

**Celebrating God's Grace - Responding to God's Challenge**  
**Bishop's Charge to**  
**the 130th Synod of the Diocesan Synod of Fredericton**  
**June 4th 2009**

**Prayer for Synod 2009**

Almighty and ever-living God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with us, we who take counsel at this Diocesan Synod for the renewal and mission of our Parishes, Diocese and your Church in this place and beyond. As your disciples, teach us in all things to seek first your kingdom to your honour and glory. Guide us to what is right, and grant us both the courage and patience to pursue it and the grace to accomplish it; through Jesus Christ our Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

In the name of the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. AMEN.

**Introduction**

*"He looked up and saw the rich putting gifts into the treasury; and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. And he said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living she had." (Luke 21.1-4)*

Over the past two years a great deal of work has been done in response to the directives of our Synod of 2007. We left our last Synod with high expectations that the questions raised at that time might be answered fully and that the problems and concerns of the day would be closer to resolution. As a result of the motions of 2007 and the work that has been done since then, we gather this weekend with a much clearer picture of where we are and what we need to do to become the church God expects us to be.

Our Convening Circular and ensuing reports bear witness, by the grace of God, to the work of your Bishop, our Diocesan Council, our Greater Chapters and the Task Forces that were struck to enable the work of our last Synod. For the most part, the recommendations of the reporting have been put in resolution form and these motions will be debated, and if it is the will of this body a new stage of work will be mandated for our newly elected Diocesan Council, our Archdeaconries, our parishes, and of course your Bishop.

We are in the season of Pentecost, and as we greet this gift of work that is set before us, our prayer this night ought to recognize God's hand in all that has led us to this place and by God's grace the work that is set before us will be in accordance with God's will.

Let us rise and sing: Thy Hand, O God Has Guided ... Thank you!

**Celebrating God Grace**

During the work of the Sharing Ministry Task Group a theme and logo for this Synod evolved: "Celebrating God's Grace...Responding to God's Challenge." A powerful and just theme for any gathering of Church members. To celebrate means "to show happiness that something good or special has happened." As people of faith, to celebrate God's grace is to celebrate God's infinite love, God's mercy, God's goodwill and abundant generosity. How can we not celebrate God's divine favor.

We begin by thanking God for the gift of his Word, Christ's Body our Church, our World Wide Communion and the Saints who surround us with such a rich tradition and faith. A faith expressed in the Church's liturgy and teaching and our beautiful places of worship like Trinity Church.

As a body we thank God for one another, our clergy and people, and the great privilege that is ours in fellowship over the next couple of days. We thank God for our honored Guests and Visitors, our Friends, namely: Our Primate, Archbishop Fred ; Bishop Harris of the Archdiocese of Saint John; Revs. Thomas Graham, the ELCIC; Wayne Dryer, representing the United Baptist Convention; Bob Johnson, United Church of Canada; the Rev. Canon Eric Beresford, President, and Moe Erhard of the Atlantic School of Theology, The Very Rev. John Wright of the Anglican Foundation, Canon Geoff Jackson of our General Synod; Mrs. Joan Randall, President of our ACW, and so many others.

We thank the Archdeaconry of Saint John and Archdeacon David Edwards and the Deanery Clericus, Trinity Church and their newly appointed Rector, the Rev. Ranall Ingalls for their gracious hospitality. We thank the Chair of Synod Planning, Archdeacon Geoffrey Hall and all of the Synod Committees, Mr. Jim Morell organizing the discussion tomorrow; the Synod Office Staff; Michael and Jennifer Smith our Synod Music Leaders, and the countless volunteers, and all of you who have made our Synod event possible.

We consider ourselves part of the Anglican family in our diocese and each of us by our presence has taken seriously our part in the leadership of our Church and in our parishes and diocese. And when I use the word "family," my prayer is that our Guests and Friends might return home and say "those Anglicans must have had wonderful parents."

Our Primate references our Anglican community as "our beloved Church," our dearest gift of God, the Body of Christ. It could be argued that our "Beloved Church" unfortunately at times expressed a high degree of negativity restricting our desire for true thanksgiving and celebration. So, over the next few days let us take this negativity to task and truly celebrate our blessings and offer them up to meet the mission challenge that is set before us.

Further, I want to say a personal thank you! To my fellow Bishops, Clergy and people of the Diocese for your prayers and support of me and Sharon; particularly, for you prayers for me in my recent convalescence. They worked! Your patience and understanding is a cherished gift. A sincere thank you! to Sharon for her prayers and partnership in this wonderful gift of service we share.

### **Responding to God's Challenge**

So how do we answer to God's favor individually and corporately as God's Church in this place? Knowing who we are both individually and corporately as members of the Anglican Church might be a place of beginning.

So let us begin ... first, we are members of an Episcopal Church, in communion with a world-wide Anglican family. We share familial responsibility for one another. We are Parish, we are Diocese, we are National Church, we are the Anglican Communion. Secondly, we are siblings in a very large family; we are inter and co-dependent and we share responsibility for one another. Third, we are both faithful and we are prodigal like most children in our quest and response as members of the family." As brothers and

sisters we are struggling to find our place within the fold. Our work of Synod gives witness to that inherited struggle.

The task force reports on “Budget Support” and “Rural and Struggling Parishes” that you have had opportunity to study and discuss during Archdeaconry Greater Chapter meetings, together make twenty nine recommendations that attempt to set out how we might, as a diocese, respond to our collective concerns. I’m grateful to Mr. Gerald McConaghy and Archdeacon Patricia Drummond for their leadership in this work.

In addition, through our Diocesan Council, we partnered with our National Church in a “Planning Study” and I am grateful for the work of Canon Geoff Jackson and the Rev. Rob Waller and our National Church support. Many from around the diocese had input as to the Planning Study’s findings and recommendations and I thank you for that. The Planning Study too, makes an additional twelve recommendations.

It is evident that Bishop Salmon’s visit has made an impact and his work and thoughts are reflected in the reports. The differences in our contexts, that is the Diocese of Fredericton and the Diocese of South Carolina, are major and significant. Demographics and culture of the east coast of Canada and the east coast the United States are difficult to compare. However, as believers in the Gospel of Christ, our individual and collective response should share the same principles.

Last fall, I asked the Diocesan Council to strike, yet another group. The “Sharing Ministry Task Group” with the following mandate:

*“The Task Group, charged by the Diocesan Executive Committee, as delegated by the Diocesan Council in September 2008, will work with the [Bishop, and the Diocesan] Council, The General Synod Consultant Team and other groups to coordinate and implement the significant current initiatives of the Synod and the Diocese of Fredericton including: Task Force on Rural and struggling Parishes; Task Force on Diocesan Budget Support; Partnership with General Synod (2007 Shared Ministry Plan, 2008 Planning Study and the 2009 Stewardship and Congregational Development Plan); [and the] potentially transforming teaching of Bishop Edward Salmon from August 2008.”*

I believe that the Task Group has been true to their mandate and their work. I’m grateful for the leadership of Jim Morell and the members of the Task Group for this good work. My suspicion is that given the detail that is found in each report and the number of recommendations that are made, one could be left with a sense of confusion, bewilderment and yes, even fear. Where do we start?

If the Holy Spirit was indeed present in our deliberations and work, and we believe God’s guiding hand is before us, then we ought to “fear not.” God will not ask of us more than we can give and as we are reminded we cannot “out give” God.

Our Mission is set against a backdrop of Anglican tradition and ecclesial polity that should serve us well and enable our response to God’s honor and glory. Knowing who we are as Anglicans and Christians is the underlying statement that expresses our essential nature.

The essential nature of God is “love.” (1 John 4.16) “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him...There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear...he who fears is not perfected in love.” This passage prompts the question, “Is our essential nature as members of God’s family founded in God’s love? Are we abiding in that love or have we moved away?” God so loved the world that he gave his only Son. God’s essential nature is a transformational love, without qualification for the whole world.

The five notices of motion brought forth by the Sharing Ministry Task Group, if passed by this Synod, will set on a journey of change and transformation, enabling a response in love for our mission as a Church, at home, and at a national and world-wide level.

In our transformational quest, we cannot possibly do what is required on our own. If we are to be true to God’s mission we are called to a life of repentance, regular daily prayer and worship in humility. We are called to set aside our pride and selfish interests, for the sake of the Gospel. Every member of the family must be considered in our decision making, not just within our parish and diocesan bounds but provincially, nationally, and world-wide. No Diocese holds exclusively the definitive truth for the whole Church. We are part of a much larger whole which includes other Christian faith traditions, particularly our ecumenical partners. Leaders from other mainline traditions have shared with me their struggle to be faithful to the teachings of their traditions while being faced with the rapidly changing culture that we are all part of. We need each other.

The faith of our Fathers has always been put to the test. There is a need to partner in our discernment. The collective is always greater than the sum of the individual parts. And we must be constantly reminded that our mission is Christ’s mission as prophesied by Isaiah and taught in the synagogue by Jesus.

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

So when we are moved by the Holy Spirit to a full encounter with our cultural reality that directly or indirectly challenges the Church’s traditional teaching on issues of justice, human rights and Christian ethics, because of the breath of our diversity, we are called first to exhibit the essential nature of God. That is, we are called to respond to the challenge in LOVE.

Questions on Stem Cell Research, Marriage and Human Sexuality, to name just a few, are broad and complex and if these issues are to be resolved to God’s glory, in patience, a much wider discourse is required.

### **The Reports**

I’m going to spend a few minutes on the reports and highlight my some of my observations. It is not my desire to preempt tomorrow’s discussion on the motions. However, my several readings of this good work reveal that what we have in large part is a description of our diocese drawn from many contexts and perspectives. The reports provide a great deal of information demonstrating the complex reality of our nature. These reports leave us with a great deal of questions. I offer just a couple: How do we

endeavor to be true to our calling in an ever changing culture? How might we structure our diocesan life so that we might be enabled to support each other and our life in the Gospel?

The information and suggestions in these reports were gleaned from the experiences, perceptions and study by a great many faithful and dedicated clergy and lay folk from our eighty plus parishes. These reports are truly a corporate response about our present situation and suggestions as to how we might approach our future together. If these resolutions created from these findings pass, your Bishop, Diocesan Council and Greater Chapters will be handed a great responsibility in carrying out the wishes of this Synod.

The implementation process may well fall to the Bishop and Diocesan Council however, if I read the reports correctly, the responsibility for the success or failure belongs to the whole diocese beginning with the individual in the pew as each individual enthusiastically embraces or rejects this work as a starting point for the next step of the building of God's kingdom in this place.

As I said earlier, we might well be overwhelmed with the high expectations these reports envision. However, we have to begin somewhere and the motions give us a starting point. Priorities must be named and the labor and costs to carry out our vision must be identified against a time line that is realistic. One report suggested it could take years for our vision to be realized but we must start now.

Continuing with my observations: there is a great deal of inter-connectedness of information and ideas between the reports. The same information and ideas are expressed differently and with different emphasis. However, all reports imply that we are at a point of "crisis" and that "intervention" is required or our future is in jeopardy. It is also recognized that there is a great deal of work to do and our resources are limited, particularly financial resources. It is further suggested within the reports that our mission response is hampered by our governance and administration, models that require too much of our time and resources for an effective and timely response.

There is a strong call for intentional evaluation of all ministries at the parish and diocesan levels. Training and education is named as needed so that leadership might respond to the changing context and priorities. There is encouragement to seek every opportunity to improve parish and diocesan communication. There is also a great desire to build inter-personal and inter-parish relationships so that a culture of "caring and support" might evolve for the betterment of the whole.

In summary, I see a definitive call for not just "change" but, as was said earlier, "transformation" across the whole diocese.

### **Youth**

The Bishops and our Synods have sought parish input as to the naming of ministry priorities since 2000. Your Bishop and Diocesan Council have been conscientious for the past nine years in endeavoring to be true to investing in these priority areas. One of the highest priorities set several years ago was "Ministry with our Youth." We celebrate what has been accomplished and need to keep this priority alive with effective faith formation as our youth continue their faith journey. Our youth want full engagement in church life. They want to be known and accepted as individuals by us – the adults – and many of them want to be church leaders someday.

When we speak to the future of our church presence in ten or twenty years we are not speaking about everyone who is here, with respect, we are speaking about those who follow us. If we have not addressed the spiritual needs of our youth today, again, with respect, the problem of our struggling parishes will not be an issue. The problem will have taken care of itself when there is no one to lead. So, what is the legacy that we desire to leave? There is very little that is standing still these days. A major challenge for all parishes today is to answer the question: what changes do we have to make so that personal faith and our church are relevant to young people and their families in today's world? And, are we prepared to meet this challenge?

I received this recent letter from a young lady desiring Confirmation. And I quote:

*Dear Bishop Miller,*

*How are you? Confirmation classes are going great. [Our Rector] is awesome at teaching us this stuff. Now I know what the altar, font, lectern and the rood screen is.*

*I know the Nicene Creed off by heart. I think that the Nicene Creed is telling us that Jesus Christ died on the Cross and descended into hell and ascended into heaven on the third day. I believe that he will come again to judge the living and the dead.*

*I had to read Psalm 23 out of the Book Alternative Services. This is my grandmother's favorite Psalm. I used to think that the bible was boring but now that I know what it means it's quite fascinating.*

*I think confirmation makes me closer to God and it's the beginning of my new relationship with God. I believe this is the right way to go in life. It makes you take a bigger role in life. Being confirmed makes me feel happy, but happy is too simple of a word. When someone is sad you can talk to them and tell them that God is with them. It is good to have God with you.*

*Take Care...Emily (Name Changed)*

Emily's letter is but one of a thousand letters I received from our youth across the diocese who say the same thing in their own words. Their letters and friendship confirm a message of hope for the present and future. We must be vigilant in keeping these youthful folk nourished and involved which is our baptismal promise.

I'm grateful to our clergy, parents, Sunday School Teachers, Parish Youth Leaders, Camp Leaders, Canon George Porter our Youth Action Director and Liz Harding our Christian Education and Camp Medley Director, not only for doing their utmost to help at the parish level, but also the advice and counsel.

### **Stewardship**

Over the last nine years we have had several stewardship conferences and training events facilitated by experts in the field. I'm grateful for the work that was done by conscientious volunteers. There is no effective way of evaluating these efforts, but in fairness, if I were asked I would be hard pressed to call this well intentioned and time consuming work successful. There is little evidence that our asset management and giving patterns have changed.

Our National Church has endeavored and continues to support us in this regard and we are grateful for their expertise and support. There is resident suspicion that when others lend a hand, there must be an ulterior motive. It is disheartening when levels of misgiving about one another reside in the hearts of the faithful. As people of faith, would we not see, that what we hold in common is God's mission to the world, and that the collective knowledge, wisdom and experience on the subject of stewardship if shared, could serve to benefit the whole at every level

Again the reports emphasize the need for transformation in the area of stewardship and parish development with a parish based stewardship program. Again this concern is calling for intentional investment with trained leadership equal to the task. This is not simply a challenge. To tackle the idol of "money" is an enormous challenge. Transformed thinking would make money a tool of mission instead of an idol. Are we prepared to meet this challenge?

The budget formula that seems to resonate for us after Bishop Salmon's visit is known as the 10-10-10 model based on the ten percent tithe at every level of giving. My understanding is that if the first ten, the tithes of the person in the pew, does not materialize then the whole principle fails.

I support this principle, but it could be argued that by our very nature we "play it safe." Jesus has something to say about playing it safe in the Gospel of Luke 21.

*"He looked up and saw the rich putting gifts into the treasury; and he saw a poor widow put in two copper coins. And he said, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all the living she had." (Luke 21.1-4)*

Our reports speak to the Biblical standard of tithing or contributing in accordance with our means as part of our Rule of Life for the mission and maintenance of our Church. I will make a bold suggestion at this point as I reflect on the passage from Luke. My suspicion is that if "tithing" is our standard and rule, and if it were followed, we would be wondering what we might do with the abundance.

On a recent edition of CBC's Radio show "*As it Happens*," a young pastor from an independent community church in Texas was interviewed because his church was doing something very different in response to the economic crisis in his community. After much prayer it was decided that instead of asking for money as a response to the financial crisis they would invite members of the congregation to take money off the offering plate if they were in need of living essentials. This was a radical change and an extreme departure from the traditional expectation.

The end result reported that this community of faith has given out more than half a million dollars since February. Even those in need were finding a way to give instead of desiring more.

Like the widow, this faith community is, by generosity and love in their outreach to the community, giving their very living in response to need and being blessed in return.

I long for the day when Jesus might say of me "but Claude, out of his poverty, put in all the living he had." Even as a tither, I'm afraid I sometimes feel I only give out of my abundance and could be found guilty of "playing it safe."

As believers we ought not to be surprised by this. The teachings of Jesus are counter to any culturally safe position. The Gospel message is based not on safety and security but on “risk.” Again to quote Bishop Salmon, “Jesus, was God’s greatest risk, for the redemption of the world.”

### **Assessing Ourselves**

An intentional self-assessment or self-evaluation should be an ongoing part of the process of our Church’s organizational and spiritual life. When I meet with parish corporations and Bishop’s Advisory Committees, I ask them to be clear about a number of things before they make decisions about their future. I believe it to be a simple and practical starting point:

1. Be clear about your Mission in the parish and beyond and your Vision as to how God’s purpose might be accomplished in the parish’s context..
2. Be honest about assets ... present and potential resources (not only financial), land, buildings are they really an asset or liability? How might they help or hinder the mission and vision?
3. Be honest about liabilities ... present and potential. How might they divest themselves of such liabilities so that their parish balance sheet exhibits a realistic picture of the support for mission?
4. Then, being clear about your Mission and Vision, they are better equipped to seek the kinds of leaders they need for the journey - both clergy and lay.

As a Diocese, we retain for a fee, professional help to manage our trust funds – our parishes and diocesan financial asset base, and we take a certain amount of pride in our successes in this regard.

On the other hand, collectively, we have a real estate asset base far greater than our financial assets and at best we are poor managers of that asset.

Part of our asset or liability base is our management skill. I believe we have a great deal of work to do in this regard. To evaluate our administration and governance systems will produce little for our shared mission and vision if the whole of God’s divine favor is not managed to his glory.

God may not honor our request for more if we are mismanaging what has already been given. An accountable evaluation process is called for at every level of our individual and corporate work.

The biblical warrant for properly managed provision for God’s mission , I believe, holds true. Let’s substitute a few words in the passage from Acts, Chapter 4.

*32 Now [all the parishes] who believed, were of one heart and soul, and no one [parish] claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. 33 With great power the [Church] gave testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon all [parishes].. 34 There was not a needy [parish] among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. 35 They laid it at the [Church’s] feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.*



We know the story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira in the verses that follow “*Ananias,*” Peter asked, “*why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land? 4 While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal? How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You did not lie to us but to God!*”

Ananias, giving from abundance and playing it safe brought his death. The sharing of the faithful brought life and sustain ability to the early Church.

### **My Charge to this 130th Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton**

God in his infinite patience and mercy has brought us to this day. His hand has been guiding us and by the power of the Holy Spirit we are charged to respond to God’s call to be sent into the world to bring Good News – God’s mission of redemption in love.

We ask God to call us to a re-commitment of intentional daily personal prayer and weekly corporate worship. To celebrate his grace and divine favor and to seek his guidance for our part of God’s mission in the world.

We ask God to call us to repentance and reconciliation with the whole body of faithful at every level of mission response - drawing on the collective voice and wisdom for the up-building of God’s kingdom of love in a broken and hurting world.

We ask God to call us to be faithful to our baptismal promises in continuing to nurture our children in the faith so that they might be given opportunity to exercise their leadership in due time.

We ask God to call us to individual and corporate evaluation and assessment of our governance, administration and asset base. Our stewardship must be all encompassing and will require intentionality and a commitment to invest time, talent and treasure as we deepen our understanding of God’s call to mission.

We ask God to call us to rediscover our rich heritage of Prayer, Proclamation and Mission - to reach out in Spirit enabled confidence as Anglicans in servant-hood at home and beyond.

The specifics as to our individual and corporate response to God’s call will not be found in a patented or *one size fits all for action* template. Playing it safe will not enable God’s kingdom and mission. God’s mission, that is, to reveal his love in the world must begin at the local level in community. A community that recognizes that we are part of a larger whole and that our responsibility is beyond our parish bounds. Our accountability is to one another in love, we are family in mission. God’s mission is God’s mission, and in the enormity of that task, we are called as family faithful and prodigal to do our part for the betterment of the whole.

I believe our structures permit us to move beyond our parish bounds and to begin to take seriously the opportunities for sharing within our archdeaconries. Being strong at the local level will enhance our corporate efforts and beyond. Our work tomorrow will begin to enable our thinking for our action in God’s mission.

But let us remember, God's call is not a call to rely solely on material blessings and the world's best management techniques and strategies. We are called to respond in the faith we hold dear in Jesus Christ.

Again from the witness of the early Church: *When [the lame man] saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, 'I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.* (Acts 3.3-6)

It is only our faith in Jesus Christ enables us to stand, enables us to walk, enables us to dance and celebrate, enables us to journey together as family in our local contexts and as a world wide communion. Thanks be to God!

AMEN.

Claude Miller  
Bishop of the Diocese of Fredericton