

Bishop's Address

To the 108th Session of the Synod of

The Diocese of Rupert's Land

November 6, 2008.

St. John's Cathedral, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Let us pray. Holy God, when you raised Jesus from the dead, his first words to your people were "Peace be with you." In those words we were welcomed as an Easter People. Help us to receive the same greeting of the Risen Christ in our midst, in this Rupert's Land Synod, in each of us. Open our minds and hearts to the words of your new creation. Help us to be transformed by your Word spoken, heard and received and your Spirit released in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

I want to begin by giving thanks to God for all of you – not just those gathered in this place – but for all of the people who consider themselves members of this Anglican Church of Rupert's Land. I continue to be honoured, humbled, sometimes humoured, often challenged, but always welcomed by you. So I thank God for this labour of love as bishop in this place – there is no where else I would rather engage in this ministry, and "work out my own salvation with fear and trembling" as God does God's work in me. (cf. Phil 2:12,13)

I want to give thanks for all of those with whom I live and work – my family, especially my spouse Nancy, and my fellow-workers in the Synod Office: Susan Suppes, Cathy Mondor, Bernice Funk, Jack Risk, Diane Trenholm, and Helen Manfield; as well as those who share space and fellowship with us – Myrna Brownlie and the Archives ministry and Terence Moore of the Rupert's Land News. And on behalf of us all, in an appendix to this Address, I offer thanks to the many leaders and others involved in the ministry and mission of our Church.

Tonight I want to invite you to join with me in honouring and giving thanks for persons in our midst whose ministry and service in their local parish as well as in other areas of our Church has been exemplary, and whose Christian witness we wish to hold up for the rest of the Church. I am pleased to announce that Mrs. Myrna Brownlie and Mrs. Patsy Grant will be admitted as members of the Order of Rupert's Land; and The Rev. Dr. Brett Cane and The Rev. Henry Falconer will be admitted as Canons of St. John's Cathedral Chapter and The Rev. Phyllis Keeper as an Honourary Canon of St. John's Cathedral. We will recognize these persons in prayer and commissioning later in this service.

At this time and place in our world and in our Church, the Agenda Committee has discerned this theme for our Synod: **Living as an Easter People in a Good Friday world**. It speaks of contradiction, paradox and challenge – of experiencing life as 'square pegs in round holes' – of pursuing life and embracing the world differently– differently from what our context promotes, expects or even tolerates.

The first Scripture reading for tonight was from the challenging prophecy of Micah. It responds to a rhetorical question about what is the best way to approach God in prayer and worship – imagining that there may be elaborate sacrifices or other outward ritualistic acts that might validate one before God. And the frank response is this exhortation: “What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah’s words about God’s expectations move us out of religious ritual and into the way we live our lives each day - lives lived in a way that is conscious of Who is God, and who we are called to be as God’s people. This holy life flows from our worship of God, and it also prepares us to worship God in spirit and in truth. When we do justice; when we love kindness; when we walk humbly with our God – we are placing ourselves into God’s family and we are engaging in God’s saving mission in the world, through Christ. I will return to this mission of God later in this address.

The Gospel reading from John contains important truth about living this new life in the Risen Christ. Jesus says that we will receive the Spirit – the Holy Spirit – who will guide us into all of God’s truth. Jesus says that in living this life we will weep and mourn, and experience pain – even while the world rejoices around us. But ultimately, like the new mother who forgets her pain after her child is born, we will experience joy - a joy that no one can take from us. And finally Jesus tells us about the Father’s desire to respond to us: “Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.”

But sometimes we struggle to take this “ideal” life off of the pages of the Bible and into the reality of our world, and even into the present state of our Church! Does the God of the Bible really work like this in the everyday lives of ordinary men, women and children like you and me? Tonight’s second reading from the Acts of the Apostles is God’s answer to us. We marvel at Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus and often set the story alongside the present-day lives of horribly broken people who manage to turn their lives around by God’s grace, and find worth and self-respect. But this is the story of a man who was a vicious enemy of the Church, and of an ordinary Christian in Damascus, Ananias, who risked persecution, imprisonment or worse at the hands of this anti-Christian crusader. Ananias went over to visit Saul and invite him to pick up this new life in Christ – an amazing act of courage if not downright foolishness! But the Risen Christ had done the seemingly impossible. This destroyer of God’s Church was on his way to becoming the greatest Apostle of the 1st century Church.

We’re calling the world in which we live a “Good Friday” world because it still displays all of the destructive forces that Jesus came to overcome, and thereby liberate us. Everywhere in our world:

- we experience poverty, injustice and violence – if not physical then emotional, psychological and spiritual violence.
- we are constantly confronted by messages in media that place before us unattainable ideals of material wealth, physical attractiveness and personal power, that leave us feeling even more paralyzed and impotent.
- we live in a world characterized by “alone-ness”. We may have family, though often not at easily-accessible distances; we may have friends, though we are hard-pressed to devote time and energy to relationships. A sense of human community is difficult to find in our world.
- As we read in newspapers, and receive images on video screens, we live in a world characterized by mistrust, lack of hope and fear – fear of what *might* happen, fear of what *could* happen, fear of what it might do to me and the kind of life I long to live.

But much of our experience in our churches feels like “Good Friday” as well. In many places in the churches of our diocese:

- we experience poverty – there never seems to be enough – enough money, enough leadership, enough people, enough youth, enough time. We experience injustice – some parishes and missions struggle to provide for ministry and an adequate building in which to gather, while others seem to be expanding staff and renovating and improving their facilities.
- we seem to be constantly reminded, by messages from friends, colleagues, even members of our own Church, of the ways in which we do not measure up to unattainable ideals – whether it is the bulging Church Schools of the 1950s, the multiple youth programs of the evangelical church in our neighbourhood, or the operating budget surpluses and healthy reserve accounts of another time.
- The life of our parish or mission is characterized by “alone-ness.” Many neighbourhood churches are experienced as non-responsive to us, or even as competing for life-sustaining persons and dollars. Often we experience the diocesan family and its leaders as ill-equipped in time and resources to support us in our need.
- And often we experience our church communities to be places of mistrust – “what are they doing with all of that money – are they investing it wisely – is it being spent on programs that are truly worthwhile?” “How can that parish afford a youth worker, or more priestly ministry?” We hear these words often – sometimes even from our own mouths! As we face what seems to be increasing financial need, decreasing financial resources, aging congregations, and differences of understanding on Christian truth and practice that are beginning to break up our Church, we lack hope – and we begin to fear what we might lose – people, resources, much-beloved ways of being the Church.

The Anglican Church of the Diocese of Rupert’s Land is immersed in the Good Friday world too. But so were the disciples of Jesus at the dawn of the day of Resurrection. And so have the followers of Christ been ever since. So how have they lived as Easter people? How are we to live as Easter people?

I believe it begins with accepting the truth of Christ’s victory over the destructive forces at work in the world. This is not the passive acceptance of the outcome of the last federal election, or the inevitability that our weather will continue to get colder and more wintery for the next several months. This is the conviction that God really is redeeming the world. This is the expectation that as we discern the will of God in our Church, it will bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives and communities. And this conviction shows itself:

- in trust – that God is faithful and that God is at work in others, and in myself, to accomplish God’s will in us and in our Church
- in hope – that even in the pain or disillusionment of the present time, that ultimately God’s good and loving purposes will prevail – even in ways we can’t presently imagine, and
- in love – an overwhelming sense of being grasped by God’s love, and of being empowered to offer a love to others that will overcome all obstacles.

Therefore, where in our life, right now, are we being challenged to act on the conviction that the Risen Christ is alive and active in our midst? Where are we being challenged to ground our life in a trust of God, a hope in God, and a love from God?

Let me begin with myself. And let me offer a confession. Several years ago I first heard of something called the Millennium Development Goals. Because of the context in which I heard about them, I thought they were some program of the Episcopal Church in the United States, and I didn't even take the time to discover what they were. The Millennium Declaration and Development Goals were adopted in 2000 by all of the member states of the United Nations. They have the potential to be one of the great achievements of yours and my lifetime. Fortunately we were well immersed in these Goals at the Lambeth Conference in England this past summer. I want to repent of my lack of attention to this huge work, and therefore of our Diocese's lack of involvement. Here are the eight Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015:

- eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- achieve universal primary education
- promote gender equality and empower women
- reduce child mortality
- improve maternal health
- combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- ensure environmental sustainability
- develop a global partnership for development

And these goals are not just for "poor countries over there." They apply equally to poor and disadvantaged peoples within our own country as well. I pledge to you that I will work toward, and support others working toward, educating and involving every one of our members in this primary opportunity of mission in God's world.

In a related area of mission, our Church's Primate's World Relief and Development Fund is celebrating 50 years of mission over a 20 month period from now until June, 2010. Across the Canadian Church it is estimated that a mere 30% of Anglicans are aware of our primary development and relief agency. Over its 50 year history we have been able to develop an amazing network of local partners in every area of the world, who are a source of reliable information about what is actually going on in the distant places of our globe, and provide us with a trustworthy channel to help funds and supplies reach their intended destination. I am pleased to serve on the PWRDF 50th Anniversary Steering Committee, and I challenge all of our churches to use the next 20 months to educate, celebrate and engage others in the mission work of the Primate's Fund. Here we are being challenged to ground our lives in a trust of God, a hope in God, and a love from God.

Sexuality issues have been the catalyst that has exposed just how differently the Gospel of Jesus Christ is understood and lived out in the diverse cultures of our world. And we live in a time when global communication exposes us to those often stark diversities instantaneously – and without the language and cultural orientation that would help us appreciate their full meaning. This dynamic then strips naked the differences, and in some cases, the alienation that is present in our own churches. The result has been an escalation of fear, mistrust and anxiety on all fronts. So where does our hope lie? Where is there a way forward? Resolution and reconciliation will take time, and progress will come in small steps, but there are some things, as Easter people, we can and must do:

- we need to recognize that different emphases of the Gospel become central in different historical periods and cultural contexts. This has been the case since the beginning of Christ's Church. In terms of human sexuality, faithful, Spirit-led Christians are going to read the Scriptures, and discern the truth of God differently in a context where homosexual behaviour is illegal versus a context where it is against the law to discriminate based on sexual

preferences. And as should be expected, even within a given context, there will be some who more closely identify, at this moment and on this issue, with the dominant position of a culture and context different than their own. This is not acquiescing to the world – it is being the human beings God has created us to be in the societal contexts that God has placed us. We are in a period of discernment – locally and throughout the Anglican Communion. Part of that discernment involves local Synods “testing” for the mind of the Spirit at work in their midst. The faithful decisions that our Synod makes in prayer and conversation will be simply that – the discernment of the leadership of the Anglican Diocese of Rupert’s Land – nothing more and also nothing less. Those decisions must not be viewed as a kind of judgement on other parts of our Church, or on those in our midst whose personal discernment is different. Certainly my intent, in attempting to serve you faithfully in episcopal ministry, is to continue to love, honour and support all of the faithful, Spirit-led ministries in our diocese.

Coming to terms with the best way to use our resources of time, talent and money that God has blessed us with in our churches for God’s mission in the world, our practice of responsible stewardship, is proving to be a major challenge. Responding to this challenge is part of Direction Five of The Way Forward action plan. It will come as no surprise that the Anglican Church in our Diocese has been in decline, at least in terms of numbers on rolls and Sunday attendance, for most of the last fifty years. And while there are a few encouraging signs in the last year or two, one cannot expect this situation to change dramatically in the near future. When corrected for inflation, both the average income and the average expenses of parishes has dropped over the last 15 years, and of course, income has dropped a little more quickly than expenses. And income made available from parishes to the diocese and wider church has dropped at three times the rate it has in the local parish. It is no wonder that we struggle to provide for the common ministry and mission in which we all share! So how do we respond? The natural reaction is to protect what we have locally first. The local congregation is our primary experience of our Church – it is the place in which our spiritual needs are most likely to be met, and it is the place where we are most likely to offer ourselves in ministry and mission. But like the Good Friday attitude of “looking after myself”, fearful that no one else will, that fuels so much of the current global economic meltdown, it is precisely this response that simply escalates the uncontrollable demise of parish communities – beginning with those that are most financially vulnerable. So where does our hope lie? Where is there a way forward?

- Strong, local parish communities that provide viable ministry and mission must be the backbone of our diocesan family. While adequately resourcing the common ministry and mission in which we share is absolutely critical, we must structure our financial stewardship in such a way that maximizes the resources available in local parishes to enable them to be, or become, energized mission centres as outlined in Direction One of The Way Forward. In order to be faithful to this truth, we have made the difficult and painful decision to reduce the number of positions funded in the diocesan budget. As of June 30, 2009, the Coordinator for Mission Development position will come to an end. In the meantime I am working with the Rev. Jack Risk to explore other options for stipended ministry in our diocese, and Jack is beginning to plan how best to prepare The Way Forward Management Council, and other leadership, to pick up and carry on the work for which he has taken primary responsibility. I especially want to thank Jack for the faithful and responsible way he has responded to this difficult development.

What is our response, then, as Easter People? All of us must carry the common ministry and mission imperative of our diocesan family back to our congregations. Many of our members do not understand which ministry and mission initiatives are funded by the diocesan budget. Our parish's commitment to Common Ministry and Mission is not funding a bureaucracy – it is helping to put into action the notion that the Diocese of Rupert's Land is a Christian community that cares about one another – that we care as much about the ministry and mission of other Anglican communities in our Diocese as we do about our own. This is the kind of love we are called to as Easter people, and we commit ourselves to this action, not because we know how God will provide, but rather because we trust the faithfulness of God. This is another way we are being challenged to ground our lives in a trust of God, a hope in God, and a love from God.

- To illustrate another way in which we need to reallocate our resources, I want to share a story of a slide that was part of a presentation at the Lambeth Conference on the Christian Church in the West. It was an aerial view, probably shot from about 300 metres above, of an impressive, double-wide, steel and concrete bridge for automobile traffic. The span was at least as long as the entire bridge structure of the Disraeli Freeway over Douglas Point and the Red River here in Winnipeg. The only problem was that the bridge spanned merely a section of dry sandy ground. Immediately to the right of the bridge was flowing a river which appeared to have no way across. We were told that this bridge, in Honduras, originally spanned the Choluteca River. But after the country was ravaged by Hurricane Mitch in 1998, the river changed its course and now flows several hundred metres to one side - making the bridge useless in terms of its original purpose. The speaker suggested that this picture was a metaphor for much of our Church today, and that the thing we needed to do was step back, discern God's mission for us today and the kind of Christian community we need to carry out that mission, and put our "new bridge" into place. We need to put together processes by which all of our congregations can:
 - assess the ministry and mission to which God is calling them, locally and beyond;
 - assess the resources of time, talent and finances readily available to respond to that call;
 - decide whether they have a sufficient level of ministry and mission viability to accomplish that call, or
 - decide how they can reconfigure themselves and/or join with others to do the work that needs to be done.

Undoubtedly this will mean allowing some of our old ways of being the Church to die, and being willing to embrace new and different ways of being Anglican Christian communities across our Diocese.

But this will not be our death. Structures die, processes die and configurations die. But God's People are forever inheriting new and eternal life. This willingness to let go is yet another way we are being challenged to ground our lives in a trust of God, a hope in God, and a love from God – for we are an Easter People!

The Risen Christ still greets us tonight: "Peace be with you. You will have pain, but your pain will turn to joy. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete." AMEN.

Appendix to the Bishop's Address to the 108th Diocesan Synod*Expressions of Gratitude*

On behalf of us all I want to give thanks for:

- *The local church leaders - lay and ordained - in our parishes and missions.*
- *The Dean, Archdeacons, District Deans and all of the clergy who have supported me in my ministry as bishop and who have worked together to build a stronger diocese.*
- *The Synod Office staff, the Diocesan Archives, and all of those who offer a volunteer ministry in the office.*
- *The Officers of the Synod: the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Registrar, Treasurer and Secretary*
- *The Chairs and members of our oversight bodies: Diocesan Council, Executive Committee, Rupert's Land Aboriginal Circle (RLAC) and their outreach arm – Rupert's Land Wechetowin, Inc., the Way Forward Management Council, and the Diocesan Stewardship Council.*
- *Diocesan Ministry and Mission committees and projects: Rupert's Land News, Faith Horizons, Finance, Investment, Rupert's Land Capital Fund, Budget, Canons, Diocesan Discernment Group on Ordained Ministry (DDGOM), Total Ministry Development Team (TMDT), Diaconate Working Group (DWG), Fresh Start, Archives, Property Management, Bishop's Theological Commission, Companion Dioceses Team, Refugee Committee, Rupert's Land Supper Club, Community Ministries at All Saints, St. Matthews and Holy Trinity, Winnipeg.*
- *Ministry and Mission of the wider Church: Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF), Anglican Fellowship of Prayer, the Warden, Faculty, Staff and College Council of St. John's College, University of Manitoba, the work of the Provincial and General Synods and their committees and task forces.*
- *Our two Anglican Sudanese communities: St. Andrew's (at All Saints) and Emmanuel (at St. Matthews)*
- *Our full communion relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and particularly Bishop Elaine Sauer and the Manitoba Northwestern Ontario Synod.*

And finally, to all the members of our parishes and missions in the diocese of Rupert's Land who, day in and day out, give of themselves in service to God for the benefit of our Anglican Church, of our local communities, and indeed all of God's world.