them entirely in the Anglican Church of Australia without carrying any of that liability and responsibility to the new entity. It would be valuable if the new entity resolved, early on, to fund redress in the diocese where any "former Anglican Church of Australia Churches" previously operated or where former Anglican Church of Australia clergy have served.

Be assured that I am resolved to continue the missional leadership of the Diocese of Melbourne and will ensure that my efforts and the efforts of the Diocese do not get diverted from our main task.

I know from my role as the co-chair of the Anglican - Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) how persistent the effects of church division are. The formation of separate ecclesial bodies is no small thing and the impact of separation is likely to be very long lasting.

"Lord Jesus Christ who said to your Apostles: peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and graciously grant her peace and unity in accordance with your will. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever, Amen."

Grace and Peace in Christ Jesus

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philip Freier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'P'.

The Most Reverend Dr Philip Freier
Archbishop of Melbourne