



Rev. Michael Hewat

View from Down Under: What FCA means for us

When asked to write about what FCA means to West Hamilton Community Church my mind immediately went back to an interview with an American rector at the GFCA (Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans) conference in 2013. When asked this same question in respect of GFCA his response was, “They know us and pray for us. We are not alone.”

In one sense West Hamilton is alone. We are still the only parish in this Province whose vicar and entire vestry have withdrawn their submission to the authority of General Synod, the consequence being loss of licences and buildings. It was a costly, painful process, and continues to present many challenges, but – like the apostle Paul – we are learning to be satisfied with what we have and with whatever happens... Christ is the one who gives us the strength we need to do whatever we must do (Phil 4.11-13).

This aloneness is primarily structural and political. In some respects it is not without its blessings! However the church of God is a family and it is not good for parishes to be alone. When we were effectively expelled from this Province we soon realised that we needed to be part of a larger church family - for fellowship and support, but also accountability. Independent churches have a poor track record of sustainability. It is difficult for them to renew themselves from their own resources alone, and it is dangerous for church leaders not to be accountable to someone in authority over them.

We also wanted to reclaim our Anglican identity. This is the branch of God’s catholic Church to which we have always belonged, and we wanted to maintain the partnerships and relationships we still had within this land and the global Communion. The Anglican Church in Aotearoa-New Zealand and Polynesia may be prepared to tear the fabric of the Communion by its actions, but we had already insisted we did not want to be a party to such behaviour. Therefore it was imperative that we reconnected somehow.

To date we have been able to reconnect through GFCA. The Primates’ Council heard our cry and agreed to authenticate us as an independent Anglican parish. For that we have been extremely grateful. However we were advised that this is not something the Primates’ Council would normally do. Its practice is to offer support to dioceses (and their bishops), not individual parishes and clergy.

Furthermore it has not provided us with episcopal oversight. We do have an appointed Visitor, which is a helpful safeguard, but no bishop.

Last March eight members of our Church Council attended the Australian FCA Conference in Melbourne, at which FCA (Australia) was launched. This too was a great encouragement to us. Professor Ashley Null eloquently reminded us of some of Anglicanism’s great strengths. The focus of the conference was not on human sexuality but on effective mission, with a number of speakers testifying to the transforming power of the gospel at work in their own communities. In the words of Brian Carrell, “Out of all this a consensus could be sensed that liberal theology, and parish ministry based on this, was a dead end; and that there was a need to bring our whole Anglican Communion, beginning with ourselves, back to its reformed Anglican roots, based on the primacy of Scripture.”

As inspiring as all this was, and as helpful as FCA (Australia) is for Australians, we returned feeling something similar is a lot more urgently needed here in New Zealand. If Australian evangelicals are concerned about the health of their church, how much more dire is the situation here? Not only is this Province in serious decline but – unlike in Australia - the evangelical voice is seldom heard or heeded. Motion 30 charted a new course for this Province which the General Synod in May will be asked to embark on. If it does, as seems most likely, there will almost certainly be other parishes and clergy who find themselves in the same position as West Hamilton and myself – cut adrift.

All this makes the launch of FCA (NZ) very timely. For a parish such as ours, if it weren’t for FCA we would have to abandon Anglicanism and join some other fold. What the establishment of FCA does is to provide a local expression of Anglicanism for West Hamilton to be in fellowship with, but – more importantly – to partner with to see God glorified in these Islands as the gospel of his Son is faithfully proclaimed in the power of his Spirit.