

Bishop's Charge
131st Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton
October 28-29 2011
Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, source of all wisdom and understanding, be present with us, we who take counsel at this 131st Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton 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.

Moment of Silence for Fred

As we enter into the proceeding of this Synod we remember God's faithful servant Canon Fred Scott. Fred's larger than life presence among us for so many years is sadly missing from our time together. I would ask you to bow your heads for a moment of silence in his memory.

"Rest eternal grant unto him O Lord and let light perpetual shine on him."

Thank You

Introduction: Celebrating First Fruits

Many weeks ago our Diocesan Council through the work of the Council Teams and Synod Planning struck a theme and logo for this Synod: "***Celebrating First Fruits.***" A powerful and hopeful theme for our work together over the next twenty four hours. Twenty four hours is a short time for a celebration to show happiness because something good and exciting has and is happening.

A short time indeed to come together to reflect on our well intentioned efforts in response to the mandate given at our last Synod. Over the past thirty months, we prayed together, sought counsel, expended time, talent and treasure in an effort to assist in the renewal of God's Church in our diocese. Priorities were set, while not all our expectations have or will be met in the short term, every effort will be made to respond to those motions from our last Synod, that have yet to be addressed as time and resources are available.

We pray that we have been about the work of the Gospel as we understand it at this time.. There is indeed cause to celebrate, not solely in our efforts, but more importantly, to celebrate God's grace and favor during this journey of faith to His honor and glory. This journey is not all about us, but about how our relationships are deepening with God and with one another; How

God is renewing his Church to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing culture that is intent on pushing God and the weak among us to the margins.

- God has blessed us on our journey thus far, and for these ‘first fruits’ we need to give God our thanks and praise
- We have begun well – we have and are preparing the ground, we are planting some seeds and have begun to give them nourishment. We are at the ‘hoping for growth’ stage.
- There is much hard work ahead even to encountering rough and rocky terrain.
- Our efforts through the Nicodemus Project (I’ll be speaking more about that later) is not about making changes because the Synod or the Bishop or Diocesan Council wants it, but because it is what God expects of us as His church and as His disciples ... He has given us each gifts and talents so that, as individuals and as the church, we might be the workers in His vineyard and the gardeners in His kingdom here on earth.
- Looking ahead 10 years, we need to ask ourselves: “Have I (as an individual) and we (as God’s church) been a bearer of His fruit or will we be one of those fruit trees that Jesus says are to be cut down and burned?”

Our part in God’s renewal efforts, the fruit of our work, hopefully, will be evident in our deliberations. Deliberations that reveal that we have/and are responding to God’s Mission that is ever growing in our communities and beyond.

Our Synod Journal is a log of our journey since we last met. It is a comprehensive report detailing our collective response as we understand God’s Mission at this point in time. While it records a great deal of effort, it is impossible to record the full account of God’s love and mobilizing grace as witnessed in our fellowship and pastoral care in our parishes and communities on a daily basis.

Last week in the Gospel we recalled the encounter of Jesus with the Pharisees and the Herodians as they sought to entrap Jesus. Jesus quickly understands their question as a trick question hoping to “catch him up.” We know the question and we know Jesus’ answer. Question: Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar? Jesus’ answer: Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars and unto God the things that are God’s.” This provocative verse of scripture is almost as popular as John 3.16.

As profound as Jesus response is “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars and unto God the things that are God’s”, the verse that follows it should give cause and benefit in our reflection. “When [the Pharisees and Herodians] heard this, they were amazed; and they left him

and went away.” “...they were amazed...” He leaves the Pharisees and Herodians speechless... they are amazed. Jesus... is... amazing

If the adversaries and detractors in our day could see His Body the Church, as amazing, I suspect then, our efforts in mission would be “being” the Church, as God intended. We would be a community of witnesses that shows a deep and abiding love for God and a deep and abiding love for one another. How amazing would that be?

Rhetorically we ask: Is renewal evident? Are our efforts quantify-able? Are our efforts successful? Are we “being” Church, or just “doing” Church? Jesus has something to say about our reason for being and how we are to sustain God’s Mission.

In Luke 13.6-9 [Jesus] tells this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

God’s Church is called to fruitfulness. Henri Nouwen wrote: “There is a great difference between success and fruitfulness. Success comes from strength, control, and respectability. A successful person has the energy to create something, to keep control over its development, and make it available in large quantities. Success brings many rewards and often fame.

Fruits, however, come from weakness and vulnerability. And fruits are unique. A child is the fruit conceived in vulnerability, community is the fruit born through shared brokenness, and intimacy is the fruit that grows through touching one another’s wounds. Let’s remind one another that what brings us true joy is not success but fruitfulness.” Henri Nouwen

Alan Hirsch writes that we must be open to the prophetic voices in our rapidly changing context and become engaged in the present world so as to realize God’s kingdom in our midst. Communities formed in faith will root mission and mission will generate new communities. And all this must be rooted in disciplines in order to be sustainable. But more than merely sustainable, we want fruitfulness, and this only grows out of a living relationship with Christ and the sending Spirit. Missional communities will thrive around a shared rule: prayer, study, hospitality.. disciplines that help us maintain a life free for the kingdom.

Matthew 7.17-19: “In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

Author: Robin Dugall writes as he reflects on this passage:

“It may not occur to you when you see fruit growing on a tree or laying on a shelf at the local grocery store you may not think that, from God’s perspective, He wants you to be more like

a fruit tree than a successful corporation. We might look at profit margins and stock portfolios to measure a person's importance in the world. We might be impressed with nice cars and big homes as measures that a person has "made it" in our culture. How different that is from the picture that Jesus gives us as He speaks of the Kingdom of God. Success isn't the goal for a person [or Church] who follows Jesus ...fruitfulness is!

Here are a couple of things to think about when it comes to fruitfulness: first of all, every tree is supposed to bear fruit. If it doesn't, you would assume that something is wrong. God plants His Spirit within each of us, and when He does, He fully expects us to grow and to change with the seasons, and to bear fruit. Not only should we be able to see deeper devotion, but also God's growing influence on the relationships and circumstances that fill our lives. That's fruitfulness.

Secondly, every tree only bears so much fruit. In other words, there isn't an infinite amount of fruit that comes from a tree. Every tree has its share of fruit for which it is responsible. When God moves in a believer's life, He calls us to bear fruit in the sphere of life in which we find ourselves day in and day out. We are not responsible to change the world we ARE responsible for making a difference in the place in life where God places us, including our church.

Again, I love the following quote from Henri Nouwen on this topic, "We are called to be fruitful not successful, not productive, not accomplished. Success comes from strength, stress, and human effort. Fruitfulness comes from vulnerability and the admission of our own weakness."

Celebrating First Fruits

So, on the occasion of our 131st Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton, we are drawn together as Jesus' disciples, as His body, the church, in this part of God's vineyard. A rich history of God at work through the fruitful works of the faithful, bringing his Word and celebrating his sacraments of love and grace that builds and strengthens our relationship with God and with one another in community near and far.

This Synod is "check-in" time. We believe that we have been faithful to the direction Synod 2009 set for us all, and the mandate of the Gospel. Our Diocesan Council together with our Parishes and Greater Chapters believe that there is evidence that soil has been prepared, that seeds have been planted and that our collective nurture has produced "early" fruits worthy of celebration. However, before we are stricken with pride and self-righteousness as to our accomplishments, again God's word has something to say:

St. Paul writes in Philippians 1: "And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness

that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.” “Harvest of righteousness.”

It is noteworthy that this “harvest of righteousness” this fruit of our work flows from determining what is best, and is centered on Christ alone, to the glory of God. We the branches can only bear fruit when we remain in the Vine.

As Jesus tells His followers: “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15.4-5) Individually and collectively we are to find our residence in the true vine.

Reflection

My Charge to Synod in 2009 was in the form of a petition. Two years ago we asked 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.
- 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, and to bring love to a broken and hurting world.
- 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.
- 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.
- call us to rediscover our rich heritage of Prayer, Proclamation and Mission - to reach out in Spirit, which enables us to be confident as Anglicans in servant-hood at home and beyond.

In 2009 I further reminded all gathered that, “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.” To which I would now add, our action must be an “Apostolic Action” and involve risk taking.

Your work at that Synod was to reflect regionally and as archdeaconries on a number of questions. Conclusions as to immediate priorities were drawn from your discussions, reports and working together. As published in the Synod Journal they include the following:

- All Parishes [should] Focus on Growth
- [we should initiate] A Congregational Development Fund
- [and a] Major Stewardship Initiative
- [that we] Prepare Our Leaders For Change
- [and] Renew Ourselves as Christians and Anglicans
- [that we] Do More of God's Work in Our Communities
- [and develop] New Communication strategies.

It is not my intent to draw attention to everything that is provided in our Synod Journal, but simply to make the point that hopefully our work and direction over the last thirty months has been true to Diocesan Council's deemed priorities.

Synod listened and produced a number of resolutions to guide the work of Diocesan Council between Synods. As noted earlier, the following four have consumed the majority of our time and effort.

Synod's Direction (Motions)

- Resolution 130-12 Strategic Direction and Transformational Change
- Resolution 13013 Stewardship and Financial Development
- Resolution 130-14 [Self-]Evaluation (Report pg. G12-G14)
- Resolution 130-23 Church Planting (Report pg.G1G11)

These priority setting motions set the direction of Diocesan Council's work through the Council's Teams since we last met. (section F) This work of transformation and renewal for our Diocese was given a name: **The Nicodemus Project.**

The Nicodemus Project set us on an exciting journey as we attempt to re-learn what it means to be Christian and Anglican; discover what is required to prepare our leaders for a different future; what is required to help our struggling parishes; all the while, evaluating our governing structures and processes; and all the while being fully committed to make change happen.

It was/is hoped that our response to the distilled list of priorities might equip and enable our diocese in a new reality to "Proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Making of Disciples" so that we might become "A Diocese of healthy, mission focused, welcoming and growing parishes." That is our hope, but it is now time to ask some important questions: "As a result of the Nicodemus Project are we stronger and healthier now than we were in 2009?", "Are the

changes we have made going to have a significant, long term effect on our health and sustainability?”, “Are we moving quickly enough?”

An encouraging sign is that our Nicodemus Project is closely aligned with the “Five Marks of Mission” of the Anglican Communion that our Primate spoke to at our last Synod:

- 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 strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Reports

As you read the reports of Diocesan Council and Council Teams Reports in preparation for our time together, I pray that you have seen the hand of God at work in our diocese. Hopefully, these reports give us a sense of where we are in the present moment. Further, this reporting provides fodder for our reflection and a base line for our “checking-in” with one another.

I want to encourage you over our time together, to not only “check-in”, but, look to the future based on where we have been, where we are, and where we might go. And it will be good to more fully understand the future conditions for our shared journey, so I will be drawing your attention to the reports of the “Mission Outreach Team and Church Planting” and the “Evaluation Team.”

The journey will be difficult at times where sacrifice of self for the betterment of the whole will be required; and, there will be times of great joy like the experience of most families that share a journey to a place where we have never been before. A journey sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit and rooted in the true vine of eternal life. A journey where our relationship with God and one another is seen as so amazing that others might be drawn into the fellowship of disciples and our respective communities enriched.

To quote Bishop Croft, who is quoted in the Church Planting Report “It is not that the Church of God has a mission in the world, but rather, that the God of mission has a church in the world.” (G2-2 of 14)

Tomorrow we will spend some time in Bible Study and you will be asked several questions by way of a questionnaire that might make clearer the path of our journey over the next two or three years. If a change in direction or course correction is needed then let us respond unafraid knowing, that to quote Bishop Salmon that “God’s risk for the salvation of the world was Jesus Christ.” “Be not afraid...I am with you.”

Again to quote the report of the Mission Outreach Team quoting Archbishop Medley in

1871, “If the Church is to make progress and to show such signs of life as to make it worthwhile for any person to join her, she must meet the want of the present generation.” (G-3 of 14)

The Mission Outreach Team report on Church Planting is a prayerful visionary response to many of the questions of doubt we all share about the future. The seven creative and “risk taking” recommendations of the report to the Bishop fall within the mandate of our Nicodemus Project initiative and the Marks of Mission of the wider church as it seeks to live the Gospel.

Please prayerfully read this report. This is a very exciting opportunity before us. The harvest is plentiful and the vision of a mixed economy reality for the church of the future; that is, traditional models living alongside “fresh expressions of church”, I consider prophetic. The church of the future must be more fruitful than those of our past, and more fruitful than our most recent expressions.

John the Baptist also emphasized the necessity of fruitfulness: "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). He warned unrighteous Jews who trusted in their lineage for salvation: "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:9). When the people asked: "What shall we do then?" he told them to share their abundance with the needy: "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:10,11).

The interim report of the Evaluation Task Group endeavors to address the structural and administrative challenges of a church that has witnessed “the great societal changes we have experienced in the past several decades.” (G-2 of 14)

This new reality has had a profound effect on the traditional model of church. Our Episcopal and Synodical structures were fashioned for another era that is not likely to return soon. If the new reality is a present and future of two models of church, that is, “traditional” and “fresh expressions”, co-existing, how does this practically happen? Both will require resources for ministry and mission.

Resources for Ministry and Mission will need to come from a restructured mission minded “traditional model” that is willing to invest time, talent and treasure in “fresh expressions” of church. Again, to quote Bishop Medley “If the Church is to make progress and to show such signs of life as to make it worthwhile for any person to join her, she must meet the want of the present generation.” The restructured healthy traditional model of church must see “fresh expressions” as an apostolic response to our Lord’s great commission to “go” to “teach”, to “baptize”, and to “remember” we are not alone.

Mission initiatives will require the participation of every faithful individual, every existing spirit led organization, and every parish; not just in this diocese but beyond our borders.

We have benefitted greatly by our partnership and fellowship with Dioceses like Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador, our Companion Diocese of Ho, our prayer partner the Diocese of the Yukon, our Provincial and General Synods as together they offer leadership in keeping with our shared vision. Vision 2019 adopted at General Synod in 2010 in response the Marks of Mission as identified by our Anglican Communion is a gospel led Mission initiative that finds its genesis in the Anglican Consultative Council of the Anglican Communion.

The Evaluation Task Group anticipates asking Diocesan Council to lead a “consultative transition plan” that will enable a renewed vision for our “traditional model.” Healthy and struggling parishes are the resource base for any new mission activity at home and beyond our borders. More formal traditional programs such as the ACW, Mothers’ Union and Cursillo too must share the overall mission vision. Bearing fruit includes all a Christian does wherever we might find ourselves to the glory of God. Ministries that exercise the wisdom of God bear good fruit.

We read in the third chapter of James: "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:17,18).

As was said earlier, We are the branches and we can only bear fruit when we individually and collectively remain in the Vine. “Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15.4-5)

At a recent meeting, I asked all gathered to look around the room and to consider the question: where will each one of us be in fifteen years? And to look over our shoulder to see who is following us. And what will our church look like? I ask you those same questions here tonight.

As many of you know I have a deep passion for the Christian formation of our children in keeping with our baptism covenant.

Methodist Bishop William Willimon was interviewed in 2007 and had this to say when asked about what was needed for the renewal of the church. I quote part of his response, which is based on his twenty years of experience as a campus minister.

He said: “I remember meeting with a group of Duke graduating seniors. And I said, “I’ve got to do the baccalaureate sermon”—this was my way of preparing for the baccalaureate sermon—“I’d like to listen to you. (that is the students). What are some issues you are dealing with? What are some challenges in this year’s graduating class that I might speak to?” And I remember this Duke student, baseball cap on the back of his head, said, “You know, you’re a preacher. You’re supposed to be listening to God, not us.” And I said, “Thank you.” And he said,

“You know this graduation weekend we’re going to get advice from a lot of people who know a lot more about things than you do. I just hope when you preach, you talk about God, because that’s the one thing we’re not going to hear anywhere except maybe from you.” And I said, “Thank you, and this meeting is adjourned.”

All the baptized, but particularly our children and youth must be part of any plan for renewal and transformation. It is probably our hope that they would follow us, wherever we lead, but I fear the reality is that, without further investing in their spiritual need, they may not. We have the opportunity to set a course for them that draws each one of us closer to God and to one another. We all recognize that there is a wide generational divide.

This week while reading a place mat at my table while waiting for my meal, I read this amusing story that make the point: A grandmother was quizzing her grandson about Noah’s Ark. She asked her grandson “how many animals were on Noah’s Ark...the grandson answered “two.” “And what would they be” He answered “mail and email.” Our young folk are quite amazing.

Jesus amazed the Pharisees and Herodians as an adult in his earthly ministry. That was not the first time that Jesus amazed the powerful.

“Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day’s journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.”

Jesus amazed all who heard him even as a twelve year old. An inter-generational mission focus and journey is necessary for the here and now and for the journey ahead. We all understand the challenges inherent in trying to bridge the generational gap, not just in our families, but also in our churches.

In closing I offer this: The Body of Christ, the Church of God in the Mission of God, must prayerfully seek renewal, a renewal of risk-taking, a renewal of apostolic action, a renewal that begs a response of amazement from all who witness God’s love in action. This is God’s mission.

We pray, not for success in the worldly sense, but for a harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.” We are called into this and for this gift we give thanks and celebrate.

AMEN