

## Report on General Synod Theological Hui 2008

### “E Ahu Ana Tatou Ki Hea – The Gospel Then and Now” Jenny Dawson

Kathy Greib described Paul as “starting off as a kind of terrorist killing off those who he thought got it wrong, but after his conversion he learned a kind of humility discovering that taking on the servant mind of Christ is more important than principles or beliefs.”

At the Theological Hui held for our church at St John’s College in Meadowbank, Auckland, from 10-13 February, studies were led by Professor Greib from Virginia Theological Seminary on the book of Romans. The aim was to enable open and creative conversations around Paul’s teaching which was overwhelmingly concerned with the issue of difference. We learned that he was writing to the Christian people of the house churches in Rome, whom he did not know but who he hoped to visit, mostly to get support from them for his planned mission to Spain. Paul was deeply concerned about the conflicts amongst the Roman Christians and he sought to offer them a way of understanding their unity in Christ as being far more significant than their differences. At the same time he did not under-estimate the insidious, destructive power of sin and death.

Kathy set the teaching clearly within the story behind Romans, so always the emphasis was on this being about real people like us. They are one church even though they don’t agree, a message that I think speaks clearly to our situation with different and different congregations that value different ways of worshipping and yet must – for the sake of Christ – find a way of being one church. That is why our fifth Sunday services and our other whole-parish activities – from picnic to training events - are so important. If we can’t find of a way of living and worshipping together, at least occasionally, then we have nothing to say to the community and our mission is meaningless.

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Righteousness and justice are the same word in biblical thinking. This is the opposite to the evil we do in attacking each other, and we were urged to remember that it is sin that is the enemy, not people who act or think differently to us. In the end, like Paul, the focus was on taking the good news of Christ to Spain, so too for us mission remains the true focus.

It was a privilege to attend this Hui especially because I went as Bishop Tom’s nominee. Each “episcopal unit”, across the three tikanga of Maori, Pakeha and Polynesia, was asked to send a bishop or nominee and others. This

meant that we had about 100 people who met in diverse small groups and a wide ranging discussion was possible. The diverse nature of the group reminded us powerfully of what it is to be “te whanau a te karaiti”.

There were also several very thoughtful inputs from Bishop Paul Reeves, former Archbishop and Governor General, with stories about his current work as peace-maker and negotiator, and also wonderful worship facilitated by Revd John Fairbrother. Above all, the common thread was how as Christians we are called to live with difference.

I was challenged on many levels, both personally and with regard to my leadership role in this parish. I wondered how far our efforts in local mission here are compromised by any lack of unity, or perhaps I should say any unwillingness to stand together bridging our differences and valuing our diversity. I look forward to addressing this in sermons, parish studies, and in my own devotional life, in the months ahead.