

## Theology Degree Forms Historic Partnership

The Anglican Diocese of Newcastle has confirmed an historic partnership with the University of Newcastle, with the University Council approving the Bachelor of Theology degree in March.

The Diocese has a history of longing for a closer relationship between Theology and the University.

Bishop Brian Farran said, "This historic partnership is a momentous occasion that sees the dream of many previous Bishops of Newcastle come to fruition."

The earliest bishops wrote of their desire for a "learned clergy" Bishop Tyrrell was particularly concerned about producing scholarly priests such as those who had graduated from the old foundations of England.

The third Bishop of Newcastle, George Stanton (1890-1905), was a vociferous advocate for theology being taught within the proximate University of Sydney.

More immediate predecessors were committed to ensuring the place of theology within the university. For instance, Bishop Francis De Witt Batty (1931-1958) campaigned for a University in Newcastle.

Bishop James Housden (1958-1972) tried to persuade the Synod of the Diocese of Newcastle in the mid 1960s to invest substantially in the new University by establishing a residential college.

Bishop Brian said, "My vision of placing theology in a public arena in a tertiary setting where everything can be critically assessed and dialogue can take place, is an exciting way of making links with the community and developing religious conversation."

The Diocese is contributing to the funding of the program by providing a Chair of Theology and a Senior Lectureship in theology for a period of five years.

Dr Grahame Feletti is the Program Convenor and the course instructors thus far are Dr Ed Parker, The Rev'd Dr Fergus King, and The Rev'd Bruce Perry.

The Diocesan Ordinands, along with other students are currently enrolled in the first year courses.

This historic partnership creates the only theological degree in Australia that is fully integrated within a university institution, in the tradition of the great European Universities.

Bishop Brian said, "World religions are becoming significant matters in social and political awareness and therefore, exploration of them is important."

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Professor Kevin McConkey said the partnership between the Anglican Diocese and the University of Newcastle will provide a new avenue of higher education for the religious and broader community.

"Theology and religious studies are very popular and the University is pleased to offer the Bachelor degree program with the active support of the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle."

*Elizabeth Keevers*