



6 February 2017

Dear sisters and brothers,

We have come to expect that at the beginning of every year there will be some media publicity about Special Religious Education in schools. This has happened again this year with quite a flurry of newspaper and social media articles.

What saddens me is that there is no celebration of the outstanding volunteer effort and great care that is offered to students in state schools by so many people. I know how diligent you are in your preparation and your desire to see children offered a well-rounded education which includes a religious perspective.

There are people who advocate against SRE and who want to encourage parents to withdraw their children from SRE classes. There will be more media about SRE during the year and at the same time next year.

So that you know what I said to the Herald, I am including my written replies below –

Anglicans in the Hunter recognise that religious groups are offered an incredible privilege in being able to offer Special Religious Education in state schools.

I was troubled by the matters raised in the Queensland review which was recently brought to my attention. We have been assured by the publishers of the Connect material that they have worked closely with Education Queensland to satisfactorily address all of the concerns raised by them.

For many decades Anglican clergy and lay volunteers have been involved in teaching SRE classes as part of offering holistic education to students. Their contribution is appreciated in many school communities. We ensure that our teachers have regular training opportunities and satisfy all working with children requirements.

It is appropriate for the current forms of religious education to be reviewed. Australian society continues to change and education about ethics, values and beliefs needs to reflect those changes.

My attention has been drawn to some specific questions about the view of the Bible in the Connect material which I will review more fully over the coming weeks.

I was then asked 'Can I just check what is your view on the Old Testament? Is it to be read as historic fact?' to which I replied

The Bible for me is a sacred text which through the use of poetry and narrative brings to life understandings about God through the centuries. By reading it we understand the teachings of Jesus, the culture in which they were fashioned and their implications. It is not a history text or science book.

The CEY Commission of the Diocese will continue to think through the way we offer SRE. We need to think about how we assist children with an Anglican affiliation in state schools to learn about the Christian faith if their parents are happy for them to do so. The environment for this work will continue to change and we need to think about the best ways of undertaking this work. The future will bring some new and different opportunities and challenges. Archdeacon Arthur Copeman and Mrs Kate Baker continue to lead this work for the Diocese.

Thank you for your ministry. I am so disappointed that the media coverage has left so many of you feeling discouraged. Your efforts, enthusiasm, commitment and care are greatly appreciated.

Please be assured of the prayers of people across the Diocese and across the churches in your work.

With every blessing,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter', written in a cursive style.

Bishop Peter Stuart