

Celebrating Ken Mason

*Fifty years
a bishop*



Kenneth Bruce Mason was born on 4 September 1928 at Ashfield in Sydney, the son of Eric Leslie Mason and Gertrude Irene Pearse. He was educated at Bathurst High School and at Sydney Teachers' College, where he graduated with a certificate as a trained primary teacher.

From 1948 until 1955 he was a teacher with the NSW Department of Education. He taught in several country public schools in New South Wales.

He left teaching to test his vocation to the sacred ministry and went into residence at St John's Theological College, Morpeth, as a candidate for the Diocese of Bathurst. He came first in 1953 in the final examination of the Australian College of Theology, and was awarded the Hey Sharp Prize, graduating with first class honours.

He was ordained to the diaconate by the Bishop of Bathurst, Arnold Lomas Wyld, in 1953, and priested in 1954. He then served within the Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd, a community of priests working in the outback of Australia. Members of the Brotherhood were appointed to outback parishes, remaining unmarried during their period of service, and without a regular stipend, accommodation and living expenses being provided from the central funds of the Brotherhood. Ken's Brotherhood name was Brother Aidan. He was Priest in Charge of Gilgandra NSW from 1954 to 1958, of Darwin NT from 1959 to 1961 and Rector of Alice Springs NT in 1962.



Bishop Ken Mason
Photo: Carol Rudd

He remained in the Brotherhood until 1964, and for the last two years of his time in the Brotherhood he was in Brisbane pursuing full-time studies. He resided in St Francis' Theological College, Brisbane, while studying at the University of Queensland for the Diploma of Divinity and the degree of Bachelor of Arts, majoring in history, which he obtained in 1964 and 1966 respectively.

In 1965 he moved to Melbourne to work as assistant chaplain of Trinity College within the University of Melbourne. The college chaplain was his former fellow member of BGS, Barry Russell Marshall (Brother Timothy), a formative influence on many undergraduates in Melbourne. Ken was the Dean of Trinity College from 1966 to 1967.

Ken's practical teaching experience, his academic studies and his thorough knowledge of rural ministry in western NSW and the Northern Territory prepared him for the next stage of his ministry, and on St Matthias' Day (24 February) 1968 he was consecrated bishop in St John's Cathedral, Brisbane, at the hands of Archbishop Philip Nigel Warrington Strong KBE, and other bishops from around Australia. He was appointed to lead the newly-founded Diocese of the Northern Territory as its first bishop. He was installed as the first Bishop of the Northern Territory on 1 March 1968. His installation took place in the old Christ Church, Darwin, which became the cathedral for the new diocese. Cyclone Tracy destroyed this building on Christmas Day 1974. Only the entrance porch of the cathedral remained and this is now incorporated in the 'new' Christ Church Cathedral, which was consecrated on 13 March 1977 in the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

In Darwin Bishop Ken moved into an apartment, set up his office in the Christ Church parish hall, and administered the Diocese with the assistance of one secretary. He travelled frequently over the large extent of the Diocese, to the four main parish centres (two of them staffed by the Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd) as well as to the aboriginal missions, which were served by the Church Missionary Society. He fostered the vocations of indigenous ministry and ordained seven men to the ministry (the 'Arnhem Seven'). He also oversaw the transition of the missions to government settlements with Anglican ministry.

Ken's ministry was recognised by his appointment as a Chaplain of the Order of St John of Jerusalem in 1979 and as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1984. He was Bishop Protector of the Australian province of the Society of St Francis from

1981 to 1993 and Protector General 1990-1993. Since 1964 he has been a member of the Oratory of the Good Shepherd, a society of celibate priests and laymen founded in Cambridge UK, and he was elected Superior of the Oratory in 1981. This involved the care and leadership of all the provinces – Europe, Southern Africa, North America and Australia. He remained Superior until 1987. He is now the senior brother by profession in this international community, and a member of the local group, the Sydney College.

After fifteen years in Darwin he left the diocese to begin work as Chairman of the Australian Board of Missions. He remained in this position for ten years, from 1983 until his retirement in 1993.

In retirement he enjoyed a busy social life being in residence for 22 years at St John's Village, Glebe, and, after suffering a stroke in January 2015, at Sirius Cove Aged Care facility in Mosman. During his retirement he has maintained his long-standing association with St James' Church, King Street, in the city, and travelled widely, including a locum in the Diocese of Hong Kong. He now receives the care of the visiting medical and paramedical staff, and the nursing staff of Sirius Cove. By the ministry of the Reverends Robert Alexander and Ron Henderson he shares in the Holy Communion and is taken occasionally to Sunday Choral Eucharist at St James' King Street. He continues to enjoy letters, phone calls and visits to his room in Mosman from his many friends.

Bishop Ken Mason was elected Chairman by the Board of ABM in April 1983 and he embraced the challenges of ministry and mission within the worldwide Anglican Communion with commitment, enthusiasm and vision from July 1983. His move to Sydney was challenging and he quickly settled into a home in Glebe which became home for many people from far and wide.

In ABM's *Mission Review* soon after he arrived Ken wrote about Christian life as a pilgrimage: 'I have strong thoughts about our dependences on one another – I'm also fairly heavily into the thought that as Christians we are not going to get it easy.'

ABM Fellowship members became Friends of ABM and Ken's leadership encouraged engagement in prayer, giving and promotion. He highlighted the long relationships with Aboriginal and Papua New Guinean partners and enthusiastically widened horizons and supported expanded partnerships.

The Good Friday Gift for the Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East was reinstituted and prayers for the peace of Jerusalem were offered: 'If peace and reconciliation can come to Jerusalem it will be a powerful sign to a badly fractured world'.

Ken reminded Australian Anglicans that their association with the church in Papua New Guinea was long and close; for many years it was an integral part of the Australian Church and of the Province of Queensland. He invited open and transparent consultation, growth of planned independence and of mutual respect and more vigorous involvement of Australians through education, promotion and personal contact.

He also noted that despite Australia's membership of the Christian Conference of Asia we were not very aware of our Asian brothers and sisters. 'We can support friends in Asia by learning more about them, making sure we meet Christians when we travel, and talk with them, rather than at them. as they live with courage and faith and exuberant joy.'

Ken's nine-year membership of the Christian Conference of Asia was an exciting, frustrating, even hurting time, but it introduced him to the infinite complexities of Asia and the vital role the Christian Church has in proclaiming 'Christ our Peace, Building a Just Society'.

In 1990 he suggested that ABM recommit to evangelism 'that will bring Good News to many people with wholeness of life and genuine community development; spell out its educational thrust with more clarity; sharpen its understanding of development so that it can be more actively involved with Partners in community growth; and that it enormously increases its income to respond with open generosity to the needs of the people whom it is committed to serve.'

Engagement and hospitality with visiting partners, young Anglicans, and with members of the ABM Auxiliary, was an important focus for all ABM staff, led by the Chairman.

Partners in Prayer was first published in 1990: 'to enlighten, to intelligently support daily prayers for ABM, its partners inside and outside Australia; now that ABM has moved into the big world of computer technology, maintaining and upgrading publications will be so much easier and more efficient', Ken wrote.

The question of why Australian Anglicans were asked to support African churches which had been the concern of English agencies was raised: there was so much to be done in the Pacific and Asia. Ken led ABM supporters to appreciate mutual interdependence at its best and to see many exciting possibilities. 'We support Central Africa and Jerusalem now, and hopefully Burma and Korean refugees in Thailand in the future. Please support not only the needs of these people, but in your prayers the continued growth of cooperation between Anglican Mission Agencies so there may be strong partnership between the churches of the Anglican Communion.

'In Partnership in the Gospel ABM sees an important place for what we call development, where in shared love and concern people may begin to recognise their potential as humans redeemed by God, and the possibilities that justice and peace and love can become realities in their lives and be a source of growth in their structures and nations.

'It is both exciting and humbling to be able to present in the Gospel God's gracious gifts of love, that bear such fruit, growth, release and renewal.

'I commend the Anglican Trust Fund for Development as one way of helping people know the fullness of life – that is, the full development of the human person in body, mind and spirit.'

In 1991 ABM sent a record number of people to work with partners in the churches of Korea, Laos, Melanesia and Papua New Guinea. The Anglican Church of PNG commemorated its centenary and during celebrations in the Diocese of the New Guinea islands, Ken was given a gift to be given to Nungalinya College Darwin, to help with education programs – it happened that the first student from PNG at Nungalinya was Rita Semini, who studied for a Certificate of Christian Ministry.

ABM sponsored a national Aboriginal conference in 1992 which was attended by 16 people from New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia. The National Aboriginal Anglican Council was set up to encourage celebration of Aboriginal life in the Anglican Church and to offer opportunities for a sense of belonging to a wider network, for spiritual growth, leadership, and social and Christian outreach to their own people.

‘Recognition of Aboriginal people and ministry at the national level and the provision of a national forum has been long in coming. It will provide the opportunity for Aboriginal Anglicans to have a far greater control of their own ministries and perhaps more importantly interpret to the church the needs and aspirations of this country’s original inhabitants’, Ken wrote in ABM’s *Partners* after the 1992 General Synod passed the resolution setting up the NAAC, now NATSIAC (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council).

In 1973 Ken ordained the first Aboriginal priest, the Reverend Gumbuli Wurramara, from St Matthew’s Parish, Ngukurr, in the Diocese of the Northern Territory.

On 30 August 1992, Ken was in Popondetta for the 50th anniversary of the New Guinea Martyrs. Later he said to the students of the Martyrs’ Memorial School: ‘I could not help feel in the Cathedral of the Resurrection, dedicated to new life, as we celebrated the Eucharist and acknowledged that through death we come to new life that all of those fifty years and indeed beyond gave us a great hope for the next fifty years. Not only will the Spirit enliven our minds in visions and dreams but provide us with the ability to make the plans and carry them out – to set ourselves goals. It is in your hands, no one else’s.’

In 1993 ABM embraced a new development focus and appointed the Reverend Robert Cooper as Development Officer. Ken had been involved in plans for the expansion of this and had encouraged staff in health and education programs and in agricultural, housing, leadership training and income producing projects in partnership with Anglican churches in Bangladesh, Korea, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines Polynesia, South Africa, and Zambia.

Ken’s retirement as Chair of ABM after 10 years’ service was a wonderful time of celebration of all he had offered and all that had been achieved in a remarkable ministry.

– compiled by CH



**Bishop Ken Mason on the day of his enthronement
at Christ Church Cathedral, Darwin
Photo: ABM Review, April 1968**



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