

The Bishop's Charge
to the 139th Synod of the Diocese of Fredericton
Fredericton, New Brunswick
November 2, 2024

Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour.

- Romans 15: 2

As some of you know in August, I broke my wrist at St. Michael's Youth Conference. Debbie sent me a very comforting message on Facebook which read: "The primary cause of injury amongst old men, is forgetting they are not young men."

Another characteristic of old men is that we reminisce. Telling stories of the past and reminding people that things are not as they used to be. If only we could turn back the clock to the "good old days", whatever random date we might come up with, things would be fine.

Unfortunately, we cannot go back, we must move on. As I said in my previous charge, I do not believe in top-down programs, but what I do believe is that we all must take responsibility where we are for advancing the Kingdom of God.

When I read scripture, I always come back to the same things when it is addressing the way in which the people of God should live.

When asked which is the greatest commandment in Matthew 22: 37–40, Jesus replies:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

The shape of Paul's letters gives us clues about this. The first part of one of his epistles tells us about why Jesus came, the importance of his death and resurrection. There is an expectation that his readers have understood this and become members of the body of Christ. This is how we come to fully understand the love of God. Then he tells them and us in the light of this understanding, this is how you should live.

Our verse of scripture for this synod session is Romans 15:2. It is part of the "how we should live" section of the letter.

"Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour. "

Now this leads us to the question asked of Jesus by the Teacher of the Law, "Who is my neighbour"? Which Jesus answered in Luke 10 with the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

What we see through the history of God's people is that the meaning of neighbour changes over time. Strong's Concordance gives us three definitions; the last one reads, according to Christ a neighbour is:

“..... any other person irrespective of nation or religion with whom we live or whom we chance to meet”.

So, our neighbour is anyone we chance to meet. Our purpose is to build them up. Ultimately, this has everything to do with people coming to a relationship with God in Christ, and there are many ways in which we might do this.

During the whole of my time as bishop I have emphasized our responsibility for the “Cure of Souls” and the need to place the Anglican Communion's Five Marks of Mission front and centre; and I do not intend to move from these foundational imperatives now.

Just to remind us, the Five Marks are:

- **To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God.**
- **To teach, baptize 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.**

I am grateful that we in this diocese have continued to embrace number three more and more over the years and are not only seeing this as doing good, but as part of our discipleship, building up our faith and providing opportunities for others to see the love of Jesus and deciding to follow him. We will hear about initiatives concerning this mark later. We have done this through large projects and small local initiatives. These things speak to the heart of who we are as God's people. They are part of our being community for our communities.

I believe that we are being called further. The first two Marks of Mission are essential to the ongoing life of the people of God. These have traditionally been characterized as evangelism. I would say that all five are part of the evangelistic mission of God's Church, but the first two have a more intentional edge.

As I said earlier old men tend to reminisce. Since the age of 15, when I went as a volunteer on my first Church Army mission in the UK I have been committed to evangelism: the proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom of God in word and deed.

To proclaim this news, we need to know the truth of it. So, I am going to ask a very basic question: do we as individuals and congregations know the truth of what many of us say every Sunday at the Eucharist?

Christ has died
Christ is risen
Christ will come again

Do we know that Jesus died on the cross to free us and the whole of creation from the power of sin and death? Have we taken hold of that for ourselves and in our congregations?

Do we know and believe that Jesus rose from the dead to show us that life does not end in death and that a new life in him begins now?

Do we know that Jesus will come again to bring in a new heaven and a new earth and that we, as citizens of heaven now, are called to show what this kingdom looks like today, in real time?

Are we as individuals and congregations living as if we believe these things to be true?

This is this good news that we are called to share in word and action so that everyone can come to fulfil their purpose as intended by God and the whole of creation can sense the hope of being freed from bondage.

In the light of this, how do we ever more intentionally move towards being effective agents of God?

The first thing we need to do is to spend time listening for God and listening to God. Some may ask does God speak today other than through the Bible? My answer is an emphatic “Yes, God does”! It is never out of line with the truths revealed in scripture, but God speaks.

Let me tell you about something that happened last Sunday. I was invited to the Church of St. Peter in Wickham to take part in the celebration of the building’s 70th anniversary. I began my sermon in the normal way when suddenly the atmosphere in the building changed. The best way I can describe it was a thickening of the air and a deep sense of silence and peace. It is something I have experienced before, so I stopped speaking and asked the congregation if they could sense it. Most of them nodded.

I explained that I believed the Holy Spirit was very present with us. I then had to admit I did not know where to go next with my talk. I tried to listen to God in the moment, which is not a thing I find easy, especially as everyone was looking at me in anticipation. I felt that I needed to speak about forgiveness and peace, so I did. Perhaps I was right, but I am not sure; maybe I was supposed to just remain silent and stay in the moment.

Trying to discern the direction of the Holy Spirit is hard and I am not particularly good at it. Too many things crowd in. I believe that we as congregations and individuals need to spend time trying to listen, hear and act.

To this end, during the spring and summer, with others, I prepared a series of teaching videos about discipleship and vocation to try to help us as congregations and individuals to discern where God is calling us. They and a study guide will be available soon.

The aim is to provide a space where we can draw breath and to try to listen to God and God’s purpose for us collectively and individually. It is rare that I would say this, but I want each parish to use the material I have prepared to discern how we continue to be communities for the communities we serve.

Each member here has the responsibility to use this material and urge that it is acted upon. It may be difficult, and it is not the be all and end all of study material, but it is an honest attempt to move us ahead as people of the Kingdom of God.

Why am I being so frank, some would say bossy? Because I believe that God loves the whole of creation. We as the Church have been called to play a part in God's reaching out in love, yet too easily we spend our time dealing with saving the furniture while the house burns.

Last year I told Diocesan Council that I believe we have five priorities, and I still think they hold, again there is probably more that God is calling us to do, but this will provide some scaffolding for our discernment:

- Our Cathedral
- Discipleship and formation
- Re-shaping ministry on the ground
- New styles of ministry
- Sharing resources

In a moment I will lay out a vision of what this might look like, but before that, we cannot do anything without spending time with God, discovering God's direction. When I have said this people have come to me and said something like "That's all very well, but how"? The video series I have prepared is to help with that.

We must begin in prayer and reflection as we seek God.

When Debbie and I, along with others, were in Ghana last year, I was surprised that our meetings at the Ho Teaching Hospital began with prayer. I asked was this normal and was told that it is.

At times I am saddened to hear that some of our vestries are resistant to anything but the most perfunctory prayer at the beginning of meetings. Let me remind us of Canon Six on Parish Governance:

The Parish Corporation

4(1) Subject to the authority of the Bishop and the Synod, a Parish Corporation shall
(a) organize and manage activities and programs in furtherance of Christian life in the parish...

This is the first duty of the corporation. It is one of the things Vestry members agree to when they allow their names to stand. I find it hard to see how we can achieve this without deliberately drawing close to God in an intentional way.

I think all the service clubs are great and they do invaluable work and if someone invites me to join one I will. But we are not a service club, we are more than that. God is grieving for the world and if we listen, God will give insight into what to do in the world. How do I know this? Because God sent Jesus to provide a way back to wholeness through the cross and he wants his people to play our part in helping all to see that.

It might be that we say Morning or Evening Prayer together before vestry, leaving the appropriate silences. It could be Gospel Based Discipleship or a traditional Bible study.

I know people might say, “We don’t have time to do that”. Truly we don’t have time not to do that.

Now I come to the last lap of the Charge. What might a vision for our diocese be if we spend serious time praying and discerning how we become a community for our communities.

No matter what our way of worship, Jesus must be at the centre of our life together.

Before I go into a little more depth I want to remind us of the theme of this synod, “Being Community for our Communities”, and the scripture verse I have centred it around:

Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour.

I want to amplify this with some words of Jesus:

[Jesus] told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.’ (Matthew 13: 33)

Without yeast dough is useless, but Jesus likens the Kingdom of Heaven as yeast which permeates the flour to affect the whole. This is what the people of God are to be like, we are to be throughout the dough (our communities) affecting them for good.

Where do we begin? As I have said we begin by following Jesus and then following his example. One of the ways we fall down is being divided against ourselves. As I speak to bishops across the country this is a common issue. This can take several forms, two of them are being divided within parishes and between parishes.

Jesus had something to say about this:

‘If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.’ (Mark 3: 24)

The first thing we must be willing to do, to borrow from St. Paul, is to break down the dividing walls which stand between us. Notice this is active not passive. We are to take action to break down these walls, not wait for them to fall.

Now into a little more depth about the priorities I see.

Our Cathedral

My purpose in considering the needs of our Cathedral is to provide a sustainable future for the building, its congregation and ministry.

Over its lifetime our cathedral has had two major renovations, one in 1911 after a fire and another in the 1990s. In 2021 a revised engineering report was received by Bishop and Chapter. It suggested that between 10 and 12 million dollars need to be spent to restore the

building. Ideally, all except about \$900,000 needed to be spent in the four years after 2022. We do not know what the current figure is, but it's probably much higher.

In mid 2022 there was a planning study to investigate how such funding could be raised. The main conclusion was that an appeal would have to be made to the "nonreligious" sector.

Coming out of that report three options became evident:

- Status quo: Continue worshipping in the current building, doing repairs as they arise, e.g., furnace etc., until it becomes unviable.
- Look to the Anglican community: The estimate was that \$8 million at most could be raised, with very limited if any access to government grants, etc.
- Establish a stand-alone Foundation to whom ownership of the building and the land will be given: A foundation will have access to a wider range of grants. The Cathedral congregation would negotiate its use of the building.

Two meetings have been held with the Cathedral congregation regarding these three options. They asked that the possibility of establishing a foundation be investigated, and subsequently the Chapter passed a motion to allow a conversation about an agreement in principle to happen.

In addition, I and others met with representatives of the City of Fredericton, including the mayor, to see how they might be involved. The reception was positive, but noncommittal, and the matter has yet to be presented to City Council.

A group has been working on the establishing of a foundation which will meet the requirements of the Canada Revenue Agency.

Currently, there is no foundation to negotiate with, and so there is no formal proposal yet.

We will also need at some point, probably in parallel with any process that might be agreed between the Cathedral, diocese, bishop and the foundation, to discuss the future of Cathedral Memorial Hall and the synod office.

Discipleship and Formation

These words are thrown around by people like me on a regular basis, but what do they mean on the ground? The video series I mentioned earlier fleshes this out, but to put it simply:

Discipleship is walking in the footsteps of Jesus following his example, and formation is shaping our lives accordingly. These apply to both individuals and congregations. We can only do this by doing so intentionally.

On another level they also involve people being formed for ministry; this might include layreaders, deacons and priests, but we cannot be limited to these roles.

The first part of my vision for us is that New Brunswick will have churches scattered throughout it where we listen as we try to discover God's will for us and then act on it again and again, as we are called bolster what we are currently doing, leave some things behind and move into new things. This means our ministry together will be enhanced and the Kingdom of God advanced.

Re-shaping Ministry on the Ground

We have come to realize that we cannot have full-time stipendiary clergy in every parish every Sunday. There are at least two factors driving this: finance and a shortage of clergy.

I believe that within the next ten years our deaneries will have one, two or at best three parishes where full-time clergy are based and out of these, ministry will be co-ordinated across the region.

This does not mean we will be closing buildings in vast swathes across the countryside, but it does mean that we are going to have to think carefully and collaboratively about how and who will do ministry.

When I became Bishop, I said that there would be no forced amalgamations, but that did not mean they would not happen. I have remained committed to this for more than ten years. Part of the reason was my experience as Parish Development Officer, where I saw the pain of amalgamation and the difficulties of making it happen.

The region that convinced me was Moncton. Yet now more than ten years later we have the Parish of the Six Saints. This change in the shape of ministry in that area is still forming and there are many issues ahead, but it came purely from a local initiative, which we in the Bishop's and Synod Offices are trying to support. Through its early days it is an example of walls being broken down to find a way forward.

Another place where ministry has been re-shaped, largely by local initiative with the help of Fathers Kevin Stockall and Nicholas Saulnier, and with my support, is Stanley. There, three layreaders from other parishes, along with local layreaders and two clergy, support Sunday worship and other ministry on a monthly basis. One of the layreaders is responsible for co-ordinating this, along with pastoral care.

We also have shared ministries emerging across the diocese because of local initiatives. All of these are tentative steps into the future, but they are pointers to what might be.

Another thing we will have to do is to plant new congregations, sometimes alongside existing ones and sometimes in new areas.

New Styles of Ministry

Historically in the Anglican Church of Canada the standard of ordained ministry has been someone with a Master of Divinity, who has completed a three-year residential program at a recognized college. I cannot think of a bishop anywhere in this country who thinks this is

realistic for the future. It does not mean it will not happen for some, and thank God for that, but it is unlikely to be the norm. In fact, it has not been the norm for quite some time.

I am not going to go into the ins and outs of what new training might look like. Part of formation, which I mentioned earlier, must delve into how we encourage individuals and congregations in ministry, developing communities for our communities.

What we will see emerging is different types of ministers: priests, deacons, layreaders, evangelists, church planters, congregational developers, itinerant ministers. Apart from the priests and deacons, they will be lay and ordained. They will be stipendiary and self-supporting. They will be bi-vocational, part-time and full-time. Their training will be varied, and this is far from a comprehensive list.

Sharing Resources

Another way in which we are and must continue to break down the walls that lie between us is by sharing resources. One of the ways in which this has been done over recent years is by parishes helping others financially. This might be giving towards a project, such as outreach or infrastructure. There have been instances over many years of parishes helping to fund clergy and other ministry in a neighbouring parish or somewhere else in the diocese. It is important that we share the financial blessings God has given to us.

There are times when people from one congregation join another in helping with events. Others offer their skills and knowledge to help with infra-structure projects, such as advice about audio visual systems, outreach programs, building projects helping with financial reporting, and many other things.

Another area where we share is people helping with leading worship, providing music, preaching and teaching.

As time goes by such sharing of people money and things will become a greater feature of our life together.

What Are We to Do Between Now and Our Next Synod?

Continue the ministries we have established with regard to the third Mark of Mission and to seek new and creative ways to be community for our communities. In other words:

To respond to human need by loving service.

We need to very intentionally and deliberately work toward prioritizing Marks 1 and 2:

To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.

To teach, baptize and nurture new believers.

This is not a new idea thought up by an Anglican Communion committee. I was reminded of this when I inducted Fr. Stephen Harnish into his new parishes a couple of weeks ago. On page 673 of the Book of Common Prayer it says:

“It is the duty of the Minister frequently.... and diligently to seek out and bring unbaptized persons in the Parish to the holy Sacrament of Baptism; and to catechize and prepare for Confirmation by the Bishop, those who have been baptized.”

We cannot presume that people will just arrive in Church and pick up the life of faith by merely being there. It is our task to be in our communities amongst the people, encouraging them to be disciples of Jesus as we show what it is to be a disciple.

Underpinning all of this needs to be the process of discernment and discipleship which the videos I mentioned earlier will help with. As I said, I want us all to use them.

What we do has to be outward focused and not just about survival. It is about placing Jesus at the centre of everything we do. It is about continuing to serve the communities in which we are set. It is about looking towards life together, rather than fearing death alone.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” We are to walk his way, declare his truth and live his life. Why? So that we and others will come to the Father, which is where we all belong.

To accomplish this, we must continue to seek ways of being communities for our communities. Seeking new ways to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus in Word and action. As St. Paul said:

Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour.

What better purpose is there than seeing people come to faith in God through Christ, for the good of all?

We continue to move towards this by being **Community For Our Communities**.