

Reflections • Wednesday 6 February 2019 • By Archbishop Phillip Aspinall

## Generous Hospitality

How can we engage constructively with people with whom we differ? Much of what passes for engagement these days seems to be nothing more than a shouting match on social media. We like to think we treat people with respect, act in good faith, value dignity, honesty and integrity, but do we put those principles into practice? Are relationships within the church any different from those in wider society? How do we engage with one another, especially when we differ?

Our theme for 2019 is 'Generous Hospitality'. It is a mark of who we are called to be as Christians and provides a starting point for thinking about how we might create communities that reflect the teachings and actions of Jesus.

In 2017 the General Synod of our church endorsed 'Being Together', which has also been adopted in the Anglican Church Southern Queensland. It is a set of guidelines or expectations for relationships and interactions within the Church. In short, it guides how we behave towards each other and tries to ensure our actions are consistent with our faith.

Sometimes we react to bad behaviour with equally poor actions. Intentionally breaking this cycle can lead to remarkable breakthroughs. If, instead of payback, we respond to negative behaviour by respecting the other person and without threatening, belittling them or humiliating them, then that can open constructive ways forward. Speaking to each other with integrity and honesty and refraining from speculation and gossip are also principles of 'Being Together'. This can make a big difference to the quality of relationships in a community, church or otherwise.

'Being Together' invites us to renew, on a daily basis, a commitment to value the wellbeing of others and to consider the impact of our behaviour on others and to encourage others. It affirms the fundamental human principles of respect for each and every person and recognises everyone's dignity, irrespective of ability, gender, sexuality, race, age or status. This outlook can make the world of difference.

Conflict is part and parcel of human relationships and it inevitably occurs within the Church, too. When we are prepared to accept responsibility for our part in a conflict – even if it was not all of our own making – and when we were are willing to play our part in resolving a conflict with love, forgiveness and healing in our hearts and minds, then new beginnings are possible.

Jesus said and did a great deal to point us in the right direction. He reached across commonly accepted differences and broke down seemingly insurmountable barriers, extending God's love and acceptance to those regarded as unlovely and unacceptable. He shared meals with all kinds of people, including some regarded as beyond the pale.

2019 is an opportunity for us to embrace the simple (to understand) but difficult (to do) teaching of Jesus to love one another. To be generously hospitable people, both as hosts and guests, can create a climate where joy, peace and faith become contagious throughout our churches and send ripples of change across the pond of wider society.

**Join Archbishop Phillip Aspinall on 15 February between 5.30 pm and 8.00 pm at St John's Anglican Cathedral to launch the 2019 theme 'Generous Hospitality'.**

## Anglicare: bringing love and hope into the lives of children in the Northern Region



**Sue Mills, Service Manager, Children and Families, Anglicare Southern Queensland in her Gympie office**

Back in June 2015, I was fortunate to be appointed as Service Manager for Children and Families for the Gympie and Sunshine Coast regions. At the time, our main business was supporting children who couldn't live at home and supporting the children's foster carers. The Anglicare staff undertook difficult, but rewarding work, every day.

Fast forward three years and the service has received more funding to grow the foster care services, as well as successfully tendering for family support services for vulnerable families living in Gympie and the Sunshine Coast Hinterland.

New services meant more staff, new offices and more resources to enable staff to do their work well. Looking back now, Anglicare in Gympie and Sunshine Coast looks very different from what it did three years ago, at least on the outside. Inside, we still have almost all the same staff who were with us in 2015 doing the same great work. And, I would like to tell you about the amazing people who work with Anglicare through the story of a little girl named Daisy.

Once upon a time there was a little girl called Daisy (not her real name) who, for reasons I can't go into, couldn't live with at home with mum or dad. In the last six years, Daisy has lived with Anglicare foster carers. Due to Daisy's poor childhood experiences, she is often angry as she tries to make sense of her world and her previous life, and can be very difficult to live with. Things at school aren't great for Daisy either as she tries to manage her emotions and complete her school work.

Daisy's two siblings came to live with Daisy soon after their births with the hope that they could all live together and connect as a family. This was absolutely the right thing for all of them, but the babies were cute and happy and Daisy didn't always feel cute or happy. Whilst the babies were easy to look after, Daisy didn't cope well with the transition and became upset and angry. The foster carers who loved Daisy felt they couldn't manage her behaviour *and* keep the younger kids safe as well. Despite everyone's best efforts, it was decided that Daisy would have to move and live with another foster family.

Whilst this was being organised, Anglicare's Intensive Foster Care service was asked to support Daisy and her carers. One of our therapeutic youth workers started to collect Daisy from school a few afternoons a week to take her to counselling sessions and do a range of activities together that were designed to build Daisy's resilience and sense of positive self. At the same time, one of our Practitioners worked with Daisy's original carers to help them understand the trauma that Daisy had experienced and how it was affecting Daisy. The Practitioner showed the carers strategies to strengthen their bond with Daisy and manage her difficult behaviour. Sometimes they needed daily debriefing sessions, but gradually the carers began to feel a stronger connection with Daisy and she also felt more secure and gradually began to feel happy. Things improved so much that the carers decided that they wanted Daisy to stay with them again, so she could grow up with her siblings.

This is a true story. We don't know what the future holds for Daisy, but today, because of the work being undertaken by our Anglicare staff, one little girl is beginning to make sense of her world, trust the adults around her and enjoy being a big sister. And, her foster carers are able to continue offering her a loving and stable home with her younger siblings.

And that is the work that Anglicare staff, across all of the Children and Families Services, are doing every day. They are not simply delivering services – they are being of service to vulnerable children and their families in our community, putting into practice Anglicare's values of Love, Hope, Care and Humility.