



Keen to encourage the next generation: delegates at the 2022 GAFCON Australasia conference in Canberra.

Russell Powell

GAFCON Australasia's second conference has set its sights firmly on the future of the church in Australia, for the first time welcoming youth to be fully involved in the movement.

GAFCON, the Global Anglican Future Conference, began as a meeting in Jerusalem in 2008 and grew into a movement for reform and renewal in the Anglican Church across the world.

The Australasian branch held its first conference in Canberra in 2022, where it announced the formation of the Diocese of the Southern Cross to cover congregations that had to withdraw from the Anglican Church in various parts of Australia because of teaching that went against the Bible.

In Brisbane in July, GAFCON Australasia will convene with a focus on children and youth.

"The invitation is for every leader in your church: male and female, young and old, clergy and lay," says the chairman of the conference committee, the Rev Jodie McNeill. "This is an opportunity to gather those from remote or rural settings, from large suburban teams, and from situations which might be very different from your own."

As a delegate at GAFCON's international conference last year in Rwanda, Mr McNeill, who is rector of Jamberoo in the Sydney Diocese, was reminded

afresh of the diversity of the global Anglican church.

"While there were men and women from many nations, the next generation of Anglicans were not present at the conference," he says. "Even though the average Anglican is aged in their 30s, there were almost no delegates in the lower half of the population range.

"It suddenly dawned on me that if we wish to inspire the next generation of Anglicans to the mission of proclaiming Christ faithfully, then they need to be in the room where it happens!"

There is ethnic diversity in the movement in Australia, with some of the newer Diocese of the Southern Cross congregations in South East Queensland including a large proportion of members from Tonga, Samoa and South Sudan.

But diversity in age is also in the sights of conference organisers and, with a "stretch goal" of 30 per cent of delegates aged under 30, the 2024 conference theme is Building The Future – with speakers including the principal of Youthworks College, the Rev Mike Dicker and Moore College lecturer the Rev Dr Mark Earngey.

"We have reimagined this to be an event that would minister to younger Anglicans as well as those who already attended GAFCON events," Mr McNeill

says. "So, we thought that we'd run special children's and youth workshops [and] we'd make under 18s free, with students and most ministry spouses half price."

The venue, Riverlife Baptist Church southwest of the Brisbane CBD, sits on five hectares of land with two acres under roof, and the main auditorium seats 1500 people. Mr McNeill's vision is for the

auditorium to be full with delegates of all ages.

"We want the kids and youth to be present, and even to participate in the running of the main sessions, so that we might encourage and inspire people in smaller churches who have no other option but intergenerational ministry each Sunday." SC

For more details see www.gafconaustralia.org/conference/

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