

“We need to tread gently, listening with deep care”



Bishop John Roundhill is Bishop for the Southern Region of the Anglican Church of Southern Queensland

It was an early start on what is the first day of the week. On Sunday 14 August, I arrived at St George’s Anglican Church in Beenleigh for their Sunday service. As their Bishop, I have joined the congregation in worship before. However, what made this visit different is that it was the first Sunday after their priest left to form the first church under the “Diocese of the Southern Cross”.

What struck me, as I stood in the carpark of St George’s, was the delight and surprise as people spontaneously gathered upon their arrival – a kind of, “Oh, so good to see you here!”

In their excitement and joy, there was something of the resurrection in their greeting of each other.

Inevitably there were other complex emotions, too, as the morning service progressed. That Sunday, the congregation was about half what it was the week before.

There was bewilderment and sorrow as one parishioner realised that a long-term friend who had sat on the same pew for many years was missing. They had either decided to go elsewhere or perhaps chosen not to attend church that day.

The pain was not just because some long-term friends were not there, but because they had chosen to walk away – to not share the Eucharist around the same table.

This is about as painful as church life gets. This kind of pain is especially raw when it is experienced in pews with missing faces on a Sunday morning.

The grief experienced by Beenleigh parishioners is now being experienced by the Wishart community, with the more recent resignation of their long-term priest.

When a church experiences such grief, it is important for all to show compassion and sensitivity – in both our online and offline conversations – because what has happened can be likened to a bereavement. We need to tread gently, listening with deep care.

As we do so, let us listen first and then respond with gentleness and understanding.

Whatever way we see this period of time, it is first and foremost a pressing pastoral issue for the Beenleigh and Wishart communities – parishioners, lay leaders and remaining clergy. They are grieving.

I am also deeply concerned for the gender and sexually diverse people and their loved ones in our parishes who have been impacted. As a parent of a non-binary young adult, I can identify with the pain felt.

The Christian Gospel speaks into this whole situation. Where there is hurt and bereavement, there is always hope. Where there is death, there is the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. It is not just at 7.30am in a cold church carpark that we might glimpse something new.

“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”
[\(Ephesians 4.1-6\)](#)