

The Bishop's Charge
135th Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton
Fredericton, NB
November 5, 2016

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

(Ephesians 4: 1-6. NRSVA)

You may feel that this charge is déjà vu all over again. In a sense, it is because one of the things I am aiming to do is review last year's document to see where we have come in the last 12 months. In my view, there is little point in setting a course and then not checking to see how well we are travelling. That being said there have been things which have emerged during the year to affect our journey and they need to be recognized. All in all, I believe we have made progress and in general I think we should be encouraged.

The verses of scripture which lie at the top of this charge are the same ones I used last year. They are still as relevant today as they were then. In his letter to the Ephesians, as with many of his others, Paul has a particular way of doing things. After general greetings he goes on to explain the need to follow Jesus and what the effect of that is, peace with God and eternal life, then he tells his audience what that means for the way we should live as a Christian community. It is part of that section I have quoted again this year.

A few months after Justin Welby was made Archbishop of Canterbury, he was asked by a member of the British press, "Why do you keep talking about Jesus?" He replied, "I am the Archbishop of Canterbury, it is what I do."

When I was elected bishop by this Synod I said that unless Jesus is placed at the centre of all we do then it is pretty pointless. After just over two years in this role I have to tell you it is hard both to live up to that statement and to see where Jesus is at times. It is still the case, however, that we have to give the prime place to Jesus. It is his life, death and resurrection which makes the Church possible and it is his Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who motivates us to do the mission of God to which we are called.

Our central task is and will remain demonstrating the love of Christ in word and action for the love of the world. If we miss this imperative, then we have missed everything.

This current Synod will deal with many matters of governance detail and you may ask what do these things have to do with the Good News of Jesus? That is a good question. Several years ago, when I first became Parish Development Officer I realized there were aspects of our Canons which could prevent us from being as flexible in mission as we might wish. On becoming bishop, I asked the Chancellor and ultimately Diocesan Council to review the Canons and today we have the result of that broader task before us.

In a fast-moving world where decisions have to be made quickly any Diocese is going to be a little like an elephant in a tutu trying to dance Swan Lake. Many of the changes before us today will help us to move more gracefully, some are to do with tidying up what we already have and others make sense in the light of current realities. I commend them to you.

During the last year, what have we done to move things forward with regard to the priorities I outlined? I believe we have done well. Have things moved as speedily as I would have liked? The short answer to that is “No”, but I am an impatient person, especially when it comes to the Church making an impact in the Mission of God.

The Spiritual Development Team has worked diligently. Prayer resources are online, many of us enjoyed the Lenten study book, *Meditative Prayer*, materials have been produced for the book *Mission Shaped Spirituality* and will soon be available. In addition, the Lent book for 2017 has already been identified; it is called *Noticing God*. Again, this year I ask that every parish set up at least one group to study this material. It is encouraging to people to know that we are part of something bigger.

Sadly, the prayer retreat the team organized had to be cancelled due to small numbers. A different approach is being undertaken this year, details of which will come out soon. I ask that we all make this a priority. We have to learn to pray.

Why is this so? Surely, David, you cannot expect us to kneel or sit for hours reciting prayers and asking God for things. No, learning about prayer is discovering what it is to be able to live in the presence of God. To be aware of God walking with us. To know that as we go about our daily routines we are with God. It is about listening so that we can align our will with his. Prayer is finding out what it is to live a real life.

Something I have noted is that there seems to be a resurgence in the presentation of the Alpha Course in the Diocese. I am delighted about this. I am sure that part of the reason is the production of new videos by the Alpha organization. If you have not participated in an Alpha course I encourage you to do so.

During the year it has become very apparent to me that we all need to learn more about the scriptures upon which our faith is based and how to interpret them in the face of present day issues. Personally, I have spent a great deal of time wrestling with the Bible concerning the matter of physician assisted dying. It has been a topic which has been front and centre in our national life and, as a Bishop, I am called to study it carefully. Without the tools to review our sacred texts I could not have reached a reasoned position.

I have been very pleased to see so many people come out to *See Through the Scriptures*. A video of my presentation of the whole course can be accessed from the Layreaders section of the Diocesan website. The course resources can also be obtained from Cheryl. At the request of someone who attended the program here last week I am looking at the next level of material, *The Divine Drama*, to see if that is something we may be able to use.

In addition, I have been asked to provide more material on the subject of interpreting the Bible. Later this month I am going to begin work on a series of podcasts. It seems like a good project for the dark nights of winter. We will see how it goes. If it is a disaster you will not hear of it again!

Last year we committed to training our leaders. I am delighted with the work that our Warden of Layreaders, Cleo Cyr, and many others have done with Layreader training in the last 12 months. We are well on the way to having excellent materials for those seeking to train as Layreaders or to develop their skills.

In addition, we have seen a number of new clergy ordained in the Diocese. I believe there were more this year than there have been for a while. It is also gratifying that some have joined us from other Dioceses. We continue to work at the development of a more flexible training method for those entering ministry and have entered into a partnership with Threshold Ministries in this regard. I was also very pleased to have Dr. Ken Neilson join the diocesan staff as Parish Development Officer.

For more than a decade the encouragement of ministry amongst our youth has been a declared priority and will continue to be so. In the coming year Camp Brookwood celebrates 50 years of camping ministry. Today's offering will be given to Brookwood as part of our ongoing commitment. There have been infrastructure developments at the camps, such as the creation of disabled access at Medley. We have also seen an increase in the number of campers attending.

This summer I had the pleasure of visiting Choir School and teaching at the St. Michael's Conference. Both of these events are well supported and meet particular aspirations amongst our young people.

There have also been strong efforts to engage with the communities which we serve. Two parishes are seeking to provide playgrounds in places where nothing exists. There has been strong community support for these initiatives. As you will have seen in the recent NB Anglican our commitment to community gardens continues to blossom. There are also a couple of parishes which are in the very early stages of looking at the development of seniors' residences or similar accommodation.

We, as a Diocese, have been able to support some of these new initiatives because of the monies left to us by Dorothy Wilkes and George Bartlett, in addition to interest set aside for innovative ministry by the Finance Committee. We must continue to thank God for his ongoing provision for us, not taking anything for granted. As an aside, if you would like

your name mentioned in a future Bishop's Charge, you should speak to Mike Briggs, our Stewardship Officer.

This year we have seen work on our Safe Church policy come to fruition. I want to thank the Human Resources Committee and others for their work on this herculean task. We will learn much as we implement things across the Diocese and have already seen places where adjustments are necessary. Having said that it is essential that we work towards fully implementing Safe Church for the safety of ourselves and others.

There are two things about which I am particularly grateful and which I believe say a great deal about the Diocese of Fredericton. The first is our overwhelming support in prayer and financial contributions for the Ranson family. Although there has been a setback in recent weeks and Colin has to return to Texas next week for additional treatment, overall he has been better and has had a period with significantly fewer seizures. Please continue to pray for the Ransons as they move to the next phase of Colin's treatment.

Secondly, I want to thank the individuals and parishes who heeded the call to serve the many refugees from both Syria and elsewhere who have come to our region during the past year. I know there have been joys and frustrations in this ministry for all involved but as we are reminded in Matthew 25, the welcoming of the stranger is one of the things Jesus commends his disciples for.

Of course, there have been difficulties this year. Some of our parishes have found it hard to know how they might continue to exist. Some have been frustrated with me and feel they have been ignored. The result of the General Synod's vote concerning changes to the marriage canon has caused angst for people on both sides of the issue. It is because of these things that we must seek to bear with one another. God is working his purpose out, but his actions are never uniform.

For signs of God's grace and mercy we must give thanks and for the hardships he puts in our way we must give thanks.