



Discussion Paper – Aboriginal Ministry Fund

Background

At the 170th annual session of Synod in 2024, Archbishop Geoff reflected on reconciliation and offered some thoughts about possible directions; Synod responded with a motion which led to this resolution:

"That this Synod directs Diocesan Council to create a strategy to set aside 15% of future sales of Synod Trust Property for Aboriginal reparation and ministry and to bring a proposal to Synod 2025."

Moved by: Bishop Chris McLeod

Seconded by: The Rev'd Canon William Deng

Following the session of Synod, Diocesan Council established a working group, convened by Kat Pugh, to consider the resolution, and bring forward a discussion paper for consideration by Diocesan Council.

Diocesan Council has endorsed this discussion paper for consideration by Synod members, and the wider diocese, ahead of what is expected to be a conference discussion at Synod.

The President's Address

In his address to the 170th Annual Session of Synod in October 2024 Archbishop Geoff said:

"Reconciliation"

At the start of this address, I acknowledged that we meet on the land of the Kaurna people. I have done that in each of the addresses I have given as President of the Synod since my first in 2017. Basically, I have done a cut and paste from one year to the next. Each year my acknowledgement has included these words: 'we continue to seek and pray for reconciliation'. While that is true, in terms of action we seem to be a bit stuck at the moment.

The question is, what can we do that is meaningful?

It is important that we continue to acknowledge the historical fact that we meet and live on, use and profit from land that originally was appropriated by settlers. That's not to make anyone feel guilty. It's just reality, and should be remembered.

Over the past month or so I have been reading excerpts from a couple of very old books. The first is 47 Years of Clerical Life in South Australia by the Reverend E.K. Miller published in 1895; and the second is Augustus Short: First Bishop of Adelaide. A chapter of colonial church history, edited by Fred T. Whittington and published in 1887.

Both of these histories speak of the engagement of the Anglican church with Aboriginal people; both books are 'of their time'; both are by 'church people'; both include information about the positive attempts of church people to care for Aboriginal people in South Australia; and both make it very clear that the Aboriginal people who had been here when the settlers arrived were quite quickly alienated from their former life as the newcomers settled and took over land for housing, industry, agriculture, and administration.

Land was appropriated without payment to those who originally had use and care of it. Our buildings across the Diocese are built on that land, so maybe land is a key to us moving forward in reconciliation.

A few weeks ago I, along with the Archbishops of Melbourne, Brisbane, and Perth and a representative of the Archbishop of Sydney met with NATSIAC, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council at the invitation of the chair of the Council, to hear from the members of NATSIAC about the priorities they have for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander ministry within the context of the Anglican church of Australia.

What was very clear is that their view is that funding for this ministry is lacking, and very important. They believe funding for a full-time aboriginal bishop, and funding for appropriate administrative support to enable NATSIAC to function properly is of prime importance.

The General Synod does have an endowment fund for Indigenous ministry, but it is not large enough to provide anything like what is needed. As an aside, Bishop Chris the current part-time national Aboriginal bishop has told me he does not want the role full time, so the full-time funding would be for his successor.

As we consider further steps in reconciliation, I do wonder whether the need for funding and land might go together.

I am aware that the Diocese of Melbourne as part of its Sale of Property policy includes a provision that 15% of the proceeds of property sales go to an indigenous fund, and I wonder whether we should consider something like that as a real acknowledgement in more than words, of the historical reality of our land. The money could be added to the General Synod endowment fund to build it up or be used for local indigenous ministry.

Using a percentage of property sale proceeds in this way might be a tangible acknowledgement of history and contribute to a more positive future.

It is important that if we did something like this, we didn't see that as reconciliation 'done and dusted', but rather one step on a continuing journey."

Acknowledging our past

As Archbishop Geoff points out "...it is important that we continue to acknowledge the historical fact that we meet and live on, use and profit from land that originally was appropriated by settlers. That's not to make anyone feel guilty. It's just reality and should be remembered."

Reparation in the broader context of colonisation and dispossession is not about legal liability, but about a moral and spiritual responsibility to acknowledge harm and contribute to healing.

Reparation refers to actions taken to acknowledge and address historical injustices. In the context of the Anglican Church in Adelaide, reparation might meaningfully include:

- Recognition of dispossession of Aboriginal peoples from their lands.
- Support for cultural renewal and healing, by including language, ceremony, and community leadership.
- Investment in Aboriginal ministry, which may serve both spiritual and social purposes.

Whilst we as a Synod can begin to discern what this looks like, the true shape of the reparation, and of the ministry, can only be realised in consultation with the wider community and with good representation of Aboriginal leaders. To that end the reconciliation action plan is a vital and important step.

Developing a Reconciliation Action Plan

There has been some very worthwhile work by the Anglicans for Makarrata network and others over the past several years in developing understanding, consulting, learning, teaching and sharing. That work has led, amongst other things, to the development of a draft Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Unfortunately, that development stalled after the first draft was referred to Reconciliation Australia. A dedicated governance group, with appropriate representation and leadership, is essential to gain their endorsement. For some time, there was not enough energy in the Diocese for people to take up such leadership responsibilities.

Happily, the Reconciliation Action Plan steering group has been reenergised by Diocesan Council under Kat Pugh's leadership.

Contributing to the future

Archbishop Geoff pointed out in his address an opportunity to make contributions to the General Synod's Aboriginal Ministry endowment fund. It is suggested that the Standing Committee of General Synod is determined to fund the National Aboriginal Bishop's office from the General Synod Budget, therefore each diocese will be expected to contribute to that in some form through the General Synod assessment. Adding to the national fund on top of this may limit our ability to fund local ministries and contribute financially to our RAP development. This may not be an amenable option for Synod.

Another opportunity might be to establish dedicated Aboriginal ministry in the diocese. The shape of that may be developed over time in consultation with stakeholders and may include, for example:

- Supporting Aboriginal clergy and lay leaders through training, stipends, and ministry resources.
- Establishing or strengthening Aboriginal congregations and culturally appropriate worship spaces.
- Community engagement and reconciliation initiatives, including partnerships with local Aboriginal organisations.
- Healing and truth-telling programs, especially those led by Elders and community leaders.

Melbourne

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The Diocese of Melbourne has been discussing and consulting for many years.

This is not intended to be a complete review, but an indication of the length, extent and nature of their engagement.

1. In 2018 the Aboriginal Council of the Anglican Province of Victoria extended an invitation to the diocese to walk and work together
2. In 2020 the Council of the Diocese of Melbourne resolved to set up a Reconciliation working group.
3. COVID really got substantially in the way in Melbourne. There was some progress and online meetings, but it wasn't until Feb 2022 that a reconciliation working group was established
4. In 2023 Uncle Glen Loughrey was appointed Diocesan Aboriginal Educational Officer, he provided education and information leading into the Voice Referendum
5. Following a report to Synod in 2023 by the Reconciliation Working Group, the leadership in Victoria determined to appoint Glen as Provincial Archdeacon for Reconciliation, First Nations Recognition and Treaty in April 2024.

6. The objective of that Archdeacon position is to work with the Aboriginal Council of the Province to:
 - Gather a provincial Aboriginal Church Council
 - Develop skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clergy and lay leaders
 - Create a pathway for emerging Indigenous leaders within the church.
7. In addition, the Diocese made submissions to the Yoorook Justice Commission in March 2024, including reporting on work to create a missional property strategy to set aside 15% of property sales for Aboriginal Ministry and Reparations.
8. In July 2024 Melbourne approved the Missional Property Strategy policy which contains the following provisions:
 - Where a parish is merging, the merged parish may retain only one church, hall and house. The surplus property is to be treated as Diocesan Managed Property and is not to fund property maintenance costs or to support a parish that is otherwise unviable.
 - Proceeds of the sale of Diocesan Managed property is to be distributed as follows:

- Indigenous Fund	15%
- Redress for child sexual abuse	25%
- Diocesan Corpus	30%
- Property for growth in ministry	30%

While Melbourne is further ahead than we are—particularly in engaging key stakeholders and communities, advancing education, allocating funds, and establishing dedicated roles—the shape of reparation and ministry there is still evolving.

What is our commitment to Aboriginal Ministry?

It is clear that this synod has an appetite for reparation and reconciliation, as reflected in the work of Anglicans for Makarrata, the establishment of a working group, and this discussion. Discerning our ministry will take time and will not be free from cost - be that financial, chronological, or spiritual. The question really is, is this synod prepared to meet these costs?

Sustained long-term funding

Archbishop Geoff suggested 15% of property sales as a starting point for consideration, reflecting the Melbourne policy. This may also go some way to addressing reparation as Archbishop Geoff stated in his address *“Using a percentage of property sale proceeds in this way might be a tangible acknowledgement of history and contribute to a more positive future.”*

If we were to take that approach, each \$1m of property sales would contribute \$150,000 to the fund. Whilst this may not be the fastest way to build up a fund (to perpetually fund one ministry position would require the sale of \$21m of property; on past performance, that would take approximately five years to achieve) it does represent a commitment to using profits from aboriginal land for aboriginal ministries.

The next issue is who’s share the 15% comes from. In our Parochial Administration Ordinance, the disbursement is:

- 55% Parish
- 5% External Mission & Ministry
- 40% Synod

Melbourne has neatly dealt with this by taking the first 15% for the fund. If we were to do that the splits would be:

- 15% Aboriginal Ministry
- 47% Parish

- 4% External Mission and Ministry
- 34% Synod

This proposed approach does raise some questions of equity.

Firstly, the Synod can only meaningfully deal with Synod-owned or Synod Trust property. There does appear to be an equity issue here if the non-model trust parishes are not captured by this proposal.

Secondly, and much more importantly, it might be argued that this approach has a very uneven impact: Only parishes with property sales are compelled to contribute.

Parishes, and other ministry groups, may consider making voluntary donations to the fund to honour their moral and spiritual responsibility to recognise harm, contribute to healing, and take action to acknowledge and address historical injustices.

Legal and Trust Considerations

Under the Model Declaration of Trust Ordinance, Synod holds property in trust for parishes. Redirecting sale proceeds must be consistent with trust purposes. Legal advice may be required to ensure compliance with trust law and to avoid unintended consequences.

Proposals for consideration

Synod supports the establishment of a dedicated fund for Aboriginal Ministry initiatives.

The fund be built up from 15% of the proceeds of future Synod Trust Property sales alongside voluntary contributions.

The shape of such initiatives will be determined by the Archbishop with the concurrence of Diocesan Council following appropriate consultation.