

The Bishop's Charge
134th Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton
Fredericton, NB
November 7, 2015

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, NRSV)

Introduction

As you all know this is my first Charge to Synod. Having been Bishop for a little over a year I have had the opportunity to consider our Diocese and to see some ways of moving in new directions. There have been many decisions to make, some have been easy and others very difficult; but I believe that by building upon the work of my predecessors we are in a stronger position than we were before.

Some of you will recall that a few years ago I gave a talk at Kingswood University in Sussex in which I quoted the Father of American Independence, Benjamin Franklin, who once said:

“Gentlemen we must hang together, because if we do not we will most assuredly hang separately”.

I am still absolutely convinced of this maxim and want us to be sure that we stick together. The reading from Ephesians 4 speaks of this very clearly. We are all parts of the Body of Christ and we are to be united by the Holy Spirit. Being united does not mean that we will only be part of something if we get our own way. Rather, it means we have to recognize that the whole picture is bigger than us and we are to seek to discern our place in God's plan.

I am glad to say that I have seen various examples of this throughout the Diocese. Our Stewardship Day celebrated some of the good things happening across our region. As I visit churches I am pleased that in many cases there are ongoing projects to meet peoples' needs.

As far as I read in scripture and our tradition the Church has two functions: to worship and to proclaim the Good News of Jesus. Each is dependent upon the other and the main purpose of this Synod is to focus upon how we ensure that we continue to do these things.

Begin with Jesus

People often ask me: when it comes to being the Church where do we begin? The answer to this question is very simple, we begin with Jesus. Firstly at the personal level, have we decided to follow Jesus or do we have some notion of God as someone different than God in Christ? This is the God who is intimately concerned about us as individuals. The God who loves the world and cosmos he has created. God in Christ who loves us and all people and desires our love in response.

If Jesus is not our focus both corporately and individually then we are beginning in the wrong place.

In order to be the Church we are called to be, I suggest we need to run everything we do through the following test: how does this, whatever this is, square with the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion? These have been printed on the inside cover of the circular. Here is a reminder of what they are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

As a Diocese we should put certain things in place in our own lives and as parishes in order to see us move in the direction of these Marks.

Pray

The first and most important is prayer. As many of you know the Spiritual Development Team has produced a Family Prayer Card for our use. The first printing was taken up very quickly and there are additional cards here today. The team will be producing more materials as time goes by and I would ask us all to participate by using them.

It is firmly within our tradition that we use Morning and Evening Prayer on a daily basis. Might I suggest that we each commit to using one or both of these each day? During the five days of the work week your Synod Office staff join together in the Board Room at 8.45 for Morning Prayer and as part of that we systematically pray for our Diocese.

In addition, we need to take opportunities to learn how to pray. Prayer is about building our relationship with God; it is an ongoing conversation, not a shopping list or an emergency call in times of trouble. We each need to take courses, go on retreat and read about the development of our prayer life. And most of all, pray!

If in our parishes we can learn to pray together and for each other then we will lead richer, more harmonious lives.

Bear with one another

This moves me on to my second point. In the reading from Ephesians 4 the recipients of the letter are told to “bear with one another”. I have said many times and in many places the Greek here is very clear: “put up with one another”. I have to be frank - during my first year I have spent far too much time fighting fires across the Diocese; having to involve myself in situations where people, it seems, cannot bear each other, never mind bear with each other. Such actions are not generous nor edifying and neither do they bring glory to God.

We have to learn to be at peace with each other and that comes through a willingness to set our own agenda aside and to seek the will of God together. Such an action begins and ends in prayer. It is developed by looking at other people and seeing them as the object of God’s love and asking God to give us the heart to love them too. It can never be about me wanting my way at all costs no matter what damage I may do to myself, to others or the work of God.

We begin to appreciate this when we dig deeply into scripture. At the end of 1 Corinthians 13 we are told “these three remain, faith hope and charity, but the greatest of these is charity”. I have used the older translation of the final word agape, charity, just to remind us that love is about charity. It is about putting the other person before ourselves. We are to have an intentional mindset to be united in the Spirit.

What this means is that we do not dismiss others, because they do not agree with us, we continue to love them. We gather around what unites and if something is beyond our ability to tolerate it then we still show love for the other person. We have to learn what charity is and how each one of us can grow more deeply in it. A major part of this will be learning to live a life of repentance. The constant acceptance that we have to set aside our own way and turn again to God’s way. Day by day I do things which displease and disappoint God. On some days I make him angry beyond measure. Yet I am still the object of his unending love.

What all this does not mean is that we hide what we feel, pretend to agree and then make moves in the parking lot to change what has just been agreed at Vestry. What it does mean is that we learn to honestly speak our views in a helpful loving way, to allow others to have their say too and then to believe that God will handle the situation, even if we have made a mistake.

Learn the Bible

In addition, we all need to be better acquainted with the Bible. I am grateful to those who have come out to the “See Through the Scriptures” course which has been offered across the Archdeaconries. It is by reading the scriptures that we get to know God more fully and, when we combine that with prayer, we are able to become more aligned with God.

Being and doing

You will have noticed that the first part of my Charge has had to do with being Christian rather than doing things: following Jesus, being prayerful, maintaining the unity of the Spirit and reading the Bible. In other words, trying to be the Church. You may feel that this is all very well, but when is the Bishop going to get to the meat and potatoes? These things are the meat and potatoes. Unless what we do comes out of who we are then what we do will be solely from our own efforts and not filled with the grace of God.

That being said, there are things to do, building upon the work we have done over the years. In this we have to begin with worship. Of course, our whole lives are to be acts of worship, but there are times when we gather together to glorify God. Often these take place on a Sunday morning, but it can be otherwise. What needs to happen, no matter whether our services are formal, informal or somewhere in between, they have to be intentionally oriented towards lifting us beyond the everyday and enabling us to touch the edge of heaven; or as the BCP says “a foretaste of the heavenly banquet”.

Train our leaders

In previous Synods we have expressed the importance of certain things and I think they are still priorities. One of these is to train our leaders (both lay and ordained) for ministry in the 21st century. During the next few months we will be rolling out a new program for the training of Lay Readers. In addition, I have been in conversation with both Wycliffe College and Atlantic School of Theology about our need for exploring different ways of training people for ordained ministry.

I also believe that during the coming years we will be looking for people with many different gifts to complement those of us who currently minister. These will be people who can work in pioneer ministries, in other words, beginning something from scratch. There will be those who are gifted evangelists and can see people come to faith in Jesus. We will develop ministries of compassion and youth ministries. The list is large in scope, but essential.

Build up our youth

Another of our priorities over the years has been a commitment to youth. We have done many things. The redevelopment of Camp Medley, improvements at Brookwood, St. Michael's Conference, Teens Encounter Christ and Choir School have all seen great commitment from members of this Diocese. In addition, there are the unsung people who, week in, week out, run Sunday School classes, youth groups, uniformed organizations, or in the summer, vacation bible school programs. All of this and more is vital to the life of our Church. Now is the time to discern ways to build out from our base and to be even more creative in this ministry.

Engage our communities

To a great degree what I have said thus far has been to do with us. The truth is that God did not send Jesus into the world so that his followers could become self-centred. In fact, it is to free us from this that Jesus came. The nature of God is to be generous and giving in order to bring people to a place of peace. A huge question for us is how do we engage the communities in which we are set in order to bring the Good News?

This is a relatively simple task initially. We go to key people and organizations in our community: the schools, the police, the municipality, not for profit groups, etc., and ask the question “How can we help”? It is my experience that they will tell us. Then we have to decide what we can do and how we are going to do it.

People say to me we have done x or y and it did not bring anyone to church. To be honest, that is to miss the point. Doing things for the good of the community is not a recruitment drive, it is for the glory of God and the benefit of others. It has the advantage of taking our eyes off ourselves.

We also have to look beyond ourselves as part of a worldwide community. Some of you will have read my article in the November edition of the NB Anglican about my friend Matthew, Bishop of Wonduruba in South Sudan. I have been in regular contact with him since the civil war broke out in his region. He tells me that he and 14,000 members of his Diocese have been displaced and there has been much looting, including Matthew’s house and office. The people are also unable to harvest, so there is a real issue around food security for next year.

Matthew and his 14,000 diocesan members are but a small fraction of the millions of displaced people in the world today. I am glad that many parishes in our diocese have responded to the refugee crisis through PWRDF, working with our Baptist friends and by other means. I ask that we all do so and extend our efforts.

As many of you are aware my guiding ministry principle is the “cure of souls”. I believe that this undergirds all that we do as Anglicans. We are responsible for the people in our area. It is our calling. During these next years I believe that we will have to look at developing ministries in parallel with what we have in order to meet this mandate. It is likely some of them will be joined to existing ministries, while others will be completely separate. I know very little about what this means, but I can say these developments will look different to what we have today. This does not mean we will leave behind what we have, but we will grow from it.

Go forward with God

Finally, I want to say that I believe God is on the move in our Diocese. He has not given up on us, he is providing for us. We have seen new clergy come to join us to augment our current capable and creative leaders. The generous gift of \$5.5 million from Miss Dorothy Wilkes for ministry development is a huge shot in the arm. The steps of faith by parishes

such as Madawaska and St. Mark, Saint John, to repurpose their buildings for different ministry needs and the development of Stephen Ministries in the Parish of Coldbrook and St. Mary; all of these are pointers to a new way.

We go forward in the strength of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit to learn of God's ways and share the Good News with others.

Bishop David Edwards
7 November 2015