

139th Session of the Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton

Response to the Bishop's Charge

Tony Munn

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Good afternoon, my name is Tony Munn, and I am a lay representative from the Parish of Pennfield under the leadership of Canon Caleb Twinamatsiko. I want to thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Bishop's Charge.

I want start by thanking God for protecting Archbishop Edwards, not only from injury but throughout your time as our chief shepherd in this diocese; and to say that your servant leadership with which you have steered this diocese is not only a matter of personality but a manifestation and a sign of obedience to your calling.

Thank you for your able and visionary leadership especially in your unwavering determination to keep the diocese together as one, which reminds us of the prayer Jesus prayed in John 17 as he wound up his earthly ministry ... *"That they may be one."*

I believe that everyone here concurs with your statement that "things are not as they used to be" and that we can not tum the clock back.

The figures you quoted in your charge about the dropping number of Anglicans in North America between 1970 and 2015 should be concerning to every committed Anglican believer and I dread how they will reflect in the next census.

In your charge I hear a voice and words like those of Nehemiah 2:17 ... *"Then I said to them, 'You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.'"* [NIV]

But again, I find consolation in your encouraging words that "we can not go back. We must move on." Your noting that a "TOP-DOWN" system of programs will not work signifies your commitment and invitation for each one's input in working together to advance the Kingdom of God.

As a good shepherd, you have highlighted a number of ways in which we can move forward together in the ministry and mission of God. The Five Mark of Mission, the materials you have prepared to help the diocese in the processes of discernment, and also your vision in the five priorities, provide a sense of unified focus and a variety of opportunities in which to engage and pattern with our communities and each other.

It is important, therefore, that in doing all this, we should not lose focus in the cause and purpose of God's coming into this world to live with us in our communities and to remember the ways in which he engaged with humanity in the process of redemption.

Our acknowledgement and belief in what Jesus did on the cross and his coming again is both an incentive and an encouragement to serve in his footsteps, aware that he works along with us as he promised in Matthew 28: 19-20 ... *"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* [NIV]

One wise comment I heard is that in addition to becoming a learning, just, and diverse church, we would benefit from being a praying church.

In this charge, you call us to always remember that we are only stewards in God's vineyard. If we are to represent him, therefore, in his own property, we must keep lines of communication open and clear; one of the basic ways for this is prayer.

Without clear communication with God in prayer, we can't claim to know what we are doing in this universe better than the owner of the universe himself. To not pray to God and seek his guidance in discerning his will, is to eliminate him from his cause.

We need to first of all pray that we would overcome the temptation of claiming to be too busy with God's work and not have time to be with God himself.

I would reiterate that your vision in the theme of this synod session, of being a community for communities, is in my view, a method of fulfilling and achieving the Great Commission. If we are to achieve the goal of discipleship (which in my view and opinion is key), we need to do it Jesus' way, remembering how he engaged in the communities of his day both in good and bad times.

I need to acknowledge, however, that this cannot be an easy and smooth road for everyone. To some people and congregations, this might come automatically and yet to some others, it may not. It is something that needs to be learned, practiced with patience, commitment and persistence. It is a sacrifice that requires us to reconsider our comfort zones, personal space and personal feelings and opinions, which in most times have proved to slow the work in this area. Maybe, it is time for us to let go.

To be a practical community, each one must move a distance towards each other, some a short distance and others a lengthy one, based on our gifts, talents, and abilities.

Unity under the bond of love is what we so desperately need not only in the life of our diocese but also in the life of our wider Church and we cannot achieve this with only our words, or cards and thoughtful gifts, but by our willingness to be the instrument of practical unity ourselves.

This reminds us of the words of one of the early Church fathers, Tertullian, who noted that when the non-believers would observe the fast-growing community of Jesus' followers they would exclaim, "See how they love one another!"

Division in the ministry does not only weaken the work of God but also goes against God's command in Jesus' final discourse when "his hour had come to depart from this world." (John 13:31-35). *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

As a point of emphasis, it is indeed critical that we place Jesus in the centre of everything we do. Only he can make both our vertical connection with God complete and without which our horizontal relationship with each other stays meaningless.

Finally, the question by the Teacher of the Law, "Who is my neighbour?" is one that we each need to ask on a daily basis and seek God to give us a Spirit sight to see our neighbours, who we don't have any shortage of.

"... one of the greatest challenges the churches have to meet, in this century, is how the modern person who cannot live the monastic life, can yet experience community life ... because we have seen, it is more and more acknowledged that life together is the very essence of authentic Christian existence." – Tullio Vinay (Corrymeeela 1965)