

Anglican Schools Conference 2023

Thanks for your welcome. I begin today by acknowledging the Ngunnawal people, Traditional Custodians of the land on which we gather today, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. As a leader in the Anglican Church of Australia I share our commitment to work for reconciliation.

It's great to be at the conference. I have been at a fair number of ASA conferences over the years. I became chair of the Anglican Schools Commission in Brisbane in 2008 so it was probably around then that I attended my first ASA conference.

This gathering seems to be especially special as it's the first face to face conference since 2019. Four challenging years have passed. No wonder there is a sense of excitement around the place as we gather over these few days.

When Peter Laurence spoke with me about giving this address, I asked him what I should talk about and he helpfully said, 'whatever you like'. That's my memory of the conversation anyway. So what do I want to say to this conference as the Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia and as someone with a strong commitment to Anglican schools? Well, a couple of things.

Thankyou.

First of all I want to say thank you. Thank you for your ministry in Anglican schools. Thanks to the principals, chaplains-lay and ordained, senior staff, teachers, support staff and school council members who are so important to Anglican schools. The years since 2019 especially have been challenging. But even setting that extraordinary time aside Anglican schools often operate in challenging environments.

I know that many Anglican schools are in an ownership and governance sense largely independent of church structures but being an Anglican school means operating at least in some sense in the name of the Anglican church and as part of it.

A moment ago I said thank you for your ministry in Anglican schools, and I used the word 'ministry' on purpose. God wants humans to flourish, and schools are a big part of helping children and young people to do that.

By working in an Anglican school you are sharing this big job with God. It's a ministry. It's God's work you are part of when you are part of an Anglican school. Schools are of course more than places for children and young people. They are communities where people gather each day for work, and they are networks of parents and families. We want everyone associated with Anglican schools to grow and flourish.

On behalf of the Anglican church of Australia, thanks for sharing in that ministry. Thanks especially for the care exercised over the pandemic period. It was hard. Perhaps the hardest time, after the immediate flurry to get online learning going, and responding to ever changing mandates, was the first half of last year, just over twelve months ago.

That was a very difficult time where school staff were coming to school and risked contracting Covid, having to balance both face to face and on-line learning, and school leaders had to manage constantly changing attendance by students, and sickness and isolation by staff.

We should not underestimate the time it will take for the community, for individuals, for Anglican schools to recover from that very difficult time, and re-emerge into a non-pandemic world, or perhaps better put, a covid-managing world.

Re-emergence

I think the conference theme: 're-emergence', is very appropriate. The past three and a half years have been very tough. We are emerging from that time where really the focus was on just keeping things going as best as we possibly could. It was a hiatus. A pause in the everyday which certainly wasn't a rest.

Now we are emerging. We are re-emerging. We are coming out of that time. Sticking our heads up. Coming back into the light.

Things are different though. Things are not the same as they were in January 2020. The world is changed. We have changed. We are all three years older for a start. The students at our school and our staff and parents are changed by the covid experience.

I was speaking with the principal of Anglican school last week, and she said she is aware of a higher level of mental health issues among students and staff, especially among students in the senior school whose middle school experience was during the pandemic, and young staff who were at university during the pandemic.

The context in which our schools operate has also changed more broadly. The ongoing invasion of Ukraine. Rising interest rates and the cost of living. Shortage of housing. An increased demand for welfare and support. Increased pressure on family budgets. Changes to government funding and taxation laws.

The context has changed. The context of course was never going to be static. Change is always happening, but it feels like Covid sped things up. Or maybe we were just very pre-occupied with the covid hiatus, and these other things jumped up and caught us by surprise.

Along with re-emergence often comes re-discovery. We see things that are familiar, but they have changed. Or perhaps we see familiar things in a new light. Perhaps we notice things we haven't noticed for a while. With re-emergence there can be discovery or rediscovery of what is important and valuable, and that can be really positive and exciting.

I want to suggest that this is an important opportunity for a rediscovery and re-embracing of the fact that being an Anglican school means being a Christian school. The Anglican church is a Christian church. The Anglican church has its particular flavour and emphases, but it is a branch of the one holy catholic and apostolic church. The universal church which encompasses all the Christian denominations and is present across the globe.

I think that in this time of re-emergence there is a real opportunity for rediscovery of the Christian faith and the Anglican expression of it for Anglican schools. Partly because that's a position of integrity-we are Anglican schools after all; and mostly because the Christian faith and the Anglican expression of it is incredibly positive for the life of people and the planet. I say this not because it's the party line or to boost the church, but because the Christian world view, the Christian way of seeing things and living is so good and so life giving.

Billions of people around the world have found that. Christianity is the largest religious grouping in the world with more than two billion people saying they are followers of Jesus. I accept completely that not all who embrace the Christian faith live it out like Jesus would hope we did. I'll quickly put my hand up as one of the imperfect Christians. But the failure of the followers should not deter us from looking at what Christianity actually is.

I am not suggesting that your schools haven't embraced the Christian faith, or you aren't living it out in the life of your school, or that you aren't commending the Christian faith to the students of your school. I am suggesting that as we re-emerge from the hiatus of the pandemic it's good to shake ourselves off, remind ourselves of what is key in the life of our schools and re-embrace it. Refresh it. Refocus it.

The Christian Faith-the Foundation of Anglican Schools

One of the issues for consideration is what is our understanding of the Christian faith? What do we think it is. I want to suggest that part of re-emergence is a fresh or refreshed understanding and embracing of the worldview which was and is foundational for Anglican schools.

The Christian faith centres on Jesus. Not an amorphous expression of an indistinct deity, but a flesh and bones expression of God. One of the most powerful lines in the Bible I think is in John's gospel where Phillip says to Jesus: 'show us the father and we will be satisfied'. And Jesus says, 'if you have seen me you have seen the father'.

The perfectly reasonable question-what is God like? Can be well answered by saying God is like Jesus in terms of attitude and priority and style.

Early Christianity was a Jesus movement, and Jesus continues to be at the centre of our life and proclamation. Jesus was an incredibly attractive person. People flocked to him, and following his death and resurrection the number of the followers of Jesus grew very rapidly.

The Gospel

One of the English words that is associated with Christianity is 'gospel'. It is translated from a Greek word *euangelion*, which is a compound word of two Greek words; *eu* which means good; and *gelion* which means announcement.

So the English word 'gospel' comes from a Greek word which literally means good announcement. Commonly *eungelion* is also translated as 'good news', but I don't mean ordinary good news like, it's good news that my flight arrived on time, but really surprisingly good news. Maybe that's a bad example in the current situation, but *euangelion* and therefore gospel describes really, really good, maybe surprising, life-giving or life-saving

good news. Could still be flight times I guess, but in the Graeco-Roman world *euangelion* would be used to announce for instance that a new king had come to the throne, or a major battle had been won. The announcement of very significant situations that really impacted people's lives for the good. That was euangelion.

The Kingdom or Reign of God

In the New Testament the word 'gospel' is associated with Jesus, and a concept called either the Kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. The Greek word which is translated 'kingdom' can also be translated reign. That's the r-e-i-g-n kind of reign, not the precipitation kind of rain. This word which is *basileio*, can be translated reign as well as kingdom. They are interchangeable. In English versions of the Bible *basileio* is commonly translated kingdom.

A very early mention of the concept of the kingdom of God being associated with Jesus is in the account of Jesus' life and ministry known as Mark's gospel. This mention is in chapter 1 verse 15 where Jesus, right at the start of his ministry says: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

The word repent doesn't mean stop being bad and start being good. It means change your mind. Make a 180 degree turn. The word believe here means accept or trust. So the verse says, in Jesus the kingdom of God has come near, accept that this is true.

The concept of the kingdom or reign of God is very important in a discovery or rediscovery of Christianity. Sometimes I think that Christianity can be seen as what might be called a 'sin management system', and certainly human sin and its forgiveness is a very important part of the Jesus story, perhaps the greater part given the impact of human sin on humanity and the rest of creation, but it's not the whole story. The concept of the kingdom or reign of God is critical in a discovery or rediscovery of Christianity.

This concept would have been well known to those who heard Jesus. The kingdom of God describes a state of affairs where God is acknowledged as king, and where life is the way God intends it to be. The kingdom of God has been described as 'the world put to rights'. Another wonderful description of this state of affairs is 'the healing of all things' (*Imagining Mission with John V Taylor Baker and Ross p.3*). I have to say in our current global situation that is an attractive thought.

The world put to rights in every sense of the world. That was very attractive to the people who first heard Jesus both talk about this state of affairs coming close, and doing things which demonstrated both that it was emerging, and what life would be like when it emerged in full.

For Jesus' compatriots living as they were in Palestine, two millenia ago, life was not easy. They were under occupation of the Roman empire which was pagan. While they were able to practice their religion, they lived with the threat of that being taken away. They yearned not only for God to be seen as king instead of the Roman emperor, they yearned for freedom and peace. This state of being had been looked forward to by the Old Testament prophets. A time of peace and justice and flourishing not only of human life but all of creation.

The motivation for this was the love of God. God's love for the world. God's desire that all of creation would flourish.

So Jesus came and his message was this long looked for state of affairs has in him come close. God was bringing this state of affairs into being. Accept that this is happening. And Jesus did things which demonstrated the emergence of this situation. He reconnected people with God and each other. He healed the sick and raised the dead. He included the excluded. He freed people from the forces of evil. He reconnected people with God and their community. He was peace and he brought peace.

An example from Matthew's account of Jesus life and ministry: Matthew 4.23 "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics, and he cured them".

And the healing of these people wasn't just about physical healing. The understanding of the time was that in many cases sickness was both a sign of something, and had significant social consequences. Sickness was seen as a sign of punishment from God for sin or being out of fellowship or favour with God, so to be healed meant blessing from God rather than curse.

Some illnesses meant that the people who were suffering them could not have contact with other people, so healing from that sickness meant reconnection with family and friends and community. Many of these illnesses meant that the sufferers couldn't work so they were condemned to poverty and living on the generosity of others. Jesus' healing sickness meant much more than people feeling physically better, though that too of course was important. Jesus' healing brought reconnection, the end of isolation, life really- a burst of new life.

Wherever Jesus went life flourished. People flourished. And that was connected to this concept of the kingdom of God. The state of affairs that in Jesus had come close and which Jesus said, God was going to bring to completion. Jesus did what he did to show that the kingdom had in come close, and to give a glimpse of what things would be like when the kingdom comes in its completeness. Jesus was the embodiment of the state of affairs called the kingdom or reign of God.

Crucifixion and Resurrection-the Climax of Jesus Ministry

About three years after his ministry began Jesus was executed by crucifixion. This could be seen as a failure, but actually his crucifixion and resurrection was the climax of his ministry. Through his crucifixion and resurrection the way to the kingdom was opened and guaranteed. The way for human sin to be forgiven was opened. The hold of death and decay was broken.

St Paul writing to the Christians in the city of Corinth in about 53 AD or CE says this:

Now I should remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ²through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died.

Most of whom are still alive-if you have any doubt about what I am saying they can back up my story.

I said before that the gospel is more than a sin management system, and it is. But Jesus death and resurrection enables the forgiveness of human sin, which is really important for humans, so that we can relate with God in peace and fellowship, but it's also important for human flourishing. The consciousness of failure and wrongdoing is not a Christian construct but a human condition. Finding forgiveness and peace and a new start is hugely important for human flourishing.

Forgiveness of human sin is also important for the whole creation.

I also said before that the motivation behind the kingdom of God was God's love. An oft quoted verse in John's gospel is John 3.16 which says 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life'.

The Greek word translated 'world' as in God so loved the world, is *cosmos*. God so loved the cosmos. Not just the human bit. The whole of creation. But dealing with human sin is critical for the cosmos. Most of the problems of the world are caused in one way or another by human sin. Greed. Jealousy. Hatred. Fear.

There is a sense of now and not yet as we think about the reign of God. The situation where the world is put to rights. Jesus inaugurated the reign of God through his life death and resurrection. So now wherever anyone acknowledges they are under the reign of God, there is the kingdom. Whenever anyone does the kind of things Jesus did as part of acknowledging the reign of God-there is the kingdom.

The best example I can think of this is being in a plane flying at night over Australia and it's a clear night. Looking down you see a lot of darkness, but every now and again you see a light or a cluster of lights as you fly over an individual home or a town or village. That's the situation now with the kingdom of God-situations where Gods love is being shown. Bursts of light. The kingdom is, but is still to fully emerge.

We look forward to a time when all you can see is light and the world is put to rights. The kingdom has come in all its fulness. That situation is on its way. The final fulfilment is guaranteed because of the resurrection of Jesus. When that state of affairs will come, we don't know. Jesus didn't know.

Jesus taught his followers a prayer, which we call the Lord's prayer, and one of the lines in the prayer is especially relevant: it's this one-your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. That line is praying that the kingdom of God would come so that things on earth will be like things in heaven. One of the ways I imagine what life will be like when the kingdom comes is to try to imagine what things are like in heaven and I don't mean floaty angels.

If heaven came to earth, what would life be like? There would be no sickness, no death, no sadness, no war, no poverty, no injustice, no bullying, no climate disaster. There would be love and peace, and we would see God face to face and it would be beautiful beyond imagining. We get glimpses of this in Jesus' ministry. We get glimpses of it in life. Being loved. The joy of a laughing child. The glory of a wonderful sunset or sunrise. A lovely lunch with family or friends.

Glimpses which give us a hint of what is to come-when heaven comes to earth. I think that's why these things mean so much to us. Why we yearn for them and try to hold on to them. Because we are designed for this reality, so when we get those glimpses they are so meaningful. We would love to reach out and hold on to them because we know that's what true. That's what life is about. That's the way life is meant to be. That's the life that is coming-the kingdom of God.

And all of that because God loves the creation, the cosmos. All of that because of Jesus' life death and resurrection.

Followers of Jesus

Significantly Jesus called his followers to do three things. First, to live today with the future in mind. To live knowing that they are already part of the kingdom of God with Jesus as their king, and live knowing the ultimate future is not death and destruction but life and flourishing. That's important because that mindset, that worldview changes the way we see ourselves and others and changes the way we act now.

Second, to pass on the message that the kingdom of God is the present and the future and invite others to accept that and get on board. To accept what God has done in Jesus and join in.

Third, to do things now and live now in ways that point to the reality of the reign of God. To bring the future into the present. To do as Jesus did and give glimpses of what is to come. We are not called to sit and wait passively but to act to bring the future into the present. That's why we are told to love each other. Not just because it's a good thing to do but because that is part of the coming kingdom of God.

That's why we want people to be kind to each other because it's a foretaste of the future as well as an expression of the kingdom of God in the present.

It is God who will put the world to rights not us, but as humans get on board with Gods plan for the future of the world we can do a lot. We can really change things.

Anglican schools want to help students to grow. Anglican schools want students to have positive values and make a difference. The Christian gospel provides the foundation for all that. The notion of the kingdom of God provides a platform for change. A reason, a purpose, a possibility for a meaningful purpose filled life.

Just imagine if a community got on board with this seriously. Chances are there would be less poverty, more peace, more love, less conflict, more forgiveness, more care for the environment, more knowledge and experience of the love of God, more equal sharing of resources. Just imagine. Dream a little.

And our schools with this foundation could more and more be helping students take on this world view and participate in the changing of the world. There would still be imperfection, because humans aren't perfect, the kingdom hasn't come yet, human sin continues to mar the world, but the more we take the live of the reign of God on board the more we could make an amazing change. We could change lives.

There is enough food in the world we need to share it better. There is enough water in the world we just need to protect it. Our capacity for innovation and invention and problem solving is immense. Imagine if it was applied for the good of the creation as part of bringing God's future into the present. We could do this. But we need a reason, a motivation. And the reason, its foundation is the love of God, the ministry of Jesus and the expectation of God putting the world being put to rights. In other words, the Christian faith.

This is what I think we need to discover or rediscover or embrace or re-embrace for our schools. Because it is beautiful. And it underpins so much of what we are trying to do as Anglican schools. This foundation may well be implicit but it needs to be made explicit. Our schools need a clear reason for what they are trying to do.

They need a foundation to provide the 'why'. School leaders need to know the foundation and build the life of the school on it. Students and staff need to know the foundations of the values we espouse. The 'why' of what we say we are trying to do.

Jesus was quite clear that the kingdom is coming and in him it was being seen and emerging, but he was also quite clear that on the way there would be struggle and hardship for his followers and the world. This is not a utopian cost-free vision. It cost Jesus the humiliation of the cross. He used the image of human birth and the struggle that often is. And we see the struggle in the world now. But the ultimate future is secure. The kingdom is coming. In Jesus it has come close so we get a glimpse of what will be.

The Christian Faith Impacts Anglican Schools

So how might this foundation of the Christian faith, the Christian worldview impact the lives of the members of our Anglican school communities in practical ways?

I want to offer a few thoughts in four brief sections.

First, how we think of ourselves-our identity.
 Second, how we think of others.
 Third, how we think about the world and the future.
 Fourth, how we think of the creation.

I am basing these reflections on the understanding that the way we think and what we think influences our actions very strongly. So if we view ourselves and others and the world through a 'kingdom of God' lens what difference might that make.

The question of identity is very important for everyone. Who am I? Where do I fit in? Am I lovable and worthwhile? What do others think of me? Sadly for many people and especially young people the question of identity can be painful. The influence of various influences and influencers is powerful. Social media can be a place of criticism or impossible comparison. Uncertainty and anxiety is very prevalent. What does the reign of God or kingdom of God say to this part of our life?

It says firstly that we are loved by God. God loved the whole world so much. God's love embraces the whole cosmos and that includes each person. God thinks each person is so valuable that God came among us in the person of Jesus. Jesus thought each of us was worthwhile enough to give his life on the cross for us.

It is very powerful to know God loves me and you. And we don't have to perform in a certain way or live up to particular expectations or look a certain way to earn that love. God's love is freely given because God thinks we are loveable. Knowing God loves us lets us know that we are worthy and worthwhile. Our identity is found primarily in God's love. We are beloved children of God. We don't need to struggle to find our identity in the opinions of peers or the online world. It's an interesting thing to roll that phrase around in your mind-God loves me. God loves me. You might try it.

Christianity also offers a way to deal with the failures that are part of our life. None of us is perfect. We all fail, and we all fall short of our own expectations and the expectations of others. Some people are tormented by their failures. They are afraid to try again. Forgiveness is open to us. We don't need to wallow in our guilt. Jesus death on the cross means forgiveness is open to us. We can know we are forgiven by God and on that basis we can forgive ourselves.

As well as being sure and positive about who we are the question of our purpose in life is also critically important.

All of us have the opportunity to live in a way which reflects and points to the coming kingdom. That's our vocation. In the past the concept of vocation tended to be associated with particular occupations. Nursing for instance. Teaching is another. The ordained or religious life.

The English word vocation comes from the latin *vocacio*, meaning "summons," which in turn comes from *vocāre*, meaning "to call." Vocation doesn't mean occupation it means purpose. Vocation is a response to the gift of love. God's gift of love for the cosmos.

Everyone can live out this vocation no matter what they do for a job or even if they have no job. Helping people have this sense of purpose will be fantastic for them and beneficial for the whole world.

The second area of focus is the way we think of others. One of the issues in our community is the way people treat other people. In schools we want students to treat each other well. To treat each other kindly, but a key question for us all when we are thinking about relating to other people is 'why' and 'how'. Why should I treat other people well and how can I treat other people well. The Christian worldview provides a clear answer to both of those questions.

We are loved by God and we are called to treat other people in the same way. As we experience God's love so we seek to treat others the same way. The more conscious we are of being loved by God the more motivated we are to let other people have a similar experience. Ideally, when we know we are loved by God and know God's love for the whole creation we should have no need to 'feed' on another, or build up our lives at the expense of another.

The third area of focus is the way we see the world around us. Dr Natasha Moore, from the centre for public Christianity wrote a little book a couple of years ago called 'The Pleasures of Pessimism'. In it she highlights the human trait of apocalism. Our attraction to the apocalyptic. It is not novel to say that bad news sells. It seems like we are surrounded by bad news and Natasha Moore says maybe that's because that's the way we like it. We like to be scared.

We like to look at the disasters and even more the forecasts of disasters. That's the way the clicks go. Dr Moore also says maybe we like bad news and we are drawn to the whole pessimistic outlook because we have a sense of dissatisfaction with our own situation. The pessimistic outlook and our fascination with doom and gloom either distracts us from our own situation or pain, or makes us feel better about it. A bit like television shows being designed to make viewers feel morally superior.

The problem with the pessimistic outlook, that sense of doom, the focussing on the bad news is that it creates anxiety. There is no doubt that there are bad things in the world. There is no doubt that there are big challenges for us, but the Christian world view is an optimistic one, and I think an important remedy for the underlying issues behind the pessimism that pervades our news and information industry.

The Christian world view is optimistic and positive. God loves the whole cosmos. The world is not going to end in death and destruction. The trajectory of the world is new creation not devastation. The Christian worldview is a powerful alternative to the pessimism which pervades much of our world because we are attracted to it so strongly.

The fourth area of focus is the care of creation. One of the things which is rightly causing great concern is the environment and especially climate change. We are being encouraged to care for the environment and change the way we interact with the environment on the basis that if we don't we will face very big problems. The big driver that is being used to

encourage behaviour change is fear. If we don't change there will be destruction and all sorts of terrible things.

I don't know how you experience it but in my experience using fear to motivate change is not very positive nor successful. Mostly because fear as a motivator is a short term solution. While the adrenalin is running we are certainly motivated but I think we saw during covid that you cant run on adrenalin indefinitely. In order to keep the adrenalin pumping the fear has to keep increasing.

There is absolutely no doubt that care of the environment is critically important. It has always been very important, but humanity has had this view that we can just keep on consuming and polluting forever. Which is quite mad, but we've been doing that.

What if we had a sustainable driver for care of the environment other than fear? Christianity provides that driver. The Christian worldview sees the creation as a gift from God to be cared for and stewarded well. Not out of fear for the future but out of love for God. Caring for the creation, living in a sustainable way is our exercising of the stewardship role we have been given by God.

I readily admit that the Christian church has manifestly failed in this task. We have failed to teach it and model it and practice it. This needs to change. It needs to change because the environment is in desperate need of care and nurture and renewal and the community is in need of a sustainable long term reason to do it.

Fear is not going to cut it. Love is the way.

How Might the Christian Faith be Expressed in Anglican Schools?

I have encouraged Anglican schools to own their being Anglican and Christian. I want to finish with a few reflections. What might that mean? What might it mean to embrace or re-embrace the Christian faith. Well, I think first of all a decision from the school leadership is required. The school council or board and senior school leaders need to decide to commit or recommit to the school living out its Anglican Christian identity or foundation. This is a critical first step. Everything else flows from that.

Once that decision is made is it reflected in the messaging of the school-the website for instance. In terms of your school website do you do you publicise the fact that your school is an Anglican school on the front page of your website? In your aims is Jesus or Christianity mentioned?

I haven't looked at all the websites of Anglican schools but I have looked at some and it's a mixed bag really. A really lovely message I think is on the front page of Emmanuel Anglican College in Ballina up in the northern rivers of New South Wales. Emmanuel is co-ed independent Anglican p-12 school of about 650 students. I declare I have an interest in Emmanuel College because I was the foundation chair of the school council, Lynn my wife was the first business manager, and our two children were two of the sixteen foundation students.

Emmanuel's front page, the first page you land on says- "we seek to grow each student to become a person of character who is inspired by excellence and adaptability, whose life is modelled on that of Jesus, and who through courage, creativity, compassion, and citizenship, strives to create a better world". That's pretty clear and positive.

Other school's websites don't say much about them being Anglican at all and while they may mention ethos or values don't talk about the foundation of that ethos or values. Some websites don't mention the fact that the school is an Anglican school at all.

Please don't hear me criticising. I don't know all the contexts I am merely inviting reflection on living out the fact that a school is an Anglican school. An Anglican Christian school. To own and embrace that fact.

This is more than websites of course. It is all kinds of communication.

I was told of a conversation last week between prospective parents and a staff member who was giving a school tour. The prospective parents asked how does the fact that this school is an Anglican school reflected in the life of the school? And the staff member said, it doesn't really impact on a day to day basis at all?

I realise there may be anxiety about enrolments being stunted by overt ownership of Anglican or Christian and maybe that's the case sometimes, but I have to say I don't think that's true to a great degree. I strongly suspect that parents or grandparents who are sometimes the ones paying the fees want clarity. What is the school on about? Is the school what it says it is. Is the life and the culture of the school in line with what it says it is.

The Christian worldview as it is embraced in Anglican schools will be reflected in the culture and the activity of the school. And the reason will be clear-we are an Anglican Christian school. Markers like Chapel being taken seriously and not pushed to the edge of the timetable. Senior staff attending and affirming and participating in the worship life of the school. Senior staff speaking of their own faith. Investing in chaplaincy and teaching the Christian faith in a serious kind of way.

Embracing or re embracing the Christian faith of an Anglican school can be incredibly positive gift to the school community and especially the students who are part of the school. The Christian faith, based on the love of God, filled with the optimism and hope of the kingdom of God brings life and purpose.

Conclusion

What do I want to say to this conference? First, thanks for all you do. Second, as we emerge, I invite and encourage a re-embracing of the faith, the world view, the lens that is the foundation of Anglican schools. I think you'll find that very life giving.

I want to finish by reading a prayer from the letter to the Ephesians, chapter 3, this is my prayer for you and all who work in Anglican schools: I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and

to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Amen.