

## The Bishop's Charge to the 62<sup>nd</sup> Synod of the Diocese of Edmonton

It is wonderful to be here and to be able to speak to you this evening about hopes and dreams for ministry in the Diocese of Edmonton. I think that, because this synod follows so closely from Thanksgiving, it is very natural to start things off in a spirit of thanksgiving for the ministry of so many women and men across the diocese. The purpose of a synod, such as this, is to come together as a diocesan family for fellowship, for worship and for education. It's also a time when we can make connections with other Anglicans from across the diocese and make new friends.

The readings this evening give us a heads up to the spirit of our time together. We have the wonderful reading from Jeremiah reminding us that we are and always have been known to God, and because we are his children we are to speak up and speak out. In Ephesians, we are reminded of the nature of the gifts given to the whole body of Christ, the church. And finally, in our gospel reading we found ourselves at the end of Jesus' meeting with the woman at the well, hearing a great call to faithful action. Jesus says: "...look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting". We end the passage with the unknown Samaritans saying that they have heard Jesus' teaching for themselves, and know that He is the Saviour of the world.

Put those three themes together, and we find that 1) we are all called by a God who has known us before all things came to be; 2) we are each of us given gifts to fit us for our lives as disciples of Christ; and 3) that through our invitation and witness we hope to draw people into the very presence of Christ so that they may one day say: "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world." We will take these themes and look at our challenges; what we have been doing and what we will go on and do together over the next few years.

Our Primate Fred has said that, as a church we have to move from a culture of membership to a culture of discipleship. Disciples are on the move, active in their faith. So despite the fact that we are contained and seated in this beautiful cathedral tonight, please dream with me of how the church, our church, is called to be on the move.

Over the last two years there has been a lot of discussion in the diocese about what it means to be a church that is actively engaged in mission - in the mission of God. A missional church is active and vibrant. As a body, it shows hope and vision for the future. What is mission?

Mission is the creating, reconciling and transforming action of God. Mission flows from the community of love found in the Trinity. The mission of God is made known to us in the person of Jesus. And the mission is now entrusted to us. To our action and witness as the people of God. In the power of the Spirit, we are called to be a sign, and foretaste of the reign of God. The missional church is incarnational and transformational. It is characterized by a rootedness in the Gospel, and in the proclaiming of that Gospel with a holy urgency. It is characterized by a will to continue to learn and to grow in individual and corporate faith. Through our baptisms when we are marked as Christ's own forever we become Christians. Therefore we do not 'do' church in some kind of abstract way – we are the church, Christ's own body.

As I have travelled throughout the diocese and visited parishes and communities, worshipped with people, attended meetings of various parish and diocesan committees I have done a lot of listening. I think I have a better understanding now of the health and vitality of the diocesan family, and the challenges ahead of us. I was really encouraged this May, by the phenomenal attendance and support for the Vital Church Planting Conference – West. Never in our wildest dreams did we think that so many people would come together from B.C. to Ontario to share hopes and dreams for the church. **Please keep those conversations alive.**

We are hopeful but realistic. We know that the challenges facing the whole of society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century face us here in the church. We know that in society there is much greater fragmentation and mobility. We know that one kind of church will no longer do - whether that is the best of traditional worship or the most cutting edge alternative worship. Our worship must always be authentic, but it can, and must, look different from place to place. We live in a networked society that is not bound geographically. Christendom is over; so we can no longer assume that the story of Jesus is known. Our evangelism efforts cannot assume that we are reacquainting people with an old friend or a childhood memory, but are often about a completely new introduction to God in Christ Jesus. And finally, we have seen firsthand, in our lifetimes, that as much as we might wish it, the prevailing culture doesn't bring people through our doors.

I would like to offer a special thank you to the clergy of the diocese for their support and for their commitment to life long learning. I have been impressed by how many of you have embraced opportunities for education and fellowship. I also want to say thank you to our diocesan lay readers and hospital visitors, who have committed to continue their own Christian

education and preparation for their valuable ministry. It is very true that no one wakes up the morning after their ordination as a priest or deacon, or the morning after their commissioning as a lay leader, and miraculously knows it all. In fact, I think that on those mornings we often wake up and think we know very little. But just as each one of us would expect our family physician to keep abreast of new developments and treatments, so too in the church we strive to look at ways of being in community, deeper theological thinking, and the practice of discipleship. Do not misunderstand me – it is not that the Word of God has changed or the sacraments have changed - not at all. But the ways in which we are to go out and proclaim that gospel, and invite people to receive the love and grace of God change all the time, and have done so since the days of the earliest disciples.

As an aside, I should give a quick reminder about the Marks of Mission, that I will keep mentioning in this charge. The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada met this summer, and through the document vision 2019 the church adopted the Five Marks of Mission to help shape the work of the whole church. We talked about them here in 2008, and you will find them laid out in more detail in the written copy of this charge which you will receive at the end of the evening. Of course you also have the handy dandy bookmark in your packages. **When you return to your parishes, can I ask that you keep these Marks of Mission current in your personal and parish lives?**

If we are to live fully into the Mark of Mission that says we are *to teach baptize and nurture new believers*, we will all have to continue to study and deepen our faith so that we might ourselves be strengthened for the task before us. Here in Edmonton, we are blessed by the Cursillo community (celebrating 20 years in the diocese this November), the Education For Ministry (EFM) students and graduates, our vocational deacons; and all those who faithfully attend Bible studies, Alpha, Christian Basics and other courses. One of the things that really impresses me is the variety of programs and opportunities to study together. I would also like to thank all of you who have taught and mentored the young people that I have the privilege of confirming. These young men and women, for they are children in the faith no longer, are ready to be leaders. **When you return to your parishes, can I ask you to look together at how those people have taken their place in your church communities? How have their gifts been utilized? Have their voices been heard?**

I am humbled daily by the stories that you share with me as your bishop, stories of faith and ministry. This church, the body of Christ in this place, is a beautiful thing. It is full of potential. This year in particular I have heard such stories of hope – hope for the future of the church as an instrument of God’s grace. Two years ago, when I gave my first charge to this synod, I would never have thought that so much would have happened in such a relatively short space of time.

We have begun to address issues around rural ministry with the formation of the rural ministry initiative, which provides support, training and ministry in a number of parishes around the diocese. The rural ministry initiative is, I hope, a clear sign that we should invest in our rural parishes and communities. Although the diocese has many parishes in the greater Edmonton area, the bulk of the diocese is rural, and much ministry is based in smaller centres of population. Over the next few years, we must seriously address the challenges of rural ministry, which include: providing leadership and sacramental ministry in far flung areas, in addition to financial challenges, such as extensive mileage. We have begun finding ways to promote greater support and collegiality, and have had speakers for training events who have specific skills and knowledge of rural ministry. It is my intention for this continue.

We have begun to address issues around children and youth, and their ministry and membership in the church. We were blessed to have Lucy Moore visit us in the diocese this past June, for workshops on Messy Church. We know that we have to look at how we are reaching out to children and young families. We have a number of churches trying the Messy Church approach, and we give thanks to God for some great movements in this area. **When you return to your parishes, can I ask that you have a discussion about how you are trying to involve the families in your community, and whether Messy Church in your parish, or in partnership with other parishes in your area, might be for you.**

We have begun to address future planning and church planting throughout the diocese. And we have begun to look at what fresh expressions of church are being called into formation. I hope that we will truly become a mixed economy church, where the new and the older forms of church are equally celebrated, treasured and present. I think that this is an area where misconceptions can arise - whether we are a traditional parish, a chaplaincy, a church plant or a

fresh expression – simply put: we are just **Being the Church**. Whether it is a ministry directed to mothers dealing with post partum issues, a coffee shop Bible study, theology on tap, or working with street involved youth – these are signs that the body of Christ is present and cares.

I hope that in the synod circular you have had the opportunity to see how many of the plans set out in the 2008 charge have been addressed and implemented in the past two years. People have been working very hard, and although it is always our duty and delight to serve God, I thank you all and hope that you have truly found joy in the service of the Lord. The responsibility for the growth and health of Christ’s body, the church rests with all of us. Every single person is called to a life of discipleship. The many conversations we have been having on the mission of the church involve all of us. Mission is not a clergy only movement.

We have taken great strides in planning out our ministry in our various areas. Looking around us to see what God is doing and asking ourselves how we can join in. I am sure that for many of you the words Mission Action Plan (MAP) are familiar. I am also sure though that they cause some people to sigh or even to engage in a little eye rolling. The truth is that I have asked every parish to have a MAP in place so dreams for our place in the community and focus for ministry are front and centre. **When you return to your parishes can I ask that by Advent your vestries designate at least 30 minutes to reviewing your MAPS and that you celebrate what your parish family shows to the world about the love of God in your community.**

One of the things for which I give tremendous thanks to God is a renewed energy around social justice. The voice of the church raised in unity can make people stop and listen, and encourage the transformation of the world that is part of God’s plan for humanity. I have said on a number of occasions, and in a variety of places, that we do not serve a Saviour who is blind and deaf to the needs and cries of the world. The earlier part of the fourth chapter of John’s gospel gives us the full story of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. Jean Vanier says of this woman that, “she is one of the most wounded people in the whole gospel – she belongs to a rejected race and her own people seem to have cast her aside.”<sup>1</sup> Yet Jesus restores her to her faith, to herself and to her community. As the church, we take the ministry of Jesus as our model. We proclaim the same good news that Christ himself proclaimed – this is at the heart of the first of the marks of mission. Justice, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and

---

<sup>1</sup> Befriending the Stranger, Jean Vanier p51

hospitality are at the heart of the good news and are the work of the church. The theologian Karl Barth said: “No praise of God is serious, or can be taken seriously, if it is apart from or in addition to the commandment: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’”. The Samaritan woman is all around us, she lives in our communities. You pass her on the street, you sit next to her on the bus or the LRT. **How are we telling her that she is welcome, and that God loves her?**

Following on the Homelessness Symposium in October 2009, we have entered into a full and rich partnership with churches and agencies throughout the greater Edmonton area, to be part of the 10-year plan to end homelessness. As Richard Smith, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Edmonton said - when we gathered a couple of weeks ago – “if we can be seen to act together and truly end homelessness, then what can we do next for the sake of the gospel?” I say, Amen to that! See if you can catch Bob Peel and members of his committee to see what the excitement is all about. We will be commissioning them during this service, so you will be able to see who they are. We are also continuing to look at our international partnership with the Diocese of Buye in Burundi. See if you can catch Lauren, our youth social justice advocate, over the course of synod, and ask her about her trip there this summer. Chat to the church members who take part in Habitat for Humanity builds, in No Room at the Inn projects. Chat to Travis about new initiatives with our indigenous brothers and sisters. **Use this synod as a time to see what is going on all around the diocese. This is the place to share your visions for the future of the church.**

**When you get home to your parishes, I ask that each parish completes the social justice self assessment tool in your clergy’s packages, and on the diocesan website, and use it as a starting point for conversation.**

An advocate for the voiceless in your local community, a shelter in downtown Edmonton, a warm meal and fellowship for the lonely, a roof over your head, a vaccination, a mosquito net, a cup of water. All these are signs of hope, that I have seen in parishes throughout the diocese over the past two years. They are signs that we can change the world and conform society more and more to the vision and dream of God. People all around the diocese are finding out what is needed locally, nationally and internationally, and offering help in the name of Christ. When there is devastation around us sometimes it is easier to see how the church could and should

respond, to see what God might be saying into such a situation. But God is speaking equally into our neighbourhoods. Into places where people's wounds and concerns are perhaps not so visible

In many ways, the body of Christ is re-membering itself - putting itself back together again with love and health giving service. Thanks be to God. In this remembering we are also living the third and fourth Marks of Mission – *to respond to human need by loving service*, and *to seek to transform the unjust structures of society*.

As a diocesan family we work together for the good of the whole church – Christ's body. I give thanks for all the men and women throughout the diocese who so tirelessly share their gifts in living out God's vision for His church. Thank you to all who serve on diocesan and parish committees, and who have embraced leadership in the church. As we build better links of support in our community of churches God is glorified. I truly believe that if one parish is hurting in the diocese then we all hurt. I remind you of Paul in the first letter to the Corinthians chapter 12: verse 21 and 22: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you'". On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. And again in verse 26: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

As patterns of ministry and leadership change, there are always concerns, and sometimes grieving, for what is past – even when we are excited about the future. There have been changes in some of the ways we have been doing ministry. I want to assure you of my prayers and support. Inevitably, there will be more changes to come. There may be shifting centres of ministry, sharing of space, and team approaches to clergy and lay leadership across more than one parish.

Every church we attend was planted to be a sign of the Kingdom in a community in the diocese of Edmonton. Jesus' parables tell us again and again about people who give up everything because they catch a glimpse of the Kingdom; they catch a glimpse of God's beauty. That is my hope for us: that in our worship, in our studies, in our pastoral relationships, I pray that people will see a glimpse of God's beauty. I pray that each parish will show a glimpse of God's Kingdom that is so beautiful, so rich, so inviting that people cannot help but be drawn into community. **When you go back to your parishes, will you please talk together about what it is that your own church community mirrors to the world of God's beauty and love.**

One of our recent conference presenters in the diocese shared with us something from his Presbyterian tradition. He told us that, The Church is called to be a provisional demonstration of God's intentions for all of humanity. I love that phrase, let me give it to you again: "The Church is called to be a provisional demonstration of God's intentions for all of humanity." We know that on one level. But it's quite something else to hold that before us in every aspect of our ministry; to think that what we do in each situation is to show God's will - living and active. Not in a silicone bracelet WWJD kind of way, but as the measure. The dearest wish of God's heart is that we should be one – we are told – just as Jesus and the Father are one. So our role is to give that invitation - and mirror that kind of love and care for the other – especially the other who is outside the doors of the church. I think it's the best news that any Christian could have – to know that everything we do and say is to be shaped by our witness to God. Yes, it's hard in some sense, but it is such a freedom. It is our calling. It is who we are. Everything about us points to a God who wants to be in relation with us.

We have great needs for increased ministry in many places as communities grow and change. We are instituting a gradual change to the apportionment and assessment formula. My aim is to leave more money in every parish for local ministry. Now remember: I said gradual – over the next three years, but you will see differences next year. We have a lean diocesan structure - there are no frills to cut, so we will be working very hard to be the best stewards of the resources that we have. **I ask for the support of every parish in these endeavours.** Change is not always bad. By looking at shifting demographics and needs, I hope that we will be even more faithful to the call to go out and proclaim the Gospel, make disciples and further the kingdom.

Later this Fall, you will see the launch of a Capital Campaign called Reach 2013. Reach 2013 looks at building up funds to provide continued support for Mission in the Diocese. Such a fund would allow ongoing support of resource ministries such as, the Rural Ministry Initiative and the Barnabas Initiative. Both these initiatives have been helping to equip and support healthy, vibrant existing parishes as well as newer forms of ministry. As you know, 2013 is our centennial year as a diocese, my dream is for every parish to be healthy and vital.

At this synod, we will hear from Michael Harvey and from Cam Harder – both very different men, from different parts of the world, who have a common passion for the church, and a common belief that the church is supposed to be healthy. Michael visited our diocese earlier this year, to give some teaching and guidance around Back to Church Sunday. Cam was a featured speaker on rural ministry at the very successful Vital Church Planting –West conference in May of this year. I hope you will be encouraged and challenged by their words.

In 2008, I asked that by 2013 we would all have brought someone to Christ. How is that going? Two years down and three to go. I have heard from many people, that they like the idea of the church growing and new people coming to faith, but feel that they cannot do it personally. If that person is you, Fear Not, we are taking baby steps. The first one was to have Back to Church Sunday in the diocese on September 26<sup>th</sup>. We, as a diocesan family, invited people to come to church – imagine that - and they came. I am told that attendance in church that day, across 43 churches, was up by an average of 51 per cent. Well done.

This is one of those areas where we do have to have that holy urgency I talked about earlier on in this charge. Canadian sociologist, Reginald Bibby, has reported that across Canada, belief in God has held steady at around 82 per cent. Nearly half of the people surveyed acknowledged that they have, or think they have, experienced God's presence. That's good news. But he also reports that, although one in four, to one in three people still attend church every week, there are fewer people who sometimes go, and there is a significant increase in the “never go to church” group. **The time to act is now. Let's not wait. Let's not be shy. If 8 out of 10 people say they believe in God, then the conversation has already begun at some level. Let's ask God for holy courage to proclaim our faith.**

Bless you everyone who prayed about the Back to Church Sunday initiative. Bless you everyone who gave an invitation, and bless you everyone who made people feel welcome. Thank you. So many more people have said that they would like to come to church, even though they could not make it on that day. Some of those we invited came back the next week. We found that people like to be asked personally to come to church. That they felt included, welcomed, wanted. Each one of us wants to feel included, welcome and wanted. Because in those visceral feelings we find hope to believe that God wants to include us, to welcome us, to want us to be part of His

family. So please don't stop. **Keep asking, keep inviting, keep proclaiming a gospel that says: 'God has called you to be his own'.** Each one of us knows it to be true in our heart that we are adopted by God and have become His child. That fact, and that alone, is the central and pivotal part of our ministry and of our lives. We grab that knowledge with astonishment, with fear and trembling perhaps, but having found it we never ever let it go.

**In your packages you will find the next Back to Church Initiative invitations set for Advent. Please encourage your parishes to see the Advent season as a good time to push the doors of our churches open even wider than usual.** Christ's body, the church, needs people like you to go out there and help people learn how to speak about their faith; how to draw people into relationship with Christ. You can still be Canadian and still be polite, but you're going to have to be a bit pushy. You won't get fed to the lions, but you might be ignored. Some days that feels worse I think. But I hope all of us here this evening might seize the task with courage; seeing it as our privilege and vocation to be part of the mission of God.

I have been asked by a number of our brothers and sisters in Christ to make the stewardship of creation a priority in the diocese, and I am happy to do so. The fifth Mark of Mission calls the church to *strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.* Care for the earth is something that many of us do at least in a small way. There are very few people here this evening who don't, at the very least, try to follow the "3 Rs" in their homes – Reduce, Reuse Recycle. But, of course, as children of God who believe that the whole of the earth was formed by God and is a thing of beauty, we are all called to play a stronger part in its stewardship. We believe that all creation is part of God's plan of redemption for this world. The Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams said: "For the Church of the 21st Century, good ecology is not an optional extra, but a matter of justice. It is therefore central to what it means to be a Christian."

**I would like to ask every parish to place this on the agenda for their vestry meetings. I would like to know more about how the living out of the stewardship of the earth is being experienced around the diocese.** If you are looking for a place to start, the Kairos Energy Workbook for religious buildings is on the diocesan website under the ecostewardship link. There will be new materials from the Church of England's *Shrinking the Footprint* Campaign

going up shortly. Our attempts to have a paperless synod this weekend, were not cost cutting measures, but an attempt to be more environmentally conscious. **In three years time, could we all be using recycled paper in our churches – not just in the office, but also in our washrooms and kitchens? Can there be an end to paper plates and Styrofoam cups and plastic cutlery? Could we endeavour to become a Fairtrade diocese?** It's a big change for us, but I think it is a necessary one.

A charge is only as good as the actions which follow it. As your bishop, I believe that we share a common mission, a common faith, and a common love of God. I believe that we all want to be disciples of Jesus, not just fans. I have asked you in this charge to have conversations, to plan ministry, to support the work of the church. My dear friends: you have sown great seeds during the last two years and good things are growing. So look around. The harvest is that person you will bring to Christ. The harvest is a healthy, vibrant church. The woman at the well, the Samaritans in the village, they all came to faith because Jesus was present to them. Will you share my vision please? Will we let Jesus live in each one of us? Can we truly be a church that is present to everyone: a church that goes to the difficult places, a church that makes disciples in the name of Jesus?

AMEN

## **The Five Marks of Mission**

- The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, through the document: “Vision 2019”, has adopted the Five Marks of Mission, that we talked about in 2008, as marks of mission that help shape the work of the whole church:

- 1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom**
- 2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers**
- 3. To respond to human need by loving service**
- 4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society**
- 5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth**

- These Five Marks of Mission were first set out in *Bonds of Affection* - 1984 ACC - 6 p. 49, and later in *Mission in a Broken World* - 1990 ACC - 8 p. 101.
- The Five Marks stress that the doing of mission (faithful action) is the measure of our response to Christ (Matt. 25:31-46; James 2:14-26). However, the challenge facing us is not just to do mission, but to be a people of mission.

For each of the Five Marks of Mission, what are the signs a) personally, b) in the parish and c) in the diocese that we are active in these ways?

## **Other Resources**

- A powerpoint presentation of the Marks of Mission with questions for study will be posted on the website.
- There is a powerpoint presentation of the diocese on the website, if you want to use it in your parish to show the breadth and variety of the diocesan churches.
- Resources for environmental stewardship can be found under the ecostewardship tab
- The vision 2019 document can be downloaded from <http://www.anglican.ca/gs2010/wp-content/uploads/019-GS2010-Vision-2019-Report-and-Appendices.pdf>
- You can find out more about Messy Church by clicking on the Messy Church link of the diocesan website

- Updated resources for Back to Church Sunday Initiatives are found on the website under the Back to Church link