ABM DIOCESAN REPRESENTATIVES CONFERENCE 2015 – Diocesan Council Report

Representatives from most Anglican Dioceses in Australia attended the ABM Diocesan Representatives Conference over three days in Newcastle from the 24th to the 26th of July, 2015. It however coincided with the centenary celebrations for the Diocese of Willochra so the Chair of the ABM Provincial Council for South Australia, Archbishop Jeffrey Driver asked me to represent the Diocese of Adelaide as well as The Murray. There was also no-one from the Diocese of Willochra either, due to illness. The only other dioceses not represented were North West Western Australia, Bathurst and the Riverina in New South Wales.

The conference was officially opened by the Bishop of Newcastle, Greg Thompson. It was followed by an update on its communications strategy, in how the ABM is building relationships with its supporters, in having a strong presence in 13 cathedrals, in optimising its website for smart devices, sending weekly updates to the media, diocesan websites and magazines. As a result, the ABM is gaining more media presence through the wider media. A marketing working group has also been established in Melbourne, to come up with a strategic direction in marketing.

Each diocese was given an opportunity to share with others what has been achieved with ABM activities and other initiatives in the past year. In our diocese, I highlighted the Bishop’s reception for the Bishop of Mandalay in Burma in October last year, in promoting the emergency appeals for Vanuatu and Nepal earlier this year, and the distribution of project books around the Diocese and the USB sticks at Synod. I mentioned that contact had been re-established with our sister diocese, the Diocese of Popondotta in PNG and that the Bishop had intended to visit the diocese in July, but had to cancel the trip. Another was planned. I had informed Bishop John Ford that the Diocese of Rockhampton now also had a sister relationship with that diocese and that he intended to talk to the Bishop of Rockhampton about this further. An issue raised by Diocesan Council concerning a UN report on the status of women was also highlighted. The ABM spoke of specific women’s programs, including a domestic violence program in the Solomon Islands last year. There were other positive parenting programs; that the Diocese could be involved in as well.

On behalf of the Diocese of Adelaide, I mentioned the role of the SA Provincial Council in co-ordinating various activities including the ABM Provincial Dinner, ABM Sunday and the Martyrs Day Service. The Adelaide Auxiliary also staged various events during the year, and had raised 10-thousand dollars so far this year. 12-thousand dollars was raised last year. I spoke of the work the Provincial Council has been doing in the past year in building further contacts with schools on specific ABM projects. This was still a work in progress. Mention was made also of the Diocese of Adelaide’s relationship with South Sudan.

I spoke of the sister relationship now established between the Diocese of Willochra and the Diocese of Mandalay. Bishop John Stead has made a visit to the Diocese and had established the new diocesan relationship. He had also invited the Bishop of Mandalay to Willochra. The Diocese had held various auxiliary events and there had another successful fundraiser for the ABM in selling a pallet of wine sourced from McLaren Vale. There was also an ABM representation at the Diocese of Willochra’s centenary celebrations. They included the Archbishop of Adelaide, the retired SA Provincial Council Chairman, Bishop David McCall and ABM Board Representative for SA, Emma Riggs.

One of the guest speakers at the conference was the Assistant Bishop of Newcastle, Peter Stuart. He spoke on the work the Diocese has been spending on developing a sister relationship with the Diocese of Guatalama in the Solomon Islands. It is one of nine dioceses in the Anglican Church of Melanesia. 32 per cent of the population claim to be Anglican in the Solomon Islands. The land is strewn with the remnants of World War 2 and there are still tensions with tribal issues and economic wealth. The civil war between 1998 and 2003 had almost left the country bankrupt. It is where seven Melanesian brothers were killed in 2003. There are projects that the ABM is undertaking in the Solomon Islands. Bishop Stuart also spoke of its association with the Anglican Church in Korea. The Anglican Church is very small, although 29 per cent of its population are Christians. Its current work is helping other Christian organisations further the realisation of peace between North and South Korea. Again, the ABM is supporting projects in Korea. In both cases with the dioceses, a covenant agreement was signed to establish a relationship first before there was any money given. The agreements were worked out in consultation with both Bishops and the ABM.

The ABM’s Partnerships Co-ordinator, Robert MacLean spoke of a draft document for the conference on suggested guidelines for successful church partnerships. The conference was given several scenarios, based on all experiences but the details were fictitious. The scenarios involved dioceses and churches that had gone ahead and worked with overseas people or dioceses, without the assistance and help of the ABM.

Two other initiatives I thought were of interest. One is the weekly church envelope system. The ABM is able to produce the envelopes at no cost to the parish, with one side of the envelope for the parish and the other side for the ABM. The other initiative is the Christmas cards. The ABM has decided to produce a Christmas card that can be sent by email, rather than by the post. The traditional card system had become an unprofitable venture for the ABM. With the emailed card, you are able to write your greetings as normal. If you open the card, it will proceed through a collage of pictures from the ABM’s overseas partners with the song, “We wish you a Happy Christmas”, sung by a Melanesian choir.

The conference was again well planned and well worth attending. The host, the Diocese of Newcastle, (which happens to be the biggest diocesan giver for the ABM), well looked after us for the weekend. Suggestions were made about having the conference on the last weekend in July in Hobart or Canberra next year.