

**The Bishop's Charge**  
**132<sup>nd</sup> Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton**  
**Sussex, NB**  
**November 9, 2013**

**But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.' *Lamentations 3.***

**Introduction**

As I begin I want to welcome all delegates to the 132<sup>nd</sup> Synod Of the Diocese of Fredericton. Over the past few weeks my appreciation has grown for each one of you and your participation in preparation for this time together. My thank you, seems insufficient for all that has been accomplished as, we together, seek to understand more clearly God's will for the Anglican Church in our Diocese as expressed in our local context as Parishes and Archdeaconries.

I want to recognize our guests and visitors and especially our National Indigenous Bishop, Bishop Mark Macdonald. He must be a bit weary...just returning from Korea for the WCC meetings. Welcome Bishop...Thank you for coming and being with us! Welcome to all.

As I begin, I want to reference our Synod of 2011 which helped to direct our course of action for the past two years. At the same time, to a very large extent, the day to day unexpected had to be managed, while endeavoring to be faithful to our work in an apostolic pro active mission mind set. It is God's Mission that we have been invited to share. We have encountered many challenges and it has been my privilege as your Bishop to prayerfully share in this journey with you for over 10 years.

To review for a moment, back in 2003, our Synod identified five priorities that would define our work for two years and report back to our Synod of 2005. The five priorities included: Communication; Leadership; Youth; Struggling Parishes and Stewardship.

From 2003 to 2005 much work was done to help us define a strategy to address these priorities. It became increasingly obvious at that time that the church must find a way to be God's presence in a culture of fear of the future, instead of living hope and love for God's people in community.

In 2007 we more fully understood, that God's people, must share the journey, because as we all know, to journey alone only adds to our fears. In order to begin this journey together we must be prepared to deepen and enrich our relationships, and where relationships were fractured, healing must happen. Time, talent and treasure would be needed to make the journey possible and our leaders must be equipped to lead.

By 2009, with much prayer, countless meetings, conversations and sacrificial leadership at every level our Synod ratified the Nicodemus Project (Five Priorities): Proclamation of the Gospel; relearn what it means to be Anglican; support parish ministry; and, equip our leadership; assess ourselves, and prepare ourselves for change.

When we look closely at the priorities we will see that for the most part it is about encouragement, encouragement to look differently at our reason for being. Encouragement, and not to be fully occupied with preserving the status quo, but to seek ways to provide hope in the spirit of Christian love, for a new day.

The encouragement as expressed in the Nicodemus Project allowed us to look at ourselves more closely with prayerful reflection and critique at every level: personally, parish and diocese. We would assess ourselves ( I will return to this a

little later as I address the Archdeaconry Commission Reports and Synod Office Self Assessment). And we would be committed to change; change that more readily addresses God's Mission.

Discerning God's will is never easy. It took six (6) years to initially draft the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion and they are continually, critiqued, reviewed and adapted for contextual differences. We should see this as a necessary part of discernment. I borrow from the Anglican Communion Statement:

“All mission is done in a particular setting - the context. So, although there is a fundamental unity to the good news, it is shaped by the great diversity of places, times and cultures in which we live, proclaim and embody it. The Five Marks should not lead us to think that there are only five ways of doing mission! (ACC)

### **Mission as celebration and thanksgiving**

An important feature of Anglicanism is our belief that worship is central to our common life. But worship is not just something we do alongside our witness to the good news: worship is itself a witness to the world. It is a sign that all of life is holy, that hope and meaning can be found in offering ourselves to God (cf. Romans 12:1). And each time we celebrate the Eucharist, we proclaim Christ's death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:26). Our liturgical life is a vital dimension of our mission calling; and although it is not included in the Five Marks, it undergirds the forms of public witness listed there.

### **Mission as church**

The Five Marks stress the doing of mission. Faithful action is the measure of our response to Christ (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; James 2:14-26). However, the challenge facing us is not just to do mission but to be a people of mission. That is, we are learning to allow every dimension of church life to be shaped and directed by our

identity as a sign, foretaste and instrument of God's reign in Christ. Our understanding of mission needs to make that clear.

### **Mission as God-in-action**

"Mission goes out from God. Mission is God's way of loving and saving the world... So mission is never our invention or choice." (Lambeth Conference 1998, Section II p121). The initiative in mission is God's, not ours. We are called simply to serve God's mission by living and proclaiming the good news.

Our Mission Action should witness to God's hope and love for the world. Our present Mission Statement, "Proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Making of Disciples" has been our mantra for many years. By being focused in this way we have been enabled to think differently about what our future might more readily embrace; knowing that the "status quo" is not an option. Enter the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion, and our conversation, language and understanding began to change.

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

The Church's response to The Marks of Mission will always be informed by the local context. But constant in proclamation, the whole Church must "Respond to human need by loving service", we must "seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and

reconciliation”, and “to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.”

As I rehearsed earlier, for the past 10 years we have been wrestling with a question, how is an Anglican presence to be maintained across the Province of New Brunswick for the benefit of God’s mission in the world?

This conversation has been conducted in different ways over many years such as *The Rural and Struggling Parishes Report* and most recently the *Reports of the Archdeaconry Commissions*. It has taken a great deal of time and effort but I sense that there is now a greater degree of clarity about what we face. One of the guiding principles of the Commissions was the idea that we face a “wicked problem.” A problem for which there is no obvious “one off” solution, but rather one having multiple possible answers, which are often local in nature.

Consequently the Archdeaconry Commissions were set up with a broad mandate in order that they each could be flexible in responding to the issues in their region. This was done and the result is, that we cannot have an overarching plan for the Diocese rolled out at this Synod, with the intent that, if everyone signs on to it, in a few years everything will be fixed.

What is needed is a multi-faceted approach within an environment of collaboration, sharing and commitment to which we have a role in creating. What happens will look different in each part of the Diocese and that is only right, because we have differing situations across the Province: From aging buildings and infrastructure, economic disparity and financial challenges, differing demographic realities all serving to make the local context unique.

We tend to think of ourselves as a small region with similar needs, this is not the case. We are actually bigger in geographical terms than many countries, thus our

contexts differ from region to region. We have to become more flexible and adaptable in the regional context.

It became clear from the Archdeaconry Commission process that an eighth report was needed which considered the role of the Bishop and the Synod Office. In addition it became apparent that a review of our governance structures was also necessary. The reason for this, is to seek a way in which a governing environment might more effectively enable the changes necessary to move from self-preservation to mission.

The reports and the subsequent Capital Campaign feasibility study have expressed the need for collaboration and what can best be described as “inter-dependent thinking”, recognizing that anything we do in one place affects others beyond our real or imagined boundaries.

As Bishop, in the light of the Archdeaconry Report recommendations and discussions which had taken place over the last eighteen months, I worked with Dr. Nancy Mathis on a new vision statement for the Diocese. The former statement was perfectly adequate, but needed to be more arresting, consequently I shared a new idea with a consultation meeting at the Villa Madonna in May of 2013. After some adjustment we arrived at: “To radiate the hope of God as an unfettered, missional diocese.”

I recognize that to some of us this is not immediately clear, but I believe that we need to work to understand its implications and to grow into it. During our time at the Villa, we came to the conclusion that the reports were leading us in three directions at three levels.

In order to radiate God’s hope for the world, we need to become unfettered, that is to: lighten the load so as to be the light of Christ, in missional action by taking the light to others. This has to be at the personal level, the parish/regional level and

the Synod/Synod Office level. You will find an outline of this in your Synod Journal (Section G).

To be a missional presence, again, I borrow from the Anglican Communion statement. “Mission is the creating, reconciling and transforming action of God, flowing from the community of love found in the Trinity, made known to all humanity in the person of Jesus, and entrusted to the faithful action and witness of the people of God who, in the power of the Spirit, are a sign, foretaste and instrument of the reign of God. (Adapted from a statement of the Commission on Mission of the National Council of Churches in Australia.)

For each of us as Anglicans we begin at the personal level and the sky is the limit as to the possibilities for drawing closer to God: In lightening the load we may wish to consider changing our life style that puts our relationship with Jesus front and centre; some old habits might need to be sacrificed; make church attendance more regular; commit yourself to bible study, seek out a Spiritual Director, commit to a rule of life, discuss more often your faith issues with your children and grandchildren, pray and read the scriptures more regularly, if you are already involved in the administration, program and mission initiatives, seek ways to improve your contribution by intentional training, personally consider God’s call in a more prayerful way, you may be being called to be a Layreader or Vocational Deacon, ask your parish for support as you endeavor to bring the love of God even in the work place. How often do we review our stewardship of giving? Look back, who is following us? How are you contributing to the succession plan for the Church of God?

As followers of Jesus repentance and change will enable us all to be more effective disciples in our communities. There is a challenge for every Anglican in this Diocese to undertake something which will draw him/her closer to Jesus. In the past there has been a sense that many of us have been waiting for Synod Office or the Bishop to do something. The challenge is what are WE doing? Take a look

at the personal section of the report on the Commissions work. Which one can you commit yourself to? Keeping it Simple. (Video)

In the parish/regional section of the report there are many things which we can attempt, but there are two watch words. The first is collaboration: what we do affects others, we cannot continue to be a body divided. The second is the need: to re-engage with our communities. Engage adjoining parishes, yes, but what about collaboration and partnership with others who share the same vision for the poor and marginalized beyond the parish bounds.

The re-purposing of our land and buildings might be an incentive for others to work with us, and we with them. The question remains “in responding to Jesus’ command to be the salt and light of the God’s Kingdom in his world. We are to work with God in his mission which is clearly outlined, as I said, in the 5 Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion and was one of the pillars of the Archdeaconry Commission process. Keeping it simple. (Video)

Your Bishop and Synod Staff have already begun to work towards some of the recommendations in the eight Commission Reports, the Nicodemus Project and the Five Marks of Mission. The following short list are foundational responses in support of local and regional mission initiatives.

- The Clergy leadership development program known as the 12 12 12, will continue beyond its first year and we are also considering how a version of it might be made available to our Vocational Deacons and Lay leaders. At a recent Provincial Council meeting in Corner Brook NFLD, the Province of Canada as accepted this model of Clergy development for our seven Dioceses. Our National Church has recently posted a story about 12 12 12 on their Web Page.



- Our partnership with General Synod to enter into a feasibility study for a Capital Campaign, known as Together in Mission. The report was encouraging but it is recommended by our consultants that it would not be advisable to launch a campaign at this time. Nevertheless, the collaborative regional model of ministry will require financial resources and a mind-set change from maintenance, to an attitude of investment to enable God's Mission.
- Our Parish Development Officer, in addition to working with Parishes and Archdeacons in setting priorities, is working closely with our National Church in the area of Stewardship, Financial Development and Planned Giving.
- Again, our Parish Development Officer is working with the Territorial Archdeacons as parishes and archdeacons name their top mission priorities over the next three to five years. Your involvement will be critical.
- The ongoing discernment as to the stewardship and future role our diocesan properties on Church Street and Rose Court.
- The Spiritual Development Team of our Diocesan Council have completed their study series on, "A Rule of Life" based on page 555 of the BCP.
- A good deal of work has been done in developing a mission apportionment which more fairly reflects the realities for our parishes today. A motion on a new formula is before this Synod.
- The seven Dioceses of the Ecclesiastical Province of Canada have adopted a Safe Church Policy that is in keeping with our Insurer's requirements, but more especially a Safe Church Policy, is required for all who are serving

and being served by the Church. I will recommend this Policy to our diocesan council for implementation.

Many people are asking what has been done as a consequence of the Commission reports thus far at the parish and archdeaconry level? Here is a summary of some of what has and is taking place:

- There are active conversation between several parish clusters in the Archdeaconry of Fredericton as to how they might collaboratively share in Mission by working together.
- The parishes of Musquash and Nerepis St. John are sharing the Rector of Musquash in the area of Youth Ministry and Mission.
- Four parishes in the Archdeaconry of Kingston Kennebecasis are sharing a full time Youth Worker.
- Four parishes in Moncton, while sharing ministry before the Archdeaconry Commissions began their work, are continuing on their quest for a shared vision for the future.
- The Tri-Parish shared ministry in East Saint John continues in the four congregation collaboration for a shared vision for the future.
- Conversations are beginning to take place in the city of Miramichi to discuss the future for their four congregations.
- The Parishes of Carlton and Victoria were amalgamated and are endeavoring to seek ways to preserve an Anglican presence in the Lower West side of Saint John by the possibility of re-purposing their physical infra-structure for worship and social outreach.
- The Parishes on the Restigouche are seeking to amalgamate to aid in their quest for a mission vision to serve the Anglican presence in their three communities and the greater region.
- The Parish of the Tobique has developed a joint ministry with the United Church of Canada.

- The Parish of Denmark is working closely with their Lutheran neighbour in the area of worship.

Last Sunday we celebrated All Saints and it was my great privilege to be in the Parish of Blackville. Seventeen young people were confirmed. Wonderful young folk who want to have a deeper relationship with God through Jesus Christ. They want to be full members of the Body and make their contribution to God's Mission. My challenge during my sermon went something like this: First of all, the number of candidates presented to the Bishop was significant (17). Secondly: I also said that their presence was a witness to the strength of the parish leadership, and the faithfulness of parents and godparents. Thirdly, my challenge: What now for the newly confirmed?

I stated the obvious: We are willing to invest a great deal in youth development in the areas of education, recreation and competitive sports. All these priorities are very important but we as parents and Godparents, and the Church, made promises before God that we would be faithful in the spiritual nurture of our children. I would offer that the spiritual nurture is the most important aspect of parenthood and God's mission for God's children. God's hope is that all human kind might deepen their relationship with God as we journey in life. It needs to start early.

As I reflect on what I have said earlier our young people too are part of God's mission. Their presence in our midst and spiritual welfare speaks to the three levels of responsibility in response to God's mission: the personal, the parish/regional and the Bishop and Synod.

Over the last eight years we have made a substantial investment in our Camp's infrastructure renewal and youth leadership: Over two million dollars plus salaries for a Youth and Camp Director. There is some debt still owing on our building renewal. But is the debt the issue? Or the opportunity that our children will have a safe and rich spiritual development experience, not just for those who can afford

the camping fee, but for every Anglican child and children of the wider community. If the latter is important we will have to revisit our priorities in the spiritual development of our children at every level with more resources and investment.

All of this being said we cannot sit back and hope for the best. Each of us as Synod members have a responsibility to seek opportunities for collaboration and leadership to which God has called us. It has to begin with us as we recognize the barriers which will prevent us from doing what we might hope to do.

During our time at the Villa the following issues were identified as being hindrances to our moving ahead as a Diocese. They are not things we face in every parish or region, but they are general points we need to consider and more importantly collaborate in working on how we resolve these issues in a culture of LOVE for each other.

- We lack the belief and commitment to resource God's hope and mission through the Church.
- (There is) fear and lack of trust in each other, God and the process.
- Some do not grasp the severity of the problem.
- Communication is not effective.
- Priorities are overly self-interested (personal / church / parish / diocese).
- Many parishes are not **committed** to a shared vision and community engagement.

The Archdeaconry Commissions have moved many of us to a place where we recognize that collaboration is the only way forward. We have to collaborate on the right basis, that is, working together for the mission of God for the love of the world. In Christ, God chose to interact with his creation in a particular way and Jesus left behind a church empowered by his Spirit to continue the mission. Are

we willing to strain every sinew in order to continue the good work God has begun in us?

At a recent meeting of the House of Bishops a retiring Bishop had this to say when asked “How did you arrive at the decision to retire?” The Bishop’s answer, and in my opinion, was prophetic. The Bishop answered the question this way “After ten years of episcopal ministry, I began to realize that I had developed into quite a good manager...but, I began to realize that it had been at a great expense. I began to question myself as to my effectiveness as a prophetic voice and spiritual leader.”

It is not a great stretch to speak of God’s Church in this way at every level; be it the Anglican Church of Canada, a particular Diocese, a particular Parish, and Bishop, Priest, Deacon or lay leader, or pew person. I believe we have all developed a reasonable level of managerial skills to administer that which has been entrusted to us, and by God’s infinite mercy and grace we are still here.

We have managed by expending time, creative energy and resources to maintain a structure and institution that has little or no prophetic voice or spiritual relevance in our present early 21<sup>st</sup> century context. The imperative of providing a pastoral presence by the church in our several communities will always be with us; but, does our presence speak a prophetic word of hope, for God’s Kingdom in this world?

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Archbishop Claude W. Miller

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