The Bishop's Charge

to the 141st Session of the Diocesan Synod Fredericton

Fredericton, New Brunswick

November 7, 2026

> *"So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith."*
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> Galatians 6: 9–10

As you have seen, our theme for this synod session is "**On We Go**". In 2020 we faced something which shook us to our core, a global pandemic. No one anticipated it or knew what to do about it. Although the COVID-19 outbreak had a great effect upon us and some parishes have not recovered numerically, many of us had the opportunity to review our mission and ministry and have made significant strides in these areas.

The recent visit of our Primate, Shane, was a great encouragement. He had the opportunity to see some of the ministry we do and to hear about much more. He was genuinely impressed with what we are doing especially in serving the communities where we are set. In fact, the following week I was with him at the House of Bishops, and several times he referenced what he had seen in New Brunswick.

We know that the people of God are always being called to move on. This was very much the case for the Jews in the Old Testament, particularly during their 40 years in the desert. Then when they were settled in the Promised Land, there was a constant call for them to honour God and live lives worthy of their calling as the Chosen People, chosen to reveal God in God's creation.

In the New Testament the first call of Jesus to those who would be his disciples is "Come and follow me". It is not stand still and wait but walk the Way with me. Each of the Gospels in its own way ends with the idea that Jesus' followers are to continue to walk. It is most explicit at the end of Matthew, "Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit", but they all have the sense of going out.

You will all probably remember the story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis. He ended up in the courts of the Pharaoh, the king and was asked to interpret the monarch's dreams. One dream told the story of seven fat cows followed by seven thin cows; the other was about seven ears full of grain followed by seven scorched ears. Historically the Church in the West has enjoyed many fat years, but over the last fifty years we have entered lean times. It is not that we are doomed to destruction, it means that we must learn to live in lean times.

This is not hunkering down, trying to hold on to what we have. I believe many of us have discovered that to do so is counterproductive.

St. Paul tells us in Galatians 6: 9-10,

> *"So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith."*

Let's be clear, Paul is not suggesting that salvation comes by what we do. Back in Galatians 3:1-3 he is very clear when he says,

> *"You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?"*

The important thing is Christ crucified. We did not receive the Holy Spirit for doing the works of the Law, no, but by believing what we heard about Jesus and him crucified.

To make it even clearer our theme passage flows out of Galatians 5: 22-25,

> *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."*

We receive the Holy Spirit when we believe in and receive the effects of Christ crucified. It is the Spirit who provides us with the Fruit to display in our lives and part of that is doing good to others, both inside and outside the family of faith.

What does this mean? Effectively, there are no others. One of the greatest threats in our world today is that we want to divide ourselves into groups based on numerous things. We know what they are, I will not bother to list them. The truth is Jesus did not see others, he saw beloved children of God. The leper, the Samaritan woman, the Syrophoenician woman, the blind, the deaf, the mute, the outcast, the woman caught in adultery and many, many more.

As we are to learn more about who our neighbour is, Jesus tells us the story of the Good Samaritan, the classic tale of being good to our neighbour. There is nothing wrong with that, in fact it is what I have been saying for the last however long. But parables are multi-faceted with many levels of meaning.

Given that Jesus is using the parable to teach a leading Jewish scholar, it is safe to presume that the injured man lying in the road is a Jew. He is apparently desperately injured and has been left for dead. Two of his own kind, a Priest and Levite come along, and for whatever reason, ignore him. Then his mortal enemy, the Samaritan, arrives and begins to help him. Can you imagine the horror that the injured man would feel at being touched so intimately by someone who is unclean?

The man lying in the road must accept help from the person he would least want help from in order to survive. I am not going to provide much commentary on that, except to ask: from whom are we willing to receive help and healing? That said, I will just leave it hanging there.

One of the saddest things I do as your bishop is the deconsecration of church buildings. There are many reasons why this happens, we know what they are and I will not rehearse them again. For generations these often-wooden structures have represented signs of hope in their communities. When I speak to people at these sad events, they tell me stories about how their relatives cut the lumber, gave the land, made the hangings and raised the roof. There are deep connections to our buildings, and we thank God for them and all that they mean.

Our forebears built them as places of worship, signs of the Gospel, places for community, sacred spaces. As we lock the door on some of our beloved buildings, I believe we must ask some vital questions, which centre upon the nature of God.

As we leave some of our buildings and other things behind, do we believe that God is left behind too? The service reminds us that God is not contained in a place. God is everywhere.

As things change, where do we find the sacred, what are the signs of the Gospel, where and how do we worship and how is community being created?

You may remember that the theme for our last full Synod was "Being Community for our Communities". Later today we will hear stories about how many of us have embraced this idea in different ways. I am extremely grateful for the ways in which this is being done, sometimes at great cost.

Although I have deconsecrated many churches since 2014, I am able to tell you that I see signs of growth and reinvigoration as I travel our diocese. I am confirming and receiving more people than I have before. There are very impressive young people making this statement of faith, this is alongside a trend where more adults are doing the same.

When I am in parishes, particularly on a Sunday, I see new faces attending worship. In some places they appear in significant numbers; elsewhere there may be one or two. I believe that this is a sign of God the Holy Spirit moving in the hearts and minds of people.

In addition to this I am finding that people are approaching me more often to tell me their stories of deep experiences with God or to ask insightful questions about faith.

This appears not to be an isolated phenomenon in the Diocese of Fredericton. Recently, the Oxford theologian Alister McGrath was interviewed in the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper. He said:

> "I am seeing a growth...in young people wanting to talk about Christianity. Others have seen it, but right now no one really wants to emphasise it. It is probably best just to let it happen."

So, when they ask to talk to him, what guidance does he give them?

> "That as human beings we are all looking for meaning, significance, purpose – and more than that. In my view, Christianity can engage all of these significantly and persuasively. This goes beyond beliefs, to where we're dealing with the deepest longings and aspirations of humanity."

I want to emphasize that final sentence:

> "This goes beyond beliefs, to where we're dealing with the deepest longings and aspirations of humanity."

What McGrath and many others, including me, are finding is not people asking the question I did all those years ago, "What do I have to do to be Christian?". Rather it is, "What do I have to do to be human?"

It is at this level where Christianity profoundly speaks. To be human we have to aspire to be like the one in whose image we are created, God. The possibility of the Fruit of the Spirit flowing through us and out into the world, as individuals and the Church, begins at the cross.

As McGrath suggests, it is best to let this happen. The challenge for us is to be in place for people to explore those questions. That has two aspects to it: being community for our communities and being confident enough in our faith to help others on their journey.

As I have journeyed, however haphazardly, trying to follow the way of Jesus, I have discovered that the ways in which people encounter God and respond to those encounters, is not a cookie cutter method. God seeks out his beloved children in many ways, because he knows us perfectly. Sometimes he touches in the intellect, sometimes the emotions, at other times the touch is physical; I cannot list the ways. Each person's journey is theirs and as Jesus was with his disciples, we are here to help them on the road.

It is the Five Marks of Mission that lie at the centre of this:

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

I know I have spoken about this for the whole time that I have been bishop. I thank God that we have grasped it so well, but as we go on, we cannot lose sight of this fundamental teaching. This is the essence of who we are as followers of Christ, we are a worshipping people who engage in mission for the good of all.

I want us to cast our minds back to the last regular synod session we had together in 2024. At that point I said that in my mind there were five priorities we needed to grapple with. I want to remind us of them and give a short review.

1) Our Cathedral.

The first is our Cathedral. We are aware of the significant issues facing this beautiful building in which we are gathered. We have recognized the gem we have, but others do too. Last week the Bishop of Qu'appelle was visiting her son who is based in Gagetown. Debbie and I met with her and her husband for lunch. I asked them to meet us at the Cathedral; Bishop Helen was in raptures about this building and the sense of the sacred in it.

Since we gathered in 2024, we held a one issue special synod session in April and decided to seek to raise the money for restoration of the cathedral among ourselves and others, rather than trying to establish and work through a foundation. During the business part of our meeting, as we consider the resolutions of the previous synod sessions, there will be a fuller report on progress so far.

2) Discipleship and Formation

This in one sense is the most vital of the priorities. If we are going to be effective in creating community for our communities we are going to need leadership, both lay and ordained. Currently our diocese, along with most others, has too many parishes where clerical leadership is needed. This is the problem I stated last time and to that end Canon Shawn Branch and others have worked towards enabling people to explore their vocation. Currently, we have about 20 people at various stages of that process, and we had the joy of seven ordinations in this building back in September.

Allied to this is our partnership with Huron College, which enables many of us to deepen our faith. If you are not sure what that partnership is, speak to Shawn.

3) Re-shaping Ministry on the Ground and 4) New Styles of Ministry

These two areas have developed, but not as quickly as I might have hoped. In my last charge I was somewhat pessimistic with my guess about the number of clergy on the ground by 2034. It may be that the matters that I mentioned earlier might work against that, which is a good thing.

I point to two significant events under these headings. The amalgamation of parishes in the Moncton area, which was set in train by them is an important development.

Last Sunday I was at the celebration of the new ministry of the Rev. Rob Pitman in St. Stephen. This is a partnership between the parish and the synod. Part of Rob's time will be looking at how help can be given to the unhoused in that community.

5) Sharing Resources

I am aware of a number of ways in which parishes are sharing resources. This is mainly in helping others financially or in providing clergy and layreader ministry where there are needs.

I want to finish with two things.

In your package today you have received a small card about the pool at Camp Medley. As you know we need a new pool. The Clark Family Foundation has generously agreed to provide us with $375,000 in matching funds if we raise that amount by December 31st this year. I know that many parishes and individuals are working towards raising funds by that date, I am grateful for that and look forward to seeing the fruit of your work.

Today our financial offering is going to the pool project. Our camps, both Brookwood and Medley are vital to our ministry and to becoming communities for our community. The intention with the new pool at Medley is to provide a resource for the local community as well as for our campers.

I understand that finances are tight for all of us at the moment, but I am personally asking you to consider donating to the pool project, either a one-off donation or a regular gift. The small card will help you in doing this. If you get stuck contact the Rev. John Galbraith, the Camp Medley Director or Justin McCoy at the synod office.

Finally, the 30th of November this year marks the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women in the Anglican Church of Canada. In your package you will find a message from me concerning this important milestone in the life of our Church. The ministry of women both lay and ordained is one of the cornerstones of our life together.

This event is to be celebrated in Vancouver at the end of this month. I am pleased to say that women clergy from this diocese will be in attendance.

One of the disappointing things of my time as bishop is that we have not seen much of a rise in the number of women coming forward to explore ordination. As we go on together, we must spend more effort on making women feel that they can fully engage with their calling in greater numbers.

So, **on we go** in faith trusting God in a changing world and a changing church. We are a people called to do good in a world where there are many challenges. Our hope is in the name of the Lord. “Let us not grow weary in doing good!”