

A Remarkable Venture of Faith
An Examination of the Fiduciary Relationship between
The Anglican Church of Australia and the Missionary
Diocese of Carpentaria

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Extended Abstract

The Diocese of Carpentaria was established as a missionary diocese in 1900 to extend the pastoral work of the Anglican Church and the evangelisation of indigenous peoples and settlers in Northern Australia. The Diocese never managed to reach a level of self-support and needed the assistance of southern dioceses and more especially the support of the Church mission agencies, for example, the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel from England in the early stages of its establishment, and the Australian Board of Missions (now referred to as the Anglican Board of Missions – Australia), the Church Missionary Society, and also in the later years the National Home Mission Fund.

As a missionary diocese it had to depend on a relationship of trust and mutual obligation referred to as a fiduciary relationship, which in a broad term relates to duty of care. The Diocese was inaugurated as a Missionary Diocese to extend support and evangelisation for Aboriginal people in Northern Australia and the ministry of the Church to settlers who had moved north in the progressive colonisation of Australia. The Diocese of Carpentaria carried out a shared responsibility along with other denominations in establishing missions for Aboriginal people in northern Australia, providing hospitals and schools. They also provided community security in permanent settlements that became places of refuge in the face of rapid European occupation, some of which took place in the context of violence. Eight Aboriginal Missions were established in the Diocese along with widespread rural ministries for settlers. The Anglican Church established the first mission to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders at Somerset in north Queensland in 1867, and the Diocese of Carpentaria took over the responsibility in 1915 of the Torres Strait Mission, established by the London Missionary Society in 1871.

The Diocese of Carpentaria included an area in Queensland from the Torres Strait Islands, Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf Country in the area from north of Latitude 19°30" South and west from 144° Longitude East and north from a line 16° 40" Latitude South to the east coast. It also included all the Northern Territory up until 1968. The See was located at Thursday Island.

An analysis of the procedure for the establishment of the Diocese from the Diocese of North Queensland and from the Diocese of Adelaide at the beginning of the twentieth century is investigated. Unfortunately an inappropriate boundary was drawn between the Diocese of North Queensland and the Diocese of Carpentaria at the time of the establishment of the new diocese. It was believed by some that Cooktown would become a provincial centre for Cape York Peninsula and the Queensland Gulf Country. In fact it declined into a village and Cairns, which was only forty kilometres south of the boundary, became the provincial centre for the area. This boundary proved to be a critical demographic problem for the whole life of the Diocese. The founding, in 1905, of the Mitchell River Mission in the Diocese of Carpentaria with the full support of the Yarrabah Mission, established in 1892 east of Cairns in the Diocese of North Queensland, formed a close association between the management of the missions. Both George Frodsham, the Bishop of North Queensland and Gilbert White, the Bishop of Carpentaria, agreed that the boundary must be moved south to incorporate Yarrabah Mission and the rapidly growing town of Cairns, which by 1910 had outstripped Cooktown. However a seriously unfortunate situation occurred when the border change was not ratified by the Bishops of North Queensland and Carpentaria and by the newly established Province of Queensland. George Frodsham left the Diocese of North Queensland due to medical reasons, and a new Bishop was elected who disagreed with this boundary change. The implications of this for the ongoing duty of care between these two neighbouring dioceses is researched and investigated in this thesis.

Two matters relating to fiduciary duty are described in the Torres Strait before the Diocese of Carpentaria was established. The first relates to the mission founded at the Government Settlement of Somerset. The Church of England's delay in providing a missionary priest and a teacher indicated a lack of enthusiasm for the evangelisation of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in far north Queensland. When the first Governor of

Queensland, George Bowen, the founder of the Government outpost of Somerset was transferred to New Zealand, the immediate lack of support and the termination of financial assistance to the Church mission can be seen as a grievous breach of fiduciary obligation. This was both for the Aborigines, and also for the two missionaries who were willing to assist the indigenous people in preparing them for the impact of European settlement in the far north of the Colony. Matters relating to the investigation of the duty of care for South Sea Islander co-workers in the London Missionary Society relate to the sacrificial aspects of primary missionary work and the fiduciary obligation of the Society.

A short case study of the development of the first Aboriginal Mission to be established by the Diocese of Carpentaria is included in this thesis. The founding of Mitchell River Mission took place at a time when the privations of life in the remote far north of Australia were indeed extreme. However the Diocese was only able to afford bare necessities in carrying out such an important responsibility for the nation. It is also noted that the Queensland Government did not share this responsibility at all adequately.

The growth of Darwin after the end of World War II indicated that it was not feasible to operate the Anglican Church in the Northern Territory from a community on a remote island in the Torres Strait. The plans to form a new Diocese of the Northern Territory from the Diocese of Carpentaria which took place in 1968 opened up conversations and a polemical exercise about the future re-organisation of the Anglican Province of Queensland.

The post-war period in the 1950s and the 1960s introduced a greater awareness about Northern Australia for the rest of the population. Concern about the treatment of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders challenged the State and Federal Governments to take on a greater responsibility from the Churches that were managing missions. In the case of the Diocese of Carpentaria, it was the Diocese that brought people's attention to the grossly inadequate funding for Aboriginal people. This resulted in the Diocese of Carpentaria handing over the administration of missions to the Queensland Government in 1967.

The Diocese of Carpentaria came to an end with a gravely unsatisfactory amalgamation with the Diocese of North Queensland in 1996. The handling of this amalgamation brought on a schism in the Anglican Church in the Torres Strait Region of

the Diocese, as consultation with the Torres Strait Islanders was poorly done. The situation was complicated by the way the Church administration chose to deal with the issue of leadership and separate agendas pursued by other parties in the Diocese. While individuals involved in these events have been accused of breaches of fiduciary obligation, this must be seen as a misfeasance, a wrongful exercise of lawful authority, which can of course occur unintentionally. It is not a malfeasance, described as an evil doing. The topic of the thesis is an examination of fiduciary relationships between the Australian Anglican Church and the Diocese of Carpentaria. Conspiracy theories related in this thesis refer to misunderstandings, rather than blatant evil acts.

The thesis examines the strengths and weaknesses of the fiduciary relationships between the Anglican Church within Australia and this missionary diocese, and how the duty of care varied according to the changing policies and structures of the Church on the one hand, and the application of the ministry responsibilities of the Diocese on the other.