

The Bishop's Charge
To the 137th Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton
Fredericton, New Brunswick
November 2, 2019

'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.'

- Ezekiel 37:4b-6, NRSV

There is a sense in which we begin this Synod twelve months late. I want to thank members of Synod for agreeing to the cancellation of last year's meeting. Although we did not know it at the time, that weekend was Janet's last on earth, so I am glad that I was able to have my mind solely upon her. Again, I want to thank members of the Diocese for your support during the year since Janet's death. It would have been much more difficult without you.

The reasons why this Synod cannot be a re-run of what was intended for last year is that time has passed, and things have happened. During my time as Bishop my emphasis has been on mission and partnership. I have been impressed how this has been taken up. We have seen initiatives, both great and small, across the diocese. I constantly find that as I visit parishes, I am told about the ways in which things are being done for others. The knitting of hats for babies, the making of prayer shawls, bowling to help feed hungry children, and so on.

Over the next few months two major projects will come to fruition. Firstly, the completion of apartment style accommodation for seniors in the Parish of Hampton This has been accomplished through co-operation with all levels of government and will provide a valuable resource for the community.

In Grand Bay-Westfield, the Church of the Resurrection is in the midst of building an indoor playpark and gathering facility for the community. This has come out consultation with local people and has been supported by the town, the Diocese and countless individuals. It is hoped that both this and the Hampton project will be up and running by early next year.

During the past 12 months there have been at least two major events in the Diocese where practical mission has been spoken about. "Deep Roots" with Michael Frost and others; and for the clergy the visit of Canon Phil Potter to our conference. Both gatherings were well received and have set us thinking about how we might respond.

Today we will begin an intentional response to these inspirational events. The first initiative we must take is to join with the rest of the Anglican Communion in intentional discipleship. It has been noted that for many of us, me included, we do not fully appreciate what it is to be a follower of Jesus. To be a disciple means that we have to spend time

learning from our master, trying to discern, individually, as congregations and as a church, how Jesus would respond to the situations in which we find ourselves.

The second will be through my call for every parish to devise a Mission Action Plan (MAP). There will be resources to enable this to happen. For some of us this will be the decision to do a very simple thing like supporting the local food bank. For others it will be much more complex. What it must be is taking a step beyond where we are now. If that means dropping something internal to do something external, then so be it.

I want us to be encouraged. During Clergy Conference Canon Phil Potter took me aside to tell me that he was impressed by the receptivity and enthusiasm of the clergy. He was also encouraged by some of the projects underway in the Diocese. My response was: "That is great Phil. Please don't just tell me, tell the others", which he did. It is good to have an outside pair of eyes look at us. He also encouraged us to continue with the way we are going. Both the MAPs and intentional discipleship will help with this.

During the past year the Anglican Church of Canada has held a General Synod. A number of important issues were on the agenda. These included the election of a new Primate, the Most Rev'd Linda Nicholls (formerly Bishop of Huron). In addition, the Synod agreed that the Most Rev'd Mark MacDonald (the National Indigenous Bishop) was made an Archbishop and he will sit with the other Metropolitans. This office will be granted as of right to future National Indigenous Archbishops.

In another development the Synod granted autonomy to indigenous people within the Anglican Church of Canada. This means that they will be able to move forward in appropriate ways, without having to refer to the General Synod and other structures. The details of this are to be worked out in the coming years.

The issue which garnered the most comment both inside and outside the Synod was to do with the proposed amendment to Canon XXI, more commonly known as the Marriage Canon. From all points of view the debate and the vote were extremely difficult and emotional. Prior to the main motion, an amendment based on Council of General Synod's *Word to the Church* was passed by the Synod. It essentially recognizes the different ways in which marriage is viewed in our Church today and makes provision for Indigenous peoples to follow their own process. This latter aligns with the self determination legislation, noted earlier.

The outcome of the ballot concerning Canon XXI itself, was that it was passed by the required two thirds majority in both the Houses of Laity and Clergy but lost in the House of Bishops. This means that the motion failed to receive the necessary majority in all three houses over two consecutive General Synods and was thereby lost overall.

The defeat of the motion led to the House of Bishops meeting in closed session over several days in order to try to write a pastoral letter to the Church which could be agreed by all. Ultimately, unanimity was not possible, but a statement to the Church was agreed to by the overwhelming majority of Bishops, including me.

This letter in and of itself has no legislative force. It recognizes that there are differing views of the nature of marriage across the Church and that each Diocese will make its own decision with regard to the solemnization of the marriages of same gender couples.

This leaves the Church in the uncomfortable situation of having a separation of doctrine and practice. In essence, the Anglican Church of Canada has not altered its position concerning marriage, yet in reality the solemnization of marriages which are at variance with the traditional understanding expressed in Canon XXI are happening in certain jurisdictions.

Issues around same gender marriage in church have been the most fractious and fracturing in our life together. In the aftermath of General Synod, I want us to stop to draw breath, which is why I am putting my full support behind the motion proposed by Leo Martin and Paul Ranson.

What I want us to concentrate on is the “cure of souls” in this province. How are we to do this?

Firstly, we must recognize that the Anglican Church is part of the Kingdom of God.

In our New Brunswick context this means:

- Everyone in the province should be able to access an Anglican congregation locally.
- Each of us who follow Jesus are Kingdom agents for change for the good in our villages, towns and cities.

How is this to be done?

- We are to provide innovative ministry and traditional ministry for people of all ages.
- We are to educate followers of Jesus for mission in their context.
- We are to establish partnerships with other entities for the good of our province.

All of this is to be done drawing on the Five Marks of Mission as our foundation.

People often ask me why I keep speaking about mission. The reason is this. I believe that the only place where human beings have a chance of finding wholeness and peace is in their relationship with God through Christ. This is formed within Jesus’ body the Church. As the Church gathers, it is a place for worship, thanksgiving for what God has done, and penitence for our shortcomings, individually and corporately.

This gathering is in preparation for scattering as salt, light and yeast in the world. Making a difference, bringing hope and help where needed, taking up opportunities to show the glory of God in what we do and who we are.

Jesus says: “I am the resurrection and the life”. The Spirit of God shows the prophet Ezekiel that the dry bones can live. Our message is one of life in its fullness. Let us go out from this Synod determined to share in the mission of God for the good of all.