Appendix #2: A brief history of the Anglican Church in Australia

When the First Fleet was sent to New South Wales in 1787, Richard Johnson of the Church of England was licensed as chaplain to the fleet and the settlement. In 1825 Thomas Scott was appointed Archdeacon of Australia under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Calcutta. William Grant Broughton, who succeeded Scott in 1829, was consecrated the first (and only) "Bishop of Australia" in 1836.

In early Colonial times, the Church of England clergy worked closely with the governors. Richard Johnson, a chaplain, was charged by the governor, Arthur Phillip, with improving "public morality" in the colony, but he was also heavily involved in health and education. Samuel Marsden (1765–1838) had magisterial duties, and so was equated with the authorities by the convicts. He became known as the "flogging parson" for the severity of his punishments. Some of the Irish convicts had been transported to Australia for political crimes or social rebellion in Ireland, so the authorities were suspicious of Roman Catholicism for the first three decades of settlement and Roman Catholic convicts were compelled to attend Church of England services and their children and orphans were raised by the authorities as Anglicans.

The Church of England lost its legal privileges in the Colony of New South Wales by the Church Act of 1836. Drafted by the reformist attorney-general John Plunkett, the act established legal equality for Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Presbyterians and was later extended to Methodists.

A mission to the Aborigines was established in the Wellington Valley in New South Wales by the Church Missionary Society in 1832, but it ended in failure and indigenous people in the 19th century demonstrated a reluctance to convert to the religion of the colonists who were seizing their lands.

In 1842 the Diocese of Tasmania was created. In 1847 the rest of the Diocese of Australia was divided into the four separate dioceses of Sydney, Adelaide, Newcastle and Melbourne. Over the following 80 years the number of dioceses increased to 25.

Sectarianism in Australia tended to reflect the political inheritance of Britain and Ireland. Until 1945, the vast majority of Roman Catholics in Australia were of Irish descent, causing the Anglo-Protestant majority to question their loyalty to the British Empire. The Australian Constitution of 1901 provided for freedom of religion. Australian society was predominantly Anglo-Celtic, with 40% of the population being Anglican. It remained the largest Christian denomination until the 1986 census. After World War II, the ethnic and cultural mix of Australia diversified and Anglicanism gave way to Roman Catholicism as the largest denomination. The number of Anglicans attending regular worship began to decline in 1959 and figures for occasional services (baptisms, confirmations, weddings and funerals) started to decline after 1966. In recent times, the Anglican and other Christian churches of Australia have been active in ecumenical activity. The Australian Committee for the World Council of Churches was established in 1946 by the Anglican and mainline Protestant churches. The movement
evolved and expanded with Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches later joining and by 1994 the Roman Catholic Church was also a member of the national ecumenical body, the National Council of Churches in Australia.

Since 1 January 1962 the Australian church has been autocephalous and headed by its own primate. On 24 August 1981 the church officially changed its name from the Church of England in Australia and Tasmania to the Anglican Church of Australia.


In 1985 the general synod of the Australian church passed a canon to allow the ordination of women as deacons. In 1992 the general synod approved legislation allowing dioceses to ordain women to the priesthood. Dioceses could choose to adopt the legislation. In 1992, 90 women were ordained in the Anglican Church of Australia and two others who had been ordained overseas were recognised. After decades of debate the issue of women's ordination, particularly as bishops, continues to divide traditionalists and reformers within the church. As of November 2013 five dioceses had not ordained women as priests and two had not ordained women as deacons. The most recent diocese to vote in favour of ordaining women as priests was the Ballarat diocese in October 2013. In 2008, Kay Goldsworthy was ordained as an assistant bishop for the Diocese of Perth, thus becoming the first woman consecrated as a bishop of the Anglican Church of Australia. Sarah Macneil was elected in 2013 to be the first female diocesan bishop in Australia. In 2014 she was consecrated and installed as the first female diocesan bishop in Australia (for the Diocese of Grafton in New South Wales).

The church remains a major provider of education and welfare services in Australia. It provides chaplains to the Australian Defence Force, hospitals, schools, industry and prisons. Senior clergy such as Peter Jensen, former Archbishop of Sydney, have a high profile in discussions on a diverse range of social issues in contemporary national debates. In recent times the church has encouraged its leaders to talk on such issues as indigenous rights; international security; peace and justice; and poverty and equity. The current primate is Philip Freier, Archbishop of Melbourne, who took office on 4 July 2014.