



**SUPREME COURT
OF QUEENSLAND**

**Opening of Law Year Church Service, Rockhampton
St Paul's Anglican Church
Monday 15 July 2013, 9am**

**The Hon Paul de Jersey AC
Chief Justice**

I begin by expressing gratitude to the Dean and the clergy of the Cathedral for kindly hosting this morning's service, and Bishop Godfrey for his participation, and I welcome so many members of the Central Queensland profession, led by Justice McMeekin, Judge Smith and the Magistrates; representatives of the support agencies, the Queensland Police Service, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and Legal Aid (Qld); and students. I particularly welcome, as well, our indigenous fellow citizens. Thank you, students from Grammar, for your inspiring choral contribution.

By our presence today, we all implicitly acknowledge the high significance of the legal profession as custodian of the rule of law. We also demonstrate publicly our earnest commitment to that goal. Beyond even those noble commitments, we acknowledge by our participation a need for further enlightenment, wisdom and reassurance. And by the prayers we offer today, we invoke God's help to that end.

In a note he compiled at my request for the 2011 Supreme Court Yearbook, the Honourable Alan Demack encapsulated in this passage the significance of these services:

“When Sir Roslyn Philp died in 1965 he was accorded a State Funeral in St John's Cathedral. Life had presented him with many unanswered questions, and he remained an agnostic. In the course of his eulogy, Archbishop Halse reminded the congregation of the obligation Christians have to pray for those in authority, irrespective of their personal beliefs. This practice dates back to the sixth century BCE, when the prophet Jeremiah urged the people who had been taken into captivity in Babylon to pray for the welfare of the city to which they had been taken.



Opening of Law Year Church Service, Rockhampton
St Paul's Anglican Church
Monday 15 July 2013, 9am

So Christians regard the gathering for a service of worship in which prayers are offered for the people involved in the administration of justice as a manifestation of their religion. This is one of the rights protected by Article 18 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Those whose religion or beliefs lead them to express their concern for the administration of justice in other ways are, of course, free to do so, just as Christians are free to decide if their beliefs allow them to participate in any such observance.”

The Brisbane service dates back to the late 1950s, when two services were held, one at St Stephen's Cathedral and one at St John's Cathedral. From the late 1960s, one ecumenical service was held, changing in the late 1980s from the sweltering conditions of early February to more tolerable July. I know the Rockhampton service is of long lineage, as with the services in Mackay, Townsville and Cairns. I have not been able to discover when this service was first held in Rockhampton, but I am told it certainly did not predate 1966. I have attended annual services since my appointment as Chief Justice in 1998. What we can say with assurance is that the Central Queensland service is sufficiently longstanding to be regarded as a fixture, and that is a good thing.

I have occasionally over the years been challenged about the justification for judicial officers participating qua judges in this service of religious worship. The challengers usually have invoked the concept of the separation of church and State. I have not been greatly concerned by those challenges. It is significant that the attendance at the service over recent years appears to have increased rather than diminished. And there is no doubt that practitioners attending are very much aware of the realities and perceptions of their legitimate roles.

In the words in which I concluded these brief observations last year, may I again, on behalf of the Central Queensland community and the State of Queensland, thank you all for your continuing dedication and contribution, for taking your role appropriately seriously, and for your preparedness to declare that publicly, as you now do.



Opening of Law Year Church Service, Rockhampton
St Paul's Anglican Church
Monday 15 July 2013, 9am

This is an address not a homily. But may I be allowed this final observation? The Great Commandment and the Beatitudes constitute a “nutshell” guide for living for us all.

Lawyers are sometimes maligned in the Gospels. That criticism by category would not have been justified had they heeded the prophet Micah’s advice peculiar to their calling, as expressed in the wonderful hymn we have just sung – to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

The law: well, we are constrained by the law, but that does not exclude justice, for our laws are just, and in any event they allow scope for discretion.

Justice, mercy ... the quality of mercy is particularly apt and desirable for those in positions of comparative power, and Judges and lawyers are in that position.

Justice, mercy and humility ... humility gently characterizes the truly great.

And by the way, that we “walk” humbly with our God does not exclude his often mercifully, and supremely generously, carrying us.

The Great Commandment, the Beatitudes, the advice of Micah: if in our busy professional and daily lives we pause to think about these things, they will inevitably and wonderfully come to influence our being, to the benefit of our fellow beings.